Regarding Rape:
Representations of Sexual Violence on the Twenty-First-Century Operatic Stage

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores contemporary representations of sexual violence on the operatic stage. In recent years, activist movements like #MeToo, the Metropolitan Opera's 2017 dismissal of James Levine, and high-profile allegations against Placido Domingo and others have illuminated the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in the opera industry. All the while, depictions of rape and violence against women are mainstays on operatic stages. I analyze performances of several canonic operas produced between 2000 and 2019 and consider how the staging of sexual violence both affects the stories these operas tell and resonates with present-day audiences. Studies of productions are underrepresented in opera scholarship, and my project is the first extended exploration of directorial practice in an explicitly political and ethical framework.

My production analysis, situated within a feminist ethical framework, focuses on two areas of inquiry: 1) the agency of the female characters victimized by sexual violence in the productions; and 2) the stylistic approach to putting acts of sexual violence onstage. Each chapter is a discrete case study of a particular issue relating to staging sexual violence on the contemporary opera stage. I analyze productions of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Don Giovanni*, *Guillaume Tell*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *La forza del destino*, *Salome*, and *Turandot*, by directors including Calixto Bieito, Atom Egoyan, Stephen Lawless, Wajdi Mouawad, David McVicar, and Francesca Zambello. By bringing contemporary opera practice into the purview of opera studies, feminist theatre studies, and trauma theory, I take the work of opera practitioners seriously and consider the ways their choices respond to and impact our culture.

Staging the implicit or explicit sexual violence in canonic operas can, in the best cases, allow for nuanced commentary on the subject in our cultural moment. Even adding sexual

violence to operas that do not typically feature it can open up space for new understandings of familiar stories and characters and mount powerful critiques of the normalization and invisibility of sexual violence in opera history. But putting sexual violence onstage is controversial and poses real risks to survivors of sexual abuse in the audience. By positioning opera performance and reception as public discourse, I interrogate the cultural work done by operatic representations of sexual violence, how they function, and what is at stake when we put rape onstage.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse explore les représentations contemporaines de la violence sexuelle sur la scène de l'opéra. Ces dernières années, tandis que les représentations de viols et de violence contre les femmes continuent de proliférer sur les scènes d'opéra, des mouvements militants comme #MeToo, le licenciement de James Levine par le Metropolitan Opera en 2017, et les allégations très médiatisées contre Placido Domingo et d'autres ont mis en lumière la prévalence du harcèlement et des abus sexuels dans l'industrie de l'opéra. J'analyse les productions de plusieurs opéras canoniques depuis 2000 en considérant comment la mise en scène de la violence sexuelle affecte les histoires que ces opéras racontent, et résonne avec les publics actuels qui sont, pour leur part, informés par leurs propres contextes culturels et politiques. Les études de productions sont sous-représentées dans les études d'opéra, et mon projet est la première exploration étendue de la pratique de la mise en scène dans un cadre explicitement politique et éthique.

Mon analyse de la production est orientée dans un cadre éthique féministe et opère à deux niveaux : l'agentivité des personnages féminins victimes de violence sexuelle dans l'œuvre et l'approche stylistique de la mise en scène des actes de violence sexuelle. Chaque chapitre se concentre soit sur un opéra particulier, soit sur une tendance dans les approches de la violence sexuelle. J'analyse les productions de *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Don Giovanni*, *Guillaume Tell*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *La forza del destino*, *Salomé et Turandot*, réalisées par les metteurs en scène Calixto Bieito, Atom Egoyan, Stephen Lawless, Wajdi Mouawad, David McVicar et Francesca Zambello, entre autres. En faisant entrer la pratique contemporaine de l'opéra dans le champ des études sur l'opéra, du théâtre féministe et de la théorie des traumatismes, cette thèse

considère sérieusement le travail des praticiens de l'opéra et examine la façon dont leur travail entre en résonance avec la culture dans laquelle nous vivons.

La mise en scène de la violence sexuelle implicite ou explicite dans les opéras canoniques peut, dans le meilleur des cas, permettre un commentaire actuel nuancé sur le sujet. Même l'ajout de la violence sexuelle dans des opéras qui n'en font pas habituellement partie peut ouvrir un espace pour une nouvelle compréhension des histoires et de personnages familiers, et monter de puissantes critiques de la normalisation et l'invisibilité de la violence sexuelle dans l'histoire de l'opéra. Mais mettre la violence sexuelle sur scène est chose controversée et comporte des risques réels pour les survivants d'abus sexuels dans le public. En positionnant la représentation et la réception de l'opéra comme un discours public, j'interroge le travail culturel effectué par les représentations lyriques de la violence sexuelle, leur fonctionnement et les enjeux de la mise en scène du viol.

Translated by Emanuelle Majeau-Bettez

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Opera has a sexual violence problem. The Metropolitan Opera's 2017 dismissal of James Levine and the ongoing allegations against Placido Domingo are only the highest-profile examples of a much greater reckoning with sexual abuse and harassment within the operatic community spurred by contemporary activist movements including #MeToo and #TimesUp.[1] Meanwhile onstage, the opera performance canon is filled with stories about sexual violence and violence against women, albeit veiled in innuendo and ambiguity. Some opera producers and directors seem to feel an obligation to address sexual violence in the canon in ways that engage with contemporary dialogues about empowering survivors and calling out perpetrators (references to Harvey Weinstein in director's notes and reviews of productions of *Don Giovanni* and *Rigoletto* abound). On the other hand, sexual violence also retains a reputation as a reliable way to titillate, to shock, and to generate press for a new production. My dissertation highlights the dynamism of contemporary opera practice with regard to sexual violence in the canon, and addresses the questions: How are opera practitioners representing sexual violence on today's opera stages? What cultural work do these representations do in our Zeitgeist? How might opera scholars and critics better conceive of the responsibilities of opera creators and spectators when it comes to representing sexual violence?

In this project, I am conceiving of operatic production and reception fundamentally as public discourse. Directors and their teams are beholden not only to the composers' and librettists' written texts, but also vitally, to their own contemporary producers, audiences, and

[1] See, for instance, the 2018 *Washington Post* exposé on sexual harassment in classical music. Anne Midgette and Peggy McGlone, "Assaults in Dressing Rooms. Groping During Lessons. Classical Musicians Reveal a Profession Rife with Harassment," *Washington Post*, July 26, 2018.

critics. The opera house is not a museum; mounting canonic operas today means putting those works into conversation with the cultures in which they are performed and the individuals who perform and receive them. Concerns about the outmoded and harmful politics of much of the operatic canon are not new; but rather than interrogating the text and music of operatic works, I explore the ways in which directors and creative teams working in opera today handle the politics of these works in production. There are often vast social and political discrepancies between the culture in which a canonic opera was written and our own. It is up to opera performers and producers to make the practical decisions about how and whether to address this tension in the way they put these works onstage.

The ethical orientation of my dissertation responds to the ethical and political stakes of representing sexual violence against the backdrop of a culture more aware than ever of the widespread existence and seriousness of sexual assault and harassment. Studies of operatic production practices have generally focused primarily on the aesthetic stakes. If they espouse an ethical responsibility, it is a responsibility owed to operatic works themselves. Carolyn Abbate, Richard Taruskin, and James Hepokoski have all pointed out a tendency among musicologists to perceive a moral urgency or ethical debt owed to anthropomorphized works.[2] My engagement with the ethics of operatic representation shifts this focus; I believe my ethical obligation is to the people whose lives and traumas are represented in the operas of the canon, and not the works themselves or their long-dead composers. Questions about ethical representation and spectatorship motivate and run through my dissertation. I work to clarify the responsibilities of

[2] Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004), 517; Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 24; James Hepokoski, "Operatic Stagings: Positions and Paradoxes: Response to David J. Levin," in *Verdi 2001: Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma, New York, New Haven*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, Marco Marcia (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 2003), 2:479.

the creators and spectators of opera, with a focus on the representation of sexual violence. My research foregrounds trauma-informed scholarship, legal discourse, and rape myths, all of which inform our cultural rhetoric of sexual violence. Opera houses are filled with survivors and perpetrators—in the audience, on the stage, and in the wings—and in this context, thinking carefully about the ways in which contemporary artists represent fictional acts of sexual violence is crucial.

That we can, or indeed should, say anything meaningful about the ethics of works of fiction is not a given in our culture of academic criticism. Ethical criticism has a bad name thanks to its associations with "soft" subjective critique, as well as the concern that an ethical condemnation of a work might be used as a justification for censorship. Wayne Booth's aim in his book, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, is "to restore the full intellectual legitimacy of our common sense inclination to talk about stories in ethical terms."[3] Part treatise, part apologia, *The Company We Keep* suggests an approach to ethical criticism that depends on the particular frame of reference of the critic. Booth discourages talking about the messages of a work in universal terms, and instead recommends that readers and listeners focus on the way works construct their individual experiences of reading and listening. The questions of the ethical critic are first, "is the work morally, politically, philosophically sound?" and second, "is it likely to work for good or ill in those who read it?"[4] I am working within a feminist ethic of operatic performance that is concerned with the real-world risks and responsibilities associated with producing historical works of operatic fiction on our contemporary stages.

[3] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), x.
[4] Ibid., 5. Interestingly, the one concrete example Booth gives of a work that cannot be imagined to do good in the minds of those who read it is the oeuvre of the Marquis de Sade, a libertine after Don Giovanni's heart.

Resistance to ethical criticism of canonic artworks is often framed as a question of whether or not it is fair to judge the work of an artist from another time by contemporary ethical standards. I am not interested in passing judgement on the ethical character of the composers and librettists of the operas of the canon. Instead, I want to critically position the canonic works that we continue to perform in our contemporary culture in the context of that culture. In 2014, the Metropolitan Opera pulled the Live in HD broadcast of John Adams's 1991 opera *The Death of Klinghoffer* under pressure from protestors who believed the opera to be antisemitic. That same Live in HD season included a performance of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, which has been frequently perceived as antisemitic.[5] Audiences routinely excuse the problematic content of *Die Meistersinger* and other historical operas because they are artefacts of a different time. But do the composers' dates really affect the way we hear and respond to these stories once the house lights go down? Does the knowledge of how long ago an opera was written significantly change the way we engage with the story in the moment of our spectatorship? Not necessarily. Opera fans love to wax poetic about the incredible immediacy of this art form—its ability to transcend boundaries of time and space to speak directly to the heart. This mode of reception makes it even more vital that we think seriously about how we tell these stories onstage today. The *Klinghoffer* furore indicates to me that ethical criticism is on the table for a lot of opera fans and critics after all. I argue that the importance of ethical representation does not expire after a certain number of years, but that the way we represent ideas about gender, race, and religion onstage continue to matter regardless of the composition dates of the works in question.

[5] Accusations of *Die Meistersinger*'s antisemitism typically cite elements of the characterization of Beckmesser in the story, as well as Hitler's well-documented love for the opera and Wagner's own antisemitic writings.

Literature Review

Musicological inquiries into opera in performance have typically stayed away from practical or political concerns. Instead, musicologists have largely dealt with performance as an important but ultimately ineffable element of musical works and practice.[6] In the preface to *In Search of Opera*, Carolyn Abbate notes that the absence of analyses of actual performances in her book may seem ironic or faulty, but she believes that abstract discussion of performance better serves her exploration of performance as an abstract phenomenon.[7] There is certainly an element of pragmatism to this neglect of consideration of mise-en-scène in multimodal operatic models. Until recently, it was much more difficult to be able to share video of particular productions. But beyond issues of access, it is a pervasive hierarchical understanding of operatic authorship that keeps significant studies of operatic staging out of much of the work that musicologists do. While audiences and scholars understand that dramatic realization is a part of opera's ontology, it is rare to grant true authorship status to a stage director and creative team in the same way we do to the librettist, let alone to the composer.

The perceived hierarchy of authorship of composers, librettists, and stage directors leads to rhetoric about protecting the music from directors who fail to understand it. This is especially rampant in critiques of works of *Regietheater*. Frequently evoked as a castigation, the terms *Regietheater* and *Regieoper* refer to the modern practice of granting freedom to the director to alter or disregard stage directions and indications about mise-en-scène in the operatic texts they stage. *Regietheater* not only breaks with traditional interpretations of a work, but tends to do so in the service of drawing parallels to modern ideas. Gundula Kreuzer writes that *Regietheater*

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[6] For instance: Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Linda and Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Taruskin, *Text and Act.*

[7] Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xii.

"aims to uncover psychological, social or political motives that tie the old work in with topical concerns, thus bestowing contemporary relevance on the entire operatic enterprise."[8] Because of the *Regie* tradition's explicit interest in modern cultural concerns, works of *Regietheater* feature as major players in my dissertation. Of course, not every *Regie* production is more culturally sensitive than a traditionalist staging, and among my case studies are works of *Regietheater* that succeed in different ways and to varying degrees in this regard.

In general, while musicologists in opera studies have long dealt with the politics of representation in operatic texts themselves, studies of operatic performances have lagged behind. Roger Parker recently noted, "the musicological establishment has tended to be indifferent or even hostile to the visual aspect of musical drama."[9] There have been a number of histories of operatic stagings written, but scholarship on specific productions and contemporary practice is scarce.[10] When musicologists have looked at opera production specifically, the studies are often

[8] Gundula Kreuzer, "Voices from Beyond: Verdi's *Don Carlos* and the Modern Stage," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19, no. 2 (2006): 151–52.
[9] Roger Parker, "Reading the *Livrets*, or the Chimera of 'Authentic' Staging,'" in *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 128.
[10] On historic staging practices: Evan Baker, *From the Score to the Stage: An Illustrated History of Continental Opera Production and Staging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, eds., *Opera Production and its Resources*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Storia dell'opera italiana 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, eds., *Opera on Stage*, trans. Kate Singleton, Storia dell'opera italiana 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On the production history of *Don Giovanni*: James Parakilas, "The Afterlife of Don Giovanni: Turning Production History into Criticism," *Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 2 (1990): 251–65. Wagner-specific studies of staging are also popular, for example: Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

organized around particular composers or time periods of performance.[11] I am indebted to Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, who have broken ground on the topic of opera in production with so much of their work, and to David Levin and Clemens Risi, who have both written monographs analyzing opera productions with a particular focus on the ways that the meaning of operatic works shift in performance.[12] I have benefited greatly from studying their production analyses. In my dissertation, I apply these analytical techniques to analyze a group of productions chosen for their engagement with a particular representational and ethical issue: staging sexual violence.

Outside the realm of production and performance studies, my dissertation resonates with scholarship on violence against women in opera.[13] It contributes in particular to a vital new area

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[11] Hedda Høgåsen-Hallesby, "Seven Veils, Seven Rooms, Four Walls and Countless Contexts" in *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories*, ed. Clair Rowden (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 133–54; Mary Hunter, "Window to the Work, or Mirror of Our Preconceptions? Peter Sellars's Production of *Così fan tutte*," *Repercussions* 4, no. 2 (2011): 42–58; Kreuzer, "Voices from Beyond"; Alison Latham and Roger Parker, *Verdi in Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Roberta Montemorra Martin and Downing A. Thomas, eds., *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); Susan McClary, *The Passions of Peter Sellars: Staging the Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019); Ronald Elwy Mitchell, *Opera: Dead or Alive: Production, Performance, and Enjoyment of Musical Theatre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); A. M. Nagler, *Misdirection: Opera Production in the Twentieth Century* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981); Andrew Porter, "Mozart on the Modern Stage," *Early Music* 20, no. 1 (1992): 132–38; Clemens Risi, "The Gestures of the Dutchman: Wagner's Staging Instructions, 1852 and Today," *Opera Quarterly* 28, no. 3–4 (2012): 159–71; Risi, "Performing Wagner for the Twenty-First Century," *New Theatre Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2013): 349–59; Risi, "Shedding Light on the Audience: Hans Neuenfels and Peter Konwitschny Stage Verdi (and Verdians),"*Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, no. 1–2 (2002): 201–10.

[12] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "Adaptation and Opera," in *Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 305–23; Hutcheon and Hutcheon, "Opera: Forever and Always Multimodal," in *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*, ed. Ruth Page (London: Routledge, 2009), 65–77; Clemens Risi, *Oper in Performance: Analysen zur Aufführungsdimension von Operninszenierungen* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2017); David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[13] Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Carolyn Abbate, "Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 225–58; Ralph Locke, "What Are These Women Doing in Opera?" in *En travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 59–98; Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Mary Ann Smart, ed., *Siren Songs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Elizabeth Aileen Carmen Morrison, "The Dead/ly Feminine: Violence and Eroticism in Three Expressionist Operas" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2001); Melanie Unseld, *"Man töte dieses Weib!": Weiblichkeit und Tod in der Musik der*

of inquiry in musicology focused on specifically sexual violence in opera.[14] A panel discussion at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Musicological Society called "Sexual Violence on Stage" resulted in the recent colloquy on sexual violence in opera published in the spring 2018 issue of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society.* The six essays of the *JAMS* colloquy "build on earlier scholarship to suggest ways in which scholars and opera professionals can begin to resist the tradition of rape culture embedded in Western opera by making ever more deliberate choices about our own performative acts of interpretation—be it as producers, stage directors, performers, composers, or scholar-teachers."[15] My work fits into this project of resistance by highlighting and analyzing both the roles played by directors and producers in putting sexual violence on opera stages, and the influence those representations have on our understanding of these operas and of sexual violence in our culture.

Methodology

My dissertation is built around the analysis of particular productions of several canonic operas with a focus on how they function and resonate in the particular times and places of their

Jahrhundertwende (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001); Joseph Kerman, "Verdi and the Undoing of Women," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 1 (2006): 21–31.

[14] Several earlier sources prefigure our current conversations about sexual violence in opera: Elizabeth Hudson, "Gilda Seduced: A Tale Untold," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 3 (1992): 229–51; Lawrence Kramer, *After the Lovedeath: Sexual Violence and the Making of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Elizabeth Wells, "'The New Woman': Lady Macbeth and Sexual Politics in the Stalinist Era," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13, no. 2 (2001): 163–89; J. P. E. Harper-Scott, "Britten's Opera about Rape," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 1 (2009): 65–88; Susan Rutherford, "Sexuality," in *Verdi, Opera, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 111–41. A few musicologists have written about how classroom teaching might change in response to on-campus sexual violence: Ruth A. Solie, "What Do Feminists Want? A Reply to Pieter van den Toorn," *Journal of Musicology* 9, no. 4 (1991): 399–410; Liane Curtis, "On Teaching and Learning: The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's *Don Giovanni*," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 12, no. 1 (2000): 119–42; Bonnie Gordon, "Why We Matter," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19, no. 1 (2015): 116–24; Kassandra Hartford, "Beyond the Trigger Warning: Teaching Operas that Depict Sexual Violence," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 7, no. 1 (2016): 19–34.

[15] Suzanne G. Cusick and Monica Hershberger, "Introduction," in "Colloquy: Sexual Violence in Opera: Scholarship Pedagogy, and Production as Resistance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 1 (2018): 217–18.

performance. Naomi André calls this kind of approach, which is sensitive to present day relevance of historical works, an "engaged musicology," and argues that it can provide "another model for thinking about how opera and classical art music produce meaning today."[16] I explore questions about how opera productions create meaning in society through a multifaceted analysis of my case studies. My focus on the canon is a conscious one. Although there are new works being composed and performed today that deal with sexual violence in ways that are contemporary and explicitly political, productions of canonic operas make up the vast majority of the works being performed on opera stages across Europe and North America.[17] I am excited by these new works, but it is crucial that producers, directors, and critics also think about the ways in which the old and sometimes problematic ideas in the canon appear onstage today. I do not wish to judge the productions I study as merely acceptable or unacceptable interpretations of difficult material. Rather, I intend to highlight the diversity of interpretation and reception of the staging of acts of sexual violence and their consequences in the twenty-first century.

My case studies are largely made up of opera productions that have generated significant interest and reactions in scholarship, in popular media, and on social media. The global operatic community is a relatively small one, and accolades and condemnations of new productions from across North America and Europe circulate widely online. My analyses are based on published texts (primarily promotional materials and reviews), photographic and video documentation of performances, and spectatorship at the live performance when possible.[18] I focus on productions between 2000 and 2019. In my research, I have found that many of the infamously sexually

[16] Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 26.
[17] For example, see two recent productions from Toronto's Tapestry Opera: *Hook Up* (2019), composed by Chris Thornbow on a libretto by Julie Tepperman; and *Oksana G.* (2017), composed by Aaron Gervais on a libretto by Colleen Murphy.
[18] I have provided URL links to photos and promotional videos in the footnotes to enhance my descriptions of the productions. Links are to Wayback Machine archival snapshots of the webpages, for greater stability.

violent stagings that continue to scandalize come from the first decade of the twenty-first century. More recent years seem to show different trends, as the cultural conversation around sexual violence has begun to shift through the 2017 Women's March and the massive visibility of the #MeToo movement. The extent to which this cultural moment will reform the programming and staging of operas that deal with issues of sexual violence remains to be seen.

I analyze the representation of sexual violence in contemporary operatic productions of canonic works through a feminist ethical framework, borrowing tools from feminist theatre studies.[19] I organize my analysis around dual poles of agency and style/stylization in order to generate a comprehensive picture of how these representations of sexual violence work:

1) Agency. The first pole of my analysis is situated within the fictional world of the opera, so I can explore the intersection of sexual violence with the agency of the female characters that are its victims. Who are these women, and what is their role in the drama? Does the violence done to them motivate them in the story, or does it motivate other (male) characters around them? Does their assault influence the drama at all, or is it merely an element of the setting? Are the victims named characters and/or singing characters? And how might the answers to these questions relate to discourses about sexual violence in the real world?

2) Style/stylization. The second pole of my analysis is situated outside the fictional world of the opera, and considers instead the sights and sounds chosen to represent sexual violence onstage. One oft-cited objection to naturalistic or indeed any staging of sexual violence is that an

[19] On representing women onstage: Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012); Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris, eds., *Feminist Futures? Theatre, Performance, Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1998). On staging violence against women: Lisa Fitzpatrick, *Rape on the Contemporary Stage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Miriam Haughton, *Staging Trauma: Bodies in Shadow* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Barbara Ozieblo and Noelia Hernando-Real, eds., *Performing Gender Violence: Plays by Contemporary American Women Dramatists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

audience's gaze typically objectifies women's bodies, and therefore, onstage violence can become tangled up with pleasure at the sexual spectacle.[20] Lisa Fitzgerald cautions, "the exposure of the (usually female) body to the spectator's gaze can, deliberately or otherwise, titillate."[21] Staging can play into or challenge this element of spectatorship. One common way of undermining the audience's sense of sexual excitement is to opt for abstract representations of the violence as it is experienced by the survivor.[22] Yet abstract representations can also serve to aestheticize and even beautify acts of sexual violence. In what ways do opera directors and performers mitigate or enhance the potential for spectatorial pleasure when staging sexual violence?

Throughout my analysis, I refer to productions primarily by the names of their directors. I am using the word director and the names of particular directors as synecdoches for the large collaborative creative teams that work on and off the stage to bring these productions into being.[23] Stage directors are typically responsible for the overarching concepts of their productions and oversee the proliferation of creative elements that bring that concept to the stage. But the creation of a production of an opera takes place in a complex system of people. Even directors who want to oversee every minute detail of a production will find themselves in positions where they need to compromise to accommodate particular performers and to work within the budget and the rehearsal period of the production. In addition to stage directors, the creative teams that shape opera productions and their performances include: the artistic director

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[20] See Dolan, "Ideology in Performance: Looking through the Male Gaze," in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 41–58.
[21] Fitzpatrick, *Rape on the Contemporary Stage*, 5.
[22] On dismantling the male gaze by breaking conventions of traditional realism, see Elin Diamond, "Mimesis, Mimicry, and the 'True-Real,'" *Modern Drama* 32, no. 1 (1989): 58–72.
[23] I am indebted to Clemens Risi, who refers to the "metonymic shift" of using the director's rather than the composer's name as possessive when we refer to, for instance, Peter Sellars's *Don Giovanni*. Risi, *Oper in Performance*, 21.

of the producing company; music directors and conductors; set, costume, and lighting designers and technicians; makeup artists; dramaturgs; choreographers; assistant directors; singers, dancers, actors, and supernumeraries; répétiteurs; translators and surtitle operators; and film crews in the case of productions shot for release on video. This list will differ from production to production, but in all cases, the question of authorship in a stage production is complex and inherently collaborative.

My approach to reception and spectatorship is founded on a conception of opera theatre as a fundamentally public artistic practice that is informed by and contributes to the particular cultural surroundings of its performance. This positioning of opera as a site of cultural discourse supports the ethical bent of my analysis, and also illuminates the role of spectatorship in this discourse. By surveying the critical literature on my selected productions, I consider the agency of the audience and the critic in the creation of meaning, thereby illuminating another way we might assess productions in the context of the world around them. The sources for my reception studies are largely drawn from public media, though there are some scholarly sources on a few of the older productions.[24] Popular opera criticism presents some resistance to analysis in this way because of the often unilateral focus of many critics on the quality of the voices and the music, and a historic bias against *Regietheater*. But in recent years, more publications have been interested in calling out problematic stage depictions, especially when it comes to representations of oppressed groups of people. The abundance of online news sources and opera blogs has meant

[24] On Atom Egoyan's *Salome*: Kay Armatage and Caryl Clark, "Seeing and Hearing Atom Egoyan's *Salome*," in *Image and Territory: Essays on Atom Egoyan*, ed. Monique Tschofen and Jennifer Burwell (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2007), 307–28; David J. Levin, "Operatic School for Scandal," in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 241–52. On Calixto Bieito's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*: Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 378–79; Risi, *Oper in Performance*, 8–10, 34–38, 52–54. On Bieito's *Don Giovanni*: Sarah Wright, "Consuming Passions: The Aesthetics of Cultural Consumption in Calixto Bieito's *Don Giovanni*," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 317–39; Risi, *Oper in Performance*, 174–80.

that conversations about particular productions that once would have been confined to the locality of the performance can now spread through much larger communities. The reception of new productions in the press and online can further highlight the discrepancies that sometimes arise between the meanings a director sets out to create and the meanings that are read by their audiences and reported by their reviewers.

Chapter Outline

My four chapters are independent inquiries into particular issues relating to staging sexual violence on the contemporary operatic stage. Together, they sketch a picture of the complexity and plurality of the creative undertaking and the spectatorial response associated with opera and sexual violence today. Brief plot synopses of the operas can be found in Appendix 1. Chapter 2 contrasts different approaches to the violence in the written text in two productions of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*: Calixto Bieito's 2004 production for the Komische Oper Berlin, and Wajdi Mouawad's 2016 production co-commissioned by Opéra Lyon and the Canadian Opera Company. Bieito's *Entführung* takes seriously and amplifies the threats of violence and torture that litter the libretto. The resulting production stages multiple rapes and the murders of prostitutes amidst a host of supernumerary working girls serving as stage dressing. Mouawad takes a different approach to the themes of violence and consent in *Entführung*, attempting to neutralize them almost entirely by means of an ambitious reconceptualization of the narrative. In a series of newly written dialogue scenes set some time after the events of the opera, Konstanze and Blonde try to explain that their captors have been misunderstood, and actually treated them quite well. These productions, in their different approaches to the violence of the opera, create different meanings in the operatic text, whose comic lightheartedness seems at times an uneasy match for the seriousness of these issues in our cultural moment. How do

these new takes on the violence of *Die Entführung* inflect the meaning of the opera? In what ways do they intersect with the opera's through-running currents of Islamophobia and misogyny? In this chapter, analysis of sexual violence thus leads into consideration of other political and ethical challenges of staging works of the operatic canon today.

My third chapter traces a troubling trend in recent productions of Strauss's *Salome* that sees directors using stage action during the Dance of the Seven Veils to position Salome as a victim of sexual abuse. I begin with an in-depth analysis of Atom Egoyan's production for the Canadian Opera Company (1996, 2002, 2013), which is the earliest production in this pattern I have found. I conducted an interview with Egoyan about this production in March 2019, some of which is reproduced here. I go on to consider a collection of thirteen other *Salome* productions mounted in North America and Europe between 2008 and 2018, all of which use the Dance of the Seven Veils as an opportunity to either stage a sexual abuse or disclose a past sexual abuse. Introducing child sexual abuse and incest into this opera significantly affects the potential meanings of the work and audience interpretations of Salome's character.

Chapter 4 looks at interpretations of *Don Giovanni* in light of our current culture of #MeToo. Promotional materials for recent productions of the opera increasingly draw connections between Giovanni and serial sexual abusers in the real world, but stage representations of Giovanni and the women in the opera reflect these conversations in more complicated ways. I survey a group of ten productions of *Don Giovanni*, all currently available for streaming online, with a focus on the representations of Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Zerlina. My analysis draws out resonances between the depiction of *Don Giovanni*'s women onstage and contemporary feminist discourses around sexual violence and harassment. I am interested in the way different stage interpretations of *Don Giovanni* work in the world today,

when audiences are more sensitive than ever to the insidiousness of sexual violence in our society. Ultimately, I aim to model ways that opera directors and producers might start to think about this opera in terms of contemporary feminist thought about sexual violence and rape culture.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I analyze four productions of canonic operas with wartime settings that feature acts of sexual violence not present in the libretti: Damiano Michieletto's 2015 *Guillaume Tell* for the Royal Opera House, Tobias Kratzer's 2019 *La forza del destino* for Oper Frankfurt, Tilman Knabe's 2007 *Turandot* for the Aalto Theater Essen, and Calixto Bieito's 2000 *Un ballo in maschera* for the Gran Teatre del Liceu. These productions all make powerful statements about the realities and atrocities of war, but there are risks to depicting rape onstage, especially in operas that do not typically feature sexual violence. I use these four productions to look at the ways that rape functions as a component of and metaphor for warfare on the operatic stage, and weigh the potential risks and benefits of interpolating scenes of sexual violence into operas where audiences do not expect them.

My approach to the ethics of representing sexual violence is focused on the stage, but there are also ethical concerns about how these representations are crafted and rehearsed.[25] Questions about safety in the rehearsal space and about the experiences of the singer-actors who perform sexually violent representations are addressed in my Conclusion.

Sexual violence is incredibly prevalent in the operatic canon, though it is not often explicit. Musicologists before me have uncovered and explored the ethical and political

[25] Ellie Hisama addresses the question of directorial ethics both off and onstage in: Hisama, "A Feminist Staging of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*," in Cusick et al., "Colloquy: Sexual Violence in Opera,"237–42.

motivations behind many canonic works. With this dissertation, I extend that project to production and interrogate the politics of these works as we perform and receive them today. Opera production is an act of adaptation, not only of the score into a performance, but also of an imagined amalgam of previous productions into something new. Specifically, the opera productions here are transcultural adaptations, to borrow Linda Hutcheon's term.[26] When we adapt works from one cultural context into another, we create dialogues between those two societies, even across great stretches of time and between distinct cultural and political moments. Hutcheon suggests that readiness to receive and produce adaptations can depend on the "rightness" of a historical moment for particular topics. Noting the proliferation of productions featuring sexual violence on operatic stages in these first two decades of the twenty-first century, I suggest that now is the right time not just to produce but to critically analyze operatic adaptations on this topic.

New York Times classical music editor Zachary Woolfe addressed the stakes of this kind of transcultural adaptation in opera when he wrote in 2016, "using opera to understand the connections between cultures and to experiment with what can bridge them is no longer merely an aesthetic possibility; it's a moral necessity."[27] Woolfe argues that it is our duty to address the racist, misogynistic, and classist ideas that fill so many works from the past if we are going to continue presenting them in the present; depicting these works without comment has become morally unacceptable. Arguments on this point proliferate in popular opera criticism today. Throughout this study, I conceive of opera productions as utterances in a cultural discourse and not historic curiosities suspended in time—not museum pieces. This positioning supports

[26] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2013). See especially chapter 5.
[27] Zachary Woolfe, "Can Opera Become an Agent of Change?" *New York Times* July 15, 2016. One of the productions Woolfe discusses in this article is Wajdi Mouawad's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, discussed in chapter 2.

analysis of opera productions in the terms of a contemporary ethical framework. The analyses in the following case studies do not explore the cultures in which these works were written. They focus instead on how the cultural contents of the operas are shaped by their directors and are received by their audiences in contemporary performance. My focus on the highly charged issue of sexual violence illuminates the ethical and political stakes at play in operatic representations today.

CHAPTER 2

Die Entführung aus dem Serail: Violence and Agency in Captivity

> *Hat nicht Osmin etwan, wie man fast glauben kann*
> *sein Recht als Herr probiert und bei dir exerzieret?*
> *Dann wär's ein schlechter Kauf!*
>
> *Has Osmin never, as one might well believe,*
> *exercised his lordly rights upon you as your owner?*
> *That would be a bad purchase for him!*
>
> –Gottlieb Stephanie, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*

Mozart's 1782 *Singspiel*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail,* presents some significant problems for modern interpreters. The libretto by Friedrich Bretzner, adapted by Gottlieb Stephanie, tells the story of the nobleman Belmonte's heroic rescue of his lover, Konstanze, her maid, Blonde, and his servant, Pedrillo, from the Turkish seraglio of the Pasha Selim and his henchman, Osmin. Konstanze is Selim's favourite in the harem, and Blonde has been given as a gift to Osmin. The constant threat of sexual violence to the women is made explicit in the libretto when Selim warns Konstanze that if she does not consent to love him, he will use force to compel her. The threat of violence pervades all aspects of this story. Osmin, the Turkish *buffo,* describes in horrible detail all the ways he would like to torture and kill the men who threaten to take the women away.

Mozart's *alla turca* style in the overture and chorus numbers reinforces the Orientalism of the story, which is in itself problematic for some audiences today. Beyond the general tensions in presenting musical exoticism in the present day, *Entführung*'s characterization of Osmin—with his murderous temper and bumbling inefficacy—paints an appalling picture of the exotic Turkish man. The story ends with Selim setting the lovers free, and this act of mercy is construed

as a victory of Enlightened thought—that incomparable gift of the West—over Eastern obscurantism. Despite its politically problematic story and Orientalist music, *Entführung* is still performed regularly and most often uncritically. In 2019, it was mounted thirty-three times across Europe and North America. The unblinking portrayal of palace guards in turbans and harem pants in many modern productions including The Metropolitan Opera's most recent staging from 2016, is alarmingly oblivious to contemporary concerns about cultural appropriation and ethical representation.

This chapter considers two recent productions of *Entführung* that make an effort to address some of the representational problems in this opera. Calixto Bieito's 2004 production for the Komische Oper Berlin, and Wajdi Mouawad's 2016 production co-commissioned by Opéra Lyon and the Canadian Opera Company, both radically reinvent Bretzner's story and ask their audiences to think about it differently. Bieito's *Entführung* has achieved some infamy for its explicit violence and nudity. Bieito moves the action from a Turkish harem to a German brothel. While this move sidesteps some of the potential for Orientalist caricature of Turkey, it also invokes modern-day tensions about Germany's significant and marginalized Turkish population. This production takes seriously and amplifies the threats of violence and torture that litter the libretto. The resulting production stages multiple rapes and the murders of prostitutes amidst a host of supernumerary working girls serving as stage dressing. Mouawad takes a drastically different approach to the themes of violence and consent in *Entführung*, attempting to neutralize it almost entirely by means of an ambitious reconceptualization of the narrative. He reimagines the original action of the *Singspiel* as a flashback narrated by Konstanze, Blonde, Belmonte, and Pedrillo in a series of newly written spoken scenes interspersed through the show. Konstanze and Blonde try to explain that their captors have been misunderstood, and actually treated them quite

well. Mouawad's direction nullifies the violent language in the libretto by re-contextualizing it as either affectionate joking or excusable outbursts that do not reflect the true feelings of the speaker.

Through analysis of these two productions of an opera that thematizes misogynistic violence, this chapter demonstrates how a director's approach to representing that violence onstage shapes the characterization of its victims and perpetrators. Bieito's *Entführung* stages numerous acts of sexual violence in service of his concept, whereas Mouawad stages none. In this chapter, I will analyze the sexual violence in Bieito's *Entführung* in detail, considering the axes of the agency of the abused characters and the representational style. I will more briefly consider Mouawad's *Entführung* as a foil for Bieito's extreme violence. Many audience members and critics have objected to Bieito's staging of such graphic acts of violence, so I think it is important that in addition to analyzing those representations on their own terms, I consider what an alternative looks like. While Mouawad's goal with his production is crafting a reparative representation of Islam and the opera's Muslim characters, my focus is on how the story changes when a director sterilizes the violence in *Entführung*. I ask the question: In the framework of feminist analysis, can putting more rather than less rape onstage be the more ethical approach to representation in an opera that thematizes sexual violence?

CALIXTO BIEITO'S *DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL*

Since its premiere at the Komische Oper Berlin in 2004, Calixto Bieito's *Entführung* has generated ongoing controversy over its displays of nudity and explicit depictions of sex and violence onstage. The opening night crowd was divided between booing the singers and fervent

reassuring applause. Many audience members walked out opening night, and a representative from DaimlerChrysler was so outraged that he threatened to pull the company's sponsorship of the Komische Oper. Despite or because of the scandal, the production's renown brought it back to the Komische Oper stage several times before its final run in 2018.

Bieito's concept pulls *Entführung* from its Orientalist context and reimagines the seraglio as a modern-day European brothel. The stage is a gaudy pink, lit with different coloured lights, and plastered with images advertising women in lingerie. The most striking element of Bieito's mise-en-scène is a collection of glass-walled boxes onstage in which sex workers dance, strip, and perform sexual acts for clients in the background of much of the main action. Selim is a gangster who runs the brothel and Osmin is his gold-chain-clad right-hand man. Blonde wears a bleach-blonde wig and works as a prostitute at the brothel. Selim keeps Konstanze leashed in a small cage. When Belmonte infiltrates the brothel, he goes undercover not as an architect, but in drag, presumably passing himself off as a prostitute. To make his concept work, Bieito adds to and alters the spoken dialogue, but manages to maintain a surprising amount of the original text. Toward the end of the opera, Bieito's concept departs from the original story and the dialogue scenes are largely rewritten, with the greatest break from the libretto happening at the opera's conclusion. After Belmonte and Pedrillo are reunited with their lovers, they arm themselves and shoot up the brothel, massacring all the clients, bodyguards, and sex workers onstage. They are still subsequently captured and forgiven by Selim, but his forgiveness is no longer motivated by the desire to show mercy for mercy's sake. Now it seems to come from a genuine love for Konstanze. He unties Konstanze, gives her his gun, tells her he loves her, and then she shoots him. Blonde shoots Osmin shortly thereafter. The final celebratory chorus number, exalting the Pasha's mercy, is now twisted into a celebration of Belmonte who dons a white suit and a pair of

sunglasses and takes over Selims's role as head of the brothel. Konstanze, sitting at the front of the stage, sees what Belmonte has become and after the final notes of music she shoots herself.[1]

Sexual violence is pervasive throughout this production. Selim, Osmin, Pedrillo, and Belmonte all commit acts of violence against women onstage including nonconsensual sex acts, sexual humiliation, and abuse of sex workers by pimps. Among the representations of these acts are several highly realistic simulations of extremely graphic violence against women, the most infamous of which features Osmin's torture and mutilation of a sex worker. When I analyze the scenes of sexual violence in this production, I am interested not only in their presence in a production of *Entführung*, but in their particular brutality and their graphic nature. This is an important distinction to make with this production. Too many commentators reviewing Bieito's *Entführung* group the representations of sexual violence in this production together with, for instance, nudity and representations of drug use into a single category of typical *Regietheater* scandal mongering. In his 2013 history of opera production and staging, Evan Baker voices his distress about directors who "have inserted graphic sexual situations or seemingly pointless nudity into the dramaturgy of an opera, in some cases to excess, causing much revulsion" and uses this *Entführung* production as a case in point.[2] A reviewer for the Metropolitan Opera Guild expressed concern about the brutalization of prostitutes in this production, but he connected it with his concerns about Belmonte's cross-dressing and a scene of homoerotic contact between women—as if rape might be effectively understood as an expression of queer sexuality.[3] Similarly, a critic for *The Telegraph* troublingly described the dismemberment of a dead

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[1] A video trailer for the production, posted to Komische Oper's YouTube channel in 2013, can be found here: https://archive.org/details/bieito-promotional-video. The video contains nudity and depictions of sexual acts and violence including gun violence.

[2] Baker, *From the Score to the Stage*, 378–79. See also Derek Scally, "Sex, Drugs and…Opera," *Irish Times*, July 3, 2004.

[3] Jochen Breiholz, "Die Entführung aus dem Serail," *Opera News*, June 29, 2004, Metropolitan Opera Guild.

prostitute as "S&M."[4] A review for the *Irish Times* includes a quote from a spectator at the theatre who said, "I don't know what all the fuss is about, if they knew anything about Mozart, they'd know that there's loads of this sort of thing in his letters."[5] I assume this audience member was referring to Mozart's well-documented appreciation for scatological humour. This too denies any real difference in kind between representing rape and torture, and representing sex and urination. It implies that any objection to this staging must be based merely in prudishness.

My analysis of this production treats the representations of sexual violence as fundamentally different from the nudity, cross-dressing, and simulations of urination and drug use onstage. Based on the reviews cited above, the latter seem to anger opera patrons and reviewers because they are seen as threatening both the perceived seriousness of opera and the hegemony of the composer's wishes. Bieito's representation of sexual violence raises the stakes beyond these concerns, as I will argue in my analysis below.

While Bieito's production succeeds in critically reading a problematic opera, his approach is not immune to criticism. His unblinking portrayal of sexualized violence makes it impossible for audiences to miss the themes of violence and consent already present in *Entführung*. He also takes a clear stand on the brutality of the sex trade, which came at a pivotal moment in German sex work legislation. This kind of contemporary resonance and political messaging is one of the most exciting parts of *Regietheater.* Yet despite a compelling critical concept, the production's critique of misogyny sometimes gets lost in its graphic depictions of sexualized violence and its objectification of women's bodies. Through consideration of the characterization of the women in the story and analysis of the specific ways acts of sexual violence are depicted in this production, I will highlight the ways Bieito's production alternately

[4] Michael White, "Hell Is Not under the Stage," *Telegraph,* September 21, 2004.
[5] Scally, "Sex, Drugs and…Opera."

succeeds and fails at critiquing misogyny and violence in the sex trade. My analysis is based on a video recording of the premiere of the Komische Oper's production on June 20, 2004.

Sexual Violence and Agency in Bieito's Seraglio

Die Entführung aus dem Serail is a rescue opera, so its female characters lack agency in the primary thrust of the plot. The opera renders Konstanze and Blonde objects and Belmonte and Pedrillo subjects (the latter to a lesser extent). The men rescue; the women are rescued. Mozart offers some critique of this formulation by giving Konstanze some of the most beautiful music in the opera. Her arias are show-stoppers and the powers of her voice and rhetoric are undeniable, even as she finds herself helpless within the contraptions of the plot.[6] Bretzner also rewrites rescue convention; Belmonte is ultimately unsuccessful in his rescue attempt, and it is only because the Pasha chooses to be merciful that the central conflict of the story resolves. Bieito offers his own critique of rescue convention, which aligns itself with Mozart's critique but largely overrules Bretzner's. Bieito's Pasha is so immediately frightening that his mercy at the end is hard to understand in terms of enlightenment as Bretzner intended. His pity for Konstanze emerges from a violent, vengeful mania, and while it is presented as genuine, it does not feel earned. Bieito's critique of the rescue formula comes instead from the revelation of Belmonte's priorities in the final scene. Belmonte's heroism erodes over the course of the third act. He relishes slaughtering the brothel's clientele and sex workers and emerges as the new Pasha, taking charge of what infrastructure remains. The hero becomes the villain, and the only escape left to a decidedly un-rescued Konstanze is suicide.

[6] Gretchen Wheelock reads "Martern aller Arten" as "a powerful statement of resistance," proportional to the Pasha's power over her. Wye Jamison Allanbrook, Mary Hunter, and Gretchen A. Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," in Smart, *Siren Songs*, 48, 50–57.

The dark finale of this perverted rescue-drama places Konstanze centre-stage as she stares heartbroken into the audience.[7] Bieito's production, like Mozart's music, centres on Konstanze's plight. Her suffering is of a different nature in this production, however. Whereas Bretzner's Konstanze seems to be truly torn between her affection for her captor and her allegiance to her betrothed, Bieito's Konstanze is terrified of Selim and lies about her affection to pacify him and protect her chastity. In the libretto, Konstanze's refusals of Selim's advances are successful; she resists him even in his position of absolute power. He tells her that he does not want to force her to love him—he wants her to choose to. Bretzner's Selim desires not just her body and her heart, but ideally her consent. Bieito's Selim is not concerned with consent. He speaks the same words, but as we watch him cage and abuse Konstanze, we know that they do not delimit his actions. Unlike Mozart and Bretzner's heroine, Bieito's Konstanze is not in charge of her fate at Selim's hands.

Selim's methods of exerting power over Konstanze operate in more insidious ways in Bieito's production as well. Toward the end of her aria, "Welcher Wechsel herrscht in meiner Seele," a weeping Selim attempts to strangle himself with the leash Konstanze has been wearing. She stops him and they kiss passionately. Unwilling to be responsible for Selim's suicide, Konstanze's capitulation here is the result of his continued manipulation. This scene evokes a darkly familiar tactic of sexual coercion in abusive relationships. In the dialogue that follows, Konstanze begins to assert herself against Selim for the first time in the opera. Selim tells her that by the next day she must love him, and she refuses. During their exchange, she unfastens her collar and hurls it to the ground. He whips her with his jacket and she retaliates, beating him with

[7] A photograph by Monika Rittershaus shows Konstanze (Brigitte Geller) just before her suicide: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803200211/https:/www.komische-oper-berlin.de/content-images/image720/4e3386bdf36f95c87135856126b183eb/904/entfuehrung63.jpg.

a leather whip. She kicks him in the chest and he collapses to great cheers of support by the audience. For a moment, she has taken real action and has physically overpowered her captor. In retaliation, Selim forces Konstanze to watch Osmin rape, torture, and murder an unnamed prostitute onstage. After this scene, Konstanze is virtually catatonic for the rest of the opera. Even when she ultimately shoots Selim, this action lacks any sense of triumph—the same audience that cheered when she kicked Selim in the chest remains silent. Selim himself gives Konstanze the gun. He guides her hand even in this final moment; Selim's death reads less as murder and more as suicide.

Bieito presents Blonde in a very different light. From her first introduction, Blonde appears to be working at the brothel with Osmin as her pimp. In her first scene with Osmin, we watch their interaction devolve from coy play-fighting to brutal violence and humiliation. Blonde is written as a typical Mozartean maid, feisty and cunning, a forebear of *Le nozze di Figaro*'s Susanna, *Così fan tutte*'s Despina, and *Don Giovanni*'s Zerlina. In this production, Blonde treats Osmin with a sexualized version of her typical Mozartean sass, but it fails to keep Osmin in line. Blonde is one of the strong women of Mozart's oeuvre, but she does not stand a chance against Osmin as a twenty-first century mobster. In Mozart's *Entführung*, we are given every reason to assume that Blonde has resisted her captor due to sheer force of will and good humour, but Bieito dismantles her optimistic resistance before our eyes. Though in her first appearance she defies Osmin, it quickly becomes impossible to further believe Blonde's Mozartean bravado. After Osmin beats and humiliates her, she spends the remainder of the production self-medicating with pills and alcohol and staggering from one scene to the next in a haze. In the final scene, Blonde is morbidly fascinated by the dead bodies of her fellow sex workers. Unlike the Mozartean archetype, Bieito's Blonde loses her autonomy in this story almost immediately after

her introduction. She still speaks some lines from the original libretto saying that she will never be Osmin's slave, but as we watch Osmin overpower her and seize her earnings it is clear that these words do not reflect reality in Bieito's seraglio.

Although Konstanze and Blonde are the only named female characters in the opera, Bieito populates his stage with a number of sex workers engaged at the brothel. These sex workers serve as elements of the mise-en-scène and props for the main characters. In Bieito's storytelling, the sex workers have no agency and are consistently dehumanized. They are tools for Osmin to use against his enemies and to satisfy his own desires; they are voodoo dolls on which Selim can inflict damage in order to hurt Konstanze; they are collateral damage, in their deaths, serving to expose Belmonte and Pedrillo's true colours; and throughout all of this, they are scene dressing. After they are murdered, the bodies of these women remain onstage as props for Osmin to interact with through the opera's conclusion. Their deaths constitute a progression between two states of objectification—from sex toys to corpses. Bieito only shows us these sex workers in a large undifferentiated group. The production denies them their individuality and reduces them to their work and to their relationship to Osmin and the brothel. Even Blonde is at risk of deindividuation in this production as a sex worker herself. One early reviewer of this production actually failed to differentiate Blonde from the background sex workers, writing that Osmin "urges a peroxide-blonde prostitute to drink a glass of his urine."[8]

Konstanze, then, is the only female character onstage who is able to even attempt to act as an agent in the story, and she is either undermined or punished at every opportunity. We watch her constant abuse, and after witnessing the torture and murder of another woman for Konstanze's benefit we begin to wonder if her resistance is really worth it. If she would have just

[8] Jane Paulick, "A Violent, Drug-Addled, Hooker-Filled Opera Angers Sponsors," *Deutsche Welle*, June 24, 2004.

slept with Selim maybe that sex worker would still be alive. Furthermore, the time Konstanze does not spend in a cage or on a leash she spends in Selim's or Belmonte's arms. Despite her incredible strength of will in denying Selim's requests of her, she is trapped under the constant control and surveillance of one of these two men. In the end, Konstanze believes the only way she can to bring her situation to an end is suicide.

In the libretto, Konstanze and Blonde function as essentially objects for exchange in the conflict between Belmonte and Pasha Selim as representatives of the enlightened West and the obscurantist East. Yet within that framework, Mozart's women exert power through their music: Konstanze through her vocal extravagances and Blonde through comic irreverence in the face of Osmin's threats. Bieito largely nullifies even this micro-agency in his representations of Konstanze and Blonde. In doing so, he makes a powerful statement about the ways in which female agency can be compromised by men in the sex trade. This production points out that the agency we read onto Konstanze and Blonde through their music is a fantasy. By transplanting the story from an Orientalist daydream to contemporary reality, Bieito suggests that *Entführung* has been a story about sex slavery all along—as distasteful as that might be to some opera fans. But simply presenting this stark vision of women stripped of their agency does not in itself operate as critique. I first examine some of the specific ways the creative team of this production renders the acts of violence onstage, and then consider the work these representations do in crafting Bieito's critique.

Sexual Violence and Style in Bieito's Seraglio

The first approach to representing sexual violence that I will highlight is seen in Osmin's aria "Solche hergelauf'ne Laffen" and Osmin and Blonde's duet, "Ich gehe doch rate ich dir." In both of these scenes, Osmin engages in what at first seems to be sexual play with a woman and

then suddenly becomes violent. “Solche hergelauf’ne Laffen” is about Pedrillo’s inferior character and Osmin’s plans to outsmart and ultimately kill his rival. Bieito stages this scene primarily between Osmin and one of the sex workers in his employ. She gives him an erotic massage and then he pulls her down to the ground where they caress each other sensually. Osmin simulates performing oral sex, and after responding positively at first the woman suddenly screams—presumably he has bitten her—and tries to move away from him. Osmin grabs her by her ankles, drags her back toward himself, and pins her to the stage in the fetal position. He eventually lets her get up and directs his anger at Pedrillo for the remainder of the aria.[9] This act of violence is the first time in the opera that we see Osmin exert his power over the women in the brothel. We learn that he can hurt them casually as it suits him.

Osmin treats Blonde in a similar way in their Act 2 duet, “Ich gehe doch rate ich dir.” At the beginning of the scene, Blonde’s alternates between stomping around arms akimbo and coyly dancing. In their duet, Blonde declares that she will never be Osmin’s slave. They argue and push each other around in a way initially played for comedy. At several points, Osmin removes articles of Blonde’s clothing and attempts to initiate sex with her, and her refusals are characterized by an eye-rolling exasperation more than a real fear. Midway through the duet, however, Osmin adjusts his tactics and the stakes change. He drags her to her feet by her hair and pours vodka all over her body before threatening her with a lighter. She bites his wrist, which causes him to drop the lighter and starts a vicious fight between them. In the end, the much larger Osmin pins Blonde to the ground and punches her hard in the stomach. She begins to cry, and Osmin urinates into a glass tumbler which he places next to her. The set rotates them out of view

[9] A photograph by Monika Rittershaus shows Osmin (Andreas Hörl) and some of the supernumerary sex workers beating Pedrillo (Thomas Ebenstein): https://web.archive.org/web/20200803200443/https:/www.komische-oper-berlin.de/content-images/image720/64457385cb85b7f646dc0d12f0b4b9e0/895/entfuehrung05.jpg.

before Blonde drinks. Like in "Solche hergelauf'ne Laffen," Osmin's sexual playfulness transforms into brutality. He puts Blonde in her place with a combination of physical abuse and humiliation that reduces her to a shadow of herself for the remainder of the opera.[10]

Selim's approach to sexual violence differs from Osmin's. Whereas Osmin's acts of violence are brutish and clumsy, Selim's are calculated and precise. The only explicit act of sexual violence he commits is the digital rape of Konstanze during her first aria, "Ach, ich liebte." Selim has Konstanze held in a cage, and over the course of the aria he brings her out on a leash. While she sings, he escalates from kissing her ankles to raping her with his fingers.[11] The aria is about Konstanze's misery at being without her beloved Belmonte. Osmin's abuses are shocking for their proximity to and growth out of comic amorous gestures; Selim's, by contrast, shock by their sheer depravity. Osmin's numbers above are in a comic mode, but "Ach, ich liebte" is in the high dramatic mode of an opera seria heroine. Konstanze sings about suffering without Belmonte and we watch that suffering play out. Bieito transforms Konstanze's soliloquy about her emotional suffering into a brutal, physical ordeal at the hands of her captor. Bieito's staging presents us with a powerful parallel between the "Liebe Schmerz" of Konstanze's words as she mourns Belmonte, and the twisted "Liebe Schmerz" of Selim's punishment for not loving him back.

Finally, there is the scene that seems largely responsible for the infamy of this production, "Martern aller Arten." In Konstanze's second aria, she is punished for the retaliatory violence she inflicts on Selim by being forced to watch Osmin violate and murder a sex worker. The aria

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[10] A photograph by Monika Rittershaus shows Blonde (Mojca Erdmann) sitting with Osmin (Andreas Hörl) as he mourns two pictured dead sex workers at the opera's conclusion. Belmonte (Matthias Klink) stands over Selim's (Guntbert Warns) body: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803200731/https:/www.komische-oper-berlin.de/content-images/image720/c2d1a7e27926d8457f8d61b947fdeae0/903/entfuehrung60.jpg.

[11] A photograph by Monika Rittershaus shows Selim (Guntbert Warns) letting Konstanze (Brigitte Geller) out of her cage, wearing a leash: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803201004/https:/www.komische-oper-berlin.de/content-images/image720/30467131a7824fccbe9e8fde1e222a0b/896/entfuehrung_cms_produktionen_entfuehrung2.jpg.

begins with Konstanze defiantly telling Selim that she will willingly face any torment before she betrays her love, but requesting Selim's mercy. As Konstanze continues singing, Osmin emerges with a sex worker in tow and the two engage in apparently consensual sexual activity. After kissing for a while, Osmin throws the woman to the ground in front of Konstanze's feet, but she laughs and beckons him to come closer. She performs fellatio on Osmin while Selim holds Konstanze by her hair making her watch. Osmin pulls a knife, presses the woman into the stage, and stuffs a cloth into her mouth. While she panics and kicks beneath him, Osmin systematically cuts her face, both her forearms, her back, her chest, and ultimately her throat.[12] After she has ceased moving, Osmin cuts off her nipple and presents it to Konstanze as she sings the climactic ending of her aria. This is the first death of a sex worker in this production and it is excruciating to watch. Osmin's relaxed approach to the deed highlights the arbitrariness of this murder—the sex worker he chooses here is effectively a stand-in for Konstanze to show her what will follow if she continues to resist Selim. In the text of her aria, Konstanze invites Selim's torture and anticipates the freedom that will come from death, but there is no salvation in the death she is made to witness, and we will sense no salvation in her eventual suicide.

Nudity: Nudity has become one of the hallmarks of *Regietheater* according to its critics. As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, some reviews of this production do not differentiate between the horrific acts of sexualized violence and the appearance of nude bodies. I have no ethical quarrel with onstage nudity in itself. However, Bieito's particular uses of nudity in *Entführung* are wrapped up in his representations of sexual violence, its perpetrators, and its

[12] A photograph by Monika Rittershaus shows Selim (Guntbert Warns) restraining Konstanze (Brigitte Geller) while Osmin (Andreas Hörl) sits on the sex worker struggling to escape: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803201214/https:/www.komische-oper-berlin.de/content-images/image720/f3c9fc3d8500024a4e72f75165ff4e2e/898/entfuehrung_cms_produktionen_entfuehrung6.jpg.

victims. There is a great deal of nudity in this production, both of men's bodies and of women's bodies. Among the main characters of the opera, we see only Osmin fully nude. In the background, supernumerary sex workers and their clients appear nude, both to engage in simulated sex and, in the case of the women, to pose in glass boxes advertising their bodies. Bieito's use of nudity in this production is not uniform. Sometimes it highlights the comedy of the score, as when Osmin bounces on the bed with his genitals exposed. Other times it constructs the realism of the brothel, as in the case of the men and women engaging in sex around the set. The two women whose nude bodies appear in the foreground of Bieito's staging are the two sex workers that are victims of Osmin's violence. In particular, the woman Osmin kills in "Martern aller Arten" has her body increasingly exposed while he tortures her. He pulls her dress and bra down so he can cut her back and chest, and as she writhes around on the ground her skirt rides up, exposing her buttocks to the audience while she struggles to escape.

One of the dangers of putting sexual violence onstage is the potential eroticization of the violated female body. Charlotte Canning links staged sexual violence with pornography and outlines a number of different modes of representation that focus on a stylization of the *idea* of rape rather than the physical act, in an effort to eschew the pornographic potential of exposed women's bodies.[13] Canning's citation of pornography is interesting. In 1983, anti-pornography lobbyists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon drafted a set of ordinances that proposed treating pornography as a violation of women's civil rights in the United States. The ordinances were ultimately deemed unconstitutional on the grounds of freedom of speech protections, but the definitions of pornography in the proposed ordinances have been influential on continuing anti-porn campaigns in the US and Canada. Dworkin and MacKinnon proposed a list of

[13] Charlotte Canning, *Feminist Theatres in the U.S.A.: Staging Women's Experience* (London: Routledge, 1996), 169–71.

conditions that when combined with "the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words" constitute pornography. The conditions relevant here are:

> a. Women are presented as dehumanized sexual objects, things or commodities; or…d. women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or e. women are presented in postures of sexual submission, servility, or display; or…h. women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, abasement, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.[14]

Regardless of the potential political value of these ordinances, it is worth noting on how many counts Bieito's depictions of sex and sexual violence constitute the kind of pornography Dworkin and MacKinnon opposed. I will unpack Bieito's representation of sex work later in this chapter, but it is certainly true that the nudity and sexual gestures of the supernumerary sex workers serve to commodify the women in the brothel. Their servility to Osmin's sexual whims is similarly clear. Conditions A and H apply to the sex worker Osmin kills as well as to Konstanze, whom Selim strips down to her undergarments while she is leashed and bound. The "context that makes these conditions sexual" is this production's setting in a brothel and the position of these women as sex workers and/or sex slaves. The sexualization of the violence done to the women in this opera is especially clear in the last scene of the opera. When Belmonte and Pedrillo massacre all the remaining inhabitants of the brothel, many of the sex workers are killed while in the act of having sex with clients. This proximity of death and sex leads to a troubling sexualization of their naked and near-naked bodies, which lie strewn across the stage for twenty-two minutes until the end of the opera.

The erotic treatment and reception of the female body in scenes depicting rape and victims of rape onstage is an old problem in the theatre. Elizabeth Howe argues that the

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[14] Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, "Model Antipornography Civil-Rights Ordinance," *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality,* Appendix D, http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/other/ordinance/newday/AppD.htm.

introduction of the actress to the English Restoration stage caused a spike in the portrayal of rape in English theatres. Rape was both "a way of giving the purest, most virginal heroine a sexual quality," and an excuse to expose naked female flesh.[15] Bieito's introduction of sexual violence to *Entführung* accomplishes both of these tasks. Konstanze is beyond reproach as a heroine in Stephanie's libretto—chaste and faithful even in the face of certain death. But in Bieito's torture chamber she is made to be Selim's sexual plaything. The problem with exposing women's bodies onstage, especially in proximity to representations of sexual violence, is essentially a problem of perspective. Bieito is a male director telling a story in which the sexual violation of women serves to inspire a male protagonist to action. The issue of point of view is explored in greater detail in relation to theatrical realism in the next section.

Realism: When it comes to violence, Bieito's production subscribes to an excruciating realism.[16] As a musical as well as a dramatic form, opera cannot be "realist" in the same way that theatre or film can be. But given the genre's necessary suspensions of disbelief when it comes to music and singing, Bieito's *Entführung* is unusually realist for an opera production. The violence in this production, like the sex, happens in full view of the audience without any veils of stylized movement or dance. The fight choreography is highly realistic and accentuated by convincing use of fake blood. This version is also cut down significantly from the original so that the action is always moving forward. Bieito's newly written dialogues are remarkably naturalistic. They employ different German dialects for different characters and discard the poetic scansion of the

[15] Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43–44. Similarly, Jennifer Airey writes: "some plays foreground the physicality of the act of rape in the eroticized spectacle of the actress's violated form—the titillating promise of sexual situations and naked female flesh could certainly help attract an audience." Jennifer Airey *The Politics of Rape: Sexual Atrocity, Propaganda Wars, and the Restoration Stage* (Newark: University of Delaware, 2012), 26.

[16] I am using "realism" interchangeably with "naturalism" to refer to a general aesthetic of mimetic representation. In theatre studies, these terms have at times distinct and nuanced meanings, which do not apply here.

original. Even in the arias and other numbers, Bieito's singers are unusually active; almost every moment of music is filled with involved stage business. This level of realism is unusual in opera, and certainly contributes to the shock value of this production because the action in this realist mode is so horrifying.

Realism is not a value-neutral mode of representation, and within feminist theatre criticism there are disagreements about its potential benefits. Elin Diamond summarizes the feminist attack on theatrical realism thusly: "Setting out to offer truthful versions of experience, realism universalizes but one point of view.…In the process of exploring social (especially gender) relations, realism ends by confirming their inevitability."[17] Elaine Aston attributes the allegedly objective perspective of realism to a male subject and a male gaze.[18] The point of view of *Entführung*'s narrative is certainly masculine. Rescue operas tell tales of heroics in which women are objects of exchange between men, and *Entführung* is no exception. Diamond and Aston might argue that by telling this story through a lens of theatrical realism, Bieito does nothing to challenge the masculine point of view of this story. A naturalistic aesthetic takes as a given that the world presented on Bieito's stage is the real world. And on this stage, where women are beaten, raped, and murdered without consequence, naturalism's attestation to reality can be seen as an acquiescence to the inevitability of violence against women.

Other feminist scholars of theatre and literature have defended realism as an aesthetic not necessarily opposed to a feminist project. Patricia Schroeder and Kim Solga have both made cases for the feminist and even radical potential of theatrical realism.[19] These arguments hang on

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[17] Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (London: Routledge, 1997), xiii.
[18] Elaine Aston, "Feminist Theories of Representation: The Case against Realism," in *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1994), 35.
[19] Patricia R. Schroeder, *The Feminist Possibilities of Dramatic Realism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996); Kim Solga, *Violence Against Women in Early Modern Performance: Invisible Acts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

the enduring popularity of realist depictions among spectators and the intense identification with fictional characters and situations that realist depictions make possible. Throughout Bieito's production, Konstanze and Blonde have brutally realistic responses to the violence done to them. Their trauma plays out in different but recognizable ways: Blonde abuses pills and alcohol and Konstanze becomes totally dependent on Belmonte after witnessing the sex worker's murder and eventually dies by suicide. In a sense, these characters can be more easily identified with because they behave more like real people than do their Mozartean archetypes—the feisty maid and the sentimental heroine. But despite Bieito's more realistic characterization, the caricatures persist and this dichotomy is jarring. Konstanze and Blonde, while their reactions to trauma are informed by a more realistic approach to the opera's plot, are still a far stretch from complex, responsible depictions of sexual assault survivors. Most of the little they have to say and sing in this opera was written for them by Stephanie and not Bieito, and so it does not respond to the violence done to them in between their words. In the next section, I contend that Bieito goes some distance to closing this gap between Mozart and Stephanie's characters and his own by paying close attention to Mozart's score.

Stage Action and Music: The interaction of Bieito's stage business and setting with Mozart's music has fuelled a good deal of the controversy in the popular press. Reviewers report cries of "poor Mozart" from the house at the public dress rehearsal and on opening night. Though this tendency to frame criticism of *Regie* productions of canonic operas as a defence of the composer's presumed intentions or wishes is common, it is rarely a very interesting way to evaluate a production. In Bieito's *Entführung*, the argument that "that's not what Mozart wrote" is especially shallow because Bieito's staging is actually highly sensitive to details in Mozart's score. Despite the vast difference in tone between this and a more traditional production of

Entführung, Bieito's dramaturgical style throughout is surprisingly well integrated with Mozart's music. Bieito recontextualizes the music in a variety of ways throughout his drama and harnesses it for his own dramatic project. Clemens Risi uses this production as one of his prime examples to demonstrate a technique in opera production in which a director "uses musical structures to legitimate his scenic choices."[20]

In her review of the production, musicologist Micaela Baranello comments on Mozart's *alla turca* style in *Entführung*, noting that "Bieito makes a lot of its gaudiness and maniacal repetitive energy."[21] There is a kind of violence in the noisy, motoric drive of Mozart's Turkish marches in this opera. This fusion of the comical and the violent does not feel entirely out of place accompanying, for instance, Osmin jumping up and down naked on the bed in his first number. The brashness of the *alla turca* at the production's conclusion is somewhat more subversive. After the murders of Selim and Osmin, the chorus runs on, presumably representing the employees and patrons of the brothel who survived Belmonte and Pedrillo's earlier massacre. The final chorus is thick with percussion and bells and the whole company accents practically every attack. In the instance of this final chorus and much of the *alla turca* throughout this production, I think that Bieito is capitalizing on the dissonance between the music and the experience of our main characters, pointing out that the jaunty Turkish music in this opera about captivity in a harem was problematic to begin with. The disjunction between the cheerful, comic *alla turca* music and the darkness that Bieito exploits in the opera's story characterizes this production as a whole. Within this frame, Bieito plays off of Mozart's music in more specific ways in the scenes of sexual violence.

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[20] Risi, *Oper in Performance*, 34. My translation.
[21] Micaela Baranello, "Die Entführung aus dem Serail, or, Men Who Hate Women," *Likely Impossibilities*, June 2, 2013.

Osmin's abuses of the sex worker in "Solche hergelauf'ne Laffen" and of Blonde in "Ich gehe doch rate ich dir" also feature a disjunction between the comic character of the music and the seriousness of Osmin's violence, but in these cases it is a disjunction inherent in Osmin's character. Mozart plays Osmin's rage and threats of violence as comedy. Bieito's Osmin maintains the character's playfulness even while he commits acts of extreme violence onstage. In "Solche hergelauf'ne Laffen," Bieito aligns Osmin's movements with the music, implying that what we hear in Mozart's score is indicative of Osmin's point of view. Jen Larsen, as Osmin, runs his hands over the woman's body rhythmically with hand motions that largely correspond to the musical shapes he is singing. At one point, a sharply accented beat at the resolution of a cadence accompanies a sharp squeeze of the woman's buttock. These moments of correspondence between comic musical figures and Osmin's playful sexual gestures are fun to watch, and Larsen's execution of the staging is excellent. When Osmin bites the woman, her scream punctuates the musical fabric. It is a clear sonic marker that pulls us out of our alignment with Osmin's character. The comic "Turkish" gestures of Osmin's music now accompany the image of him pinning this woman to the stage while she cowers and cries. The music is still Osmin's but now we are hearing it from the outside, and the same basic musical features now feel sinister. The comic character of the music works in two ways in this scene: it gives us some insight into Osmin's twisted mind, which makes little distinction between sexual play and sexual violence; and it startles us with the dark reality of the story Bieito intends to tell us through this previously comic opera.

The duet between Osmin and Blonde, "Ich gehe doch rate ich dir," works differently in its musical and scenic correlation. Over the course of the number, the balance of musical power shifts from Osmin to Blonde by way of changing who introduces new musical material and

influences the register of the other character's music.[22] Blonde ends the duet in the more powerful position due to her musical rhetorical prowess. In Bieito's conception of this story, though, Blonde cannot be allowed to win. In the final bars of the duet, Bieito has Osmin overpower Blonde and throw her to the ground. The orchestra finishes playing, and Osmin continues to beat Blonde in silence. There is a sense that the music of the duet was a delusion: both Blonde's delusion and ours. The comic music of the duet allowed us to exist for a moment in a different *Entführung* in which Blonde can control Osmin, but when the music fades we are left with only the sounds of Osmin's fists landing and Blonde's laughter turning to cries of pain. These sounds from the actors onstage, the beating and the crying, contribute to the sonic profile of Bieito's production. Like the sex worker's scream that marks the first act of violence Osmin commits, Blonde's sobs and the sounds of Osmin's fists characterize the seriousness of Bieito's concept amid and around the sounds of Mozart's music. The last sound we hear in Bieito's production is the gunshot that signifies Konstanze's suicide, which happens just after the final notes of the score have been played. These sounds decentre Mozart's music as the only sonic signifier during the musical numbers of the opera. Bieito's vision encroaches on what most opera goers hold most dear in their favourite works—the sound of the music—and in so doing does not allow his listeners to simply close their eyes to block out the production (a popular refuge of the *Regie*-hating opera goer).

Bieito stages Konstanze's two arias, "Ach, ich liebte" and "Martern aller Arten," in a way that aligns spectators with Konstanze's experience of the events taking place onstage. These are both highly emotional and introspective tours de force for Konstanze, but in Bieito's production

[22] Berta Joncus, "'Ich bin eine Engländerin, zur Freyheit geboren': Blonde and the Enlightened Female in Mozart's Die Entführung aus dem Serail," *Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2010): 574. See also Matthew Head, *Orientalism, Masquerade, and Mozart's Turkish Music* (London: Royal Musical Association, 2000).

both are staged in ways that strip Konstanze of agency in the plot even as she seems to have so much in the music. In "Ach, ich liebte," Konstanze is violated by Selim and in "Martern aller Arten" she is forced to watch Osmin kill a woman. In both, Bieito harnesses the extravagances of her singing voice to express the powerful emotions of the character. Risi uses "Ach, ich liebte" as an example of grounding and legitimizing staged action in operatic music.[23] Konstanze's high-flying coloratura passages in this aria become vocalized responses to the increasingly horrible things Selim does to her, culminating in the digital rape. Similarly, in "Martern aller Arten," Konstanze's coloratura is associated with her responses to the action. These passages become shrieks that Konstanze releases when Osmin cuts the sex worker somewhere new or when the bleeding woman grasps at Konstanze's legs. Osmin slits the sex worker's throat on Konstanze's sustained high C. At the aria's conclusion, a long vocal trill scores the tremor of the sex worker's legs before she falls limp on the downbeat of Konstanze's cadence. The final coloratura passages, which are the most elaborate in the aria, are sung here in response to Osmin holding out the bloody nipple. Bieito's technique of aligning physical and musical gestures in his staging ensures that these scenes of violence do not feel entirely disconnected from Mozart's music. In addition to legitimizing the staging for the spectator, as Risi says, the use of this technique in these two arias draws us closer to Konstanze's point of view.[24] She screams on our behalf as we join her in witnessing these acts of shocking brutality.

In all these elements of the style of Bieito's representations of sexual violence, the question of perspective has persisted. Bieito has made the barrier between sex and death paper-

[23] Risi, *Oper in Performance*, 34–35.
[24] In her review, Baranello notes that most of the reviews she has read of this production are written by men and tend to focus on the male gaze in their analysis of "Martern aller Arten." By contrast, she says that she found herself identifying powerfully with Konstanze in this scene and writes that "the production's equal (if not greater) weight on the women's perspectives is one of its most remarkable aspects." Baranello, "Men Who Hate Women."

thin in his production, bedecking his stage with hyper-sexualized dead and suffering women's bodies. The problematic tendency of some spectators to eroticize depictions of rape go unchallenged and may actually be encouraged by this staging. It feels as if an eroticizing, objectifying gaze has been superimposed onto the stage at some of these moments. As a spectator, it is as if I am being made to look at these bodies in a way I do not wish to. The starkly naturalistic approach to the stage action serves to further tell me that this vision I am seeing of the overlaying of eroticization and the suffering of women is true and objective and inevitable. But Bieito uses the music to endear us to Konstanze and to make her suffering potent and tangible. Yet while Konstanze's suffering is sublimated into vocal prowess and musical depth, the suffering of the other women littered about Bieito's stage is undermined by their erotic objectification. Who are these women?

Bieito's Seraglio as Brothel

Bieito's production abandons the Turkish locale of this opera in its set design, but Turkish involvement in the modern German brothel system is nonetheless a fascinating context for this production. Turkish immigrants make up the largest ethnic minority group in Germany; many of these families immigrated in the 1960s in response to a labour shortage. The presence of this large primarily Muslim Turkish diaspora has been perceived by some as a threat to German social and political order.[25] Perhaps by transplanting the setting of *Entführung* to Germany Bieito was attempting to bypass some of these German anxieties about Islam, but it seems likely that even in this new Western-European guise audience members in Berlin may have continued to read Turkishness onto Selim, Osmin, and some of the supernumerary sex workers in Bieito's

[25] Katherine Pratt Ewing, "Living Islam in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, no. 2–3 (2003): 405–31.

seraglio. Connections to Turkey and Turkish migrants abound in the German brothel system. One of the major players in the German sex trade in the 1990s and 2000s was Turkish gangster Necati Arabaci who was arrested in 2002 in Germany for charges including pimping, human trafficking, and assault. There is the mega-brothel in Cologne, the largest in Europe, called *Pascha.* Besides the name of the club, promotional materials for the brothel and its associated nightclub feature pan-Middle Eastern imagery. Photos on *Pascha*'s website include images of a mural depicting palaces in the Mughal architectural style, patrons wearing turbans and eating from giant trays of fruit, and exotic dancers draped in body and hair jewellery. The Orientalism of these stereotypical depictions of Middle Eastern culture resonates with the Orientalism of Mozart and Stephanie's opera; the connection between modern day German brothels and *Entführung*'s idealized Turkish seraglio was likely quite a small step for some of Bieito's audiences at the Komische Oper Berlin.

By setting his *Entführung* in a brothel, Bieito also brings his production into conversation with tropes of representing prostitutes and prostitution in media. Film scholar Russell Campbell argues in his book *Marked Women* that especially when written by men, "the figure of the prostitute [is] representative of all that is threatening as well as alluring in the female other."[26] Campbell outlines a number of archetypes of character and narrative in the popular representation of prostitutes, several of which offer ways to think about Bieito's representations of Konstanze, Blonde, and the unnamed sex workers with whom he populates his set.

The supernumerary sex workers in this production do not have character enough to subscribe to Campbell's character tropes individually but their collective fate plays into one of the most pervasive and recognizable tropes about prostitutes in media: they must die. While all of

[26] Russell Campbell, *Marked Women* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 26.

the deaths of the sex workers in this production are certainly meant to be upsetting, they play into this trope that ultimately functions to devalue the lives of sex workers. The continuing prevalence of the "dead hooker" joke in popular culture is a clear indicator of how pervasive this trope is. Campbell notes that the murder of prostitutes in film is frequently characterized by sadistic violence and indignity. Indeed, the death of the sex worker by Osmin's hand during "Martern aller Arten" is purely perfunctory. Her murder has nothing to do with her; it is a tactic to make Konstanze behave. The sex worker's physical torture is a tool of psychological torture for Konstanze, whose story actually matters.

It is not only the bad men in this opera that kill sex workers; Belmonte and Pedrillo slaughter all the women they can find in the brothel. Campbell writes:

> The killing of a prostitute on screen…may serve to assuage male fears: for a time at least the anxieties that the female as sexual being provokes can be stilled. Commission of the act itself, however, may be displaced from the male protagonist onto a surrogate figure, such as a pimp or a serial killer, so that the murder may be simultaneously enjoyed and disavowed: the existence of violence against women in society is thus acknowledged but attributed to bad elements who will themselves, very likely, be obliterated.[27]

Bieito complicates this act of disavowal by having the murderers be the two male heroes of the opera, who have until this point been relatively sympathetic. But at the moment of the massacre, their hero status is called into question. When Belmonte assumes of the dead Pasha's authority over the brothel, we realize that the only thing keeping the heroes from being villains was the availability of the means.

Konstanze is Campbell's archetypical martyr in this production, "suffering and degraded in life but spiritually transcendent."[28] Konstanze's case is complicated by the fact that she never actually agrees to sell her body, neither for money nor for the promise of safety. Selim degrades

[27] Ibid., 6.
[28] Ibid., 126.

her in other ways, though, through caging her, beating her, and sexually abusing her. Campbell's martyr is an image of altruism and self-sacrifice. He writes, "no matter how brutal, no matter how unjust the blows of her pimp or the violence of her client, she will not fight back—or if she does she will quickly pay for it; her virtue is endurance."[29] Konstanze accepts her suffering willingly to protect both her own virtue and Belmonte's honour. The function of this archetype is to assuage an audience's guilt by showing that the suffering of the martyr is not in vain, because in death—and she always dies—she is redeemed by her virtue. Although Bieito's Konstanze does die, her suicide lacks clear indications of sacrifice or salvation. Her final moments seem to be characterized more by desperation and a lack of any acceptable alternatives. She dies without fanfare, without an angelic chorus akin to the one that welcomes Margarete into heaven at the end of Goethe's *Faust*. Suicide is, according to Campbell, the device by which "the objectives of patriarchal ideology are most fully achieved" because the unruly woman dies to maintain male order, but displaces the guilt of her death from the system onto herself.[30] Typically, the archetypal suicide Campbell is talking about is motivated by the prostitute's shame. This is not the case for Konstanze, but her martyr's death by suicide in the absence of redemption reveals another angle from which to appreciate the darkness of this story about the sex trade.

Bieito's Blonde, on the other hand, can be productively understood in terms of Campbell's "fallen woman" archetype. The fallen woman embodies dualities of innocence and guilt, purity and corruption. When we are first introduced to Blonde in Bieito's production, she is drunk, belligerent, and presumably returning from engaging in sex work with one of the brothel's patrons. The fallen woman scenario, writes Campbell, "explores male fascination with the

[29] Ibid., 127.
[30] Ibid., 366.

metamorphosis of the good woman into the bad."[31] Blonde may not be the paragon of virtue that Konstanze is, but we imagine that she entered the brothel as a good servant, a good friend, and a faithful partner. The Blonde we meet is traumatized and appears to be barely surviving. While her suffering is obvious, Bieito's Blonde takes on traits that frequently mark women as bad in popular media: she is constantly intoxicated and is at times single-mindedly focused on money. Blonde's ultimate fate is not as clear as Konstanze's. After shooting Osmin, Blonde sits at his side, closes his eyes, holds his hand, and cries over his body until the chorus enters singing the new Pasha's praises. She staggers into view one last time, smoking a cigarette and barely standing. Belmonte, who has by then donned his gangster apparel, pats her shoulder and sends her into the crowd of the chorus. It is not impossible that Blonde will die by suicide as well, but Bieito does not show us this. She seems to be walking into the fate Konstanze cannot bear for herself: continuing to work at the brothel against her will under its new management. It seems likely that Pedrillo will take up Osmin's position and may now act as pimp to his lover. It is significant that this is conjecture, though. Bieito does not grant Konstanze a sense of spiritual redemption in her suicide and does not offer Blonde the closure of a true ending to her arc at all. Blonde was fallen when we met her, and she is fallen in the same way at the end.

While Konstanze and Blonde hold different archetypical positions based on their differing capacities to resist their captors, they are united as "captives," another of Campbell's archetypes. Campbell writes, "on the one hand, there is outrage at the enslavement and exploitation of women in coerced prostitution…on the other hand, there is the potent male fantasy of the sex slave, the attractive female who may be stripped, shackled, and raped at will."[32] There is more at work in Bieito's *Entführung* than this male fantasy of sexual servitude.

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[31] Ibid., 28.
[32] Ibid., 187.

While some of the nudity of the supernumeraries feels gratuitous and even exploitative, the presence of brutally explicit violence against women in Bieito's production levels a complex critique of misogyny and violence in the sex trade. It is troubling that the most nuanced female character in this production is the one woman who never actually works as a prostitute, but Konstanze's complexity is still exciting. When Belmonte takes on the Pasha's role at the end of the opera, Bieito seems to be arguing that the problem of the sex trade is not a problem of individual bad men, but a problem of our system of misogyny.

In 2004, Bieito's choice to set his *Entführung* in a European brothel coincided with the passage of new controversial sex work legislation in Germany. Throughout the twentieth century, prostitution was not expressly illegal in Germany (except in the the German Democratic Republic during its existence) but German courts repeatedly ruled that sex work was immoral and sex workers were thus excluded from public benefits, health insurance, and labour rights laws. In 2002, Germany adopted the Law Regulating the Legal Situation of Prostitutes (ProstG) in an attempt to improve working conditions for sex workers. ProstG removed most of the morality language from the law surrounding prostitution in order to legalize promotion of prostitution (pimping), to recognize contracts between sex workers and their clients as well as sex workers and their employers, and to grant sex workers access to employment benefits including healthcare and social security.

The version of ProstG that passed into law left a great deal of jurisdiction to German states, so despite the intentions of the lawmakers, many conservative states were able to restrict prostitution to certain areas and criminalize it elsewhere. Amnesty International advocates decriminalization as opposed to legalization of sex work in their Policy to Protect the Human Rights of Sex Workers because "there is still scope for criminalization and related human rights

abuses under legalization as some sex workers can be left operating outside of the law in legalized systems."[33] Legalization thus tends to create a two-tiered system of sex work, where many sex workers are operating outside regulations without legal protections. In Germany, many of these criminalized sex workers are undocumented immigrants who do not have the option to work within the legal system. And as Katherine Koster, Communications Director for the Sex Workers Outreach Program notes, even within the legal tier, "the vast majority of Germany sex workers work as 'Independent contractors,' meaning most aren't benefitting from the labor rights the 2002 Act was intended to grant."[34]

When Bieito's *Entführung* opened in Berlin in 2004, the controversy of ProstG would have been fresh in the minds of many in its audience. Bieito's production, while clearly critical of German brothels generally, is inconsistent with its referents to the contemporary sex trade. Within the walls of Bieito's brothel, everything about the action seems to refer to an illegal underground operation. Selim and Osmin are dressed as and behave like gangsters, and for the most part criminal gangs run the illegal tier of the sex trade in Germany. Belmonte and Pedrillo's massacre of the prostitutes, patrons, and pimps in Selim's brothel may be seen to evoke the violence that goes on between rival outlaw motorcycle gangs in Germany's red-light districts. Bieito does not allow his supernumerary sex workers to speak and so avoids signalling the

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[33] "Q&A: Policy to Protect the Human Rights of Sex Workers," *Amnesty International*, May 26, 2016, https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/qa-policy-to-protect-the-human-rights-of-sex-workers/.

[34] Katherine Koster, "Trafficking and the State of the German Sex Trade," *HuffPost*, August 26, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trafficking-and-the-state_b_8038252. See also "Sex Work and the Law": Understanding Legal Frameworks and the Struggle for Sex Work Law Reforms," Briefing Paper, *Global Network of Sex Work Projects*, https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/Sex%20Work%20%26%20The%20Law.pdf; Emily Bazelon, "Should Prostitution Be a Crime?," *New York Times Magazine*, May 5, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/should-prostitution-be-a-crime.html.

ethnicities of any of these women. But if they did speak, would they speak Turkish? Czech? Ukrainian?[35]

Other elements of this production highlight the trappings of a legal brothel. ProstG legalized advertising prostitution, and Bieito's mise-en-scène includes some typical features of street-advertisement for German brothels. His set contains scrolling signs listing services offered by the sex workers inside and the glass boxes evoke window prostitution, which occurs in several German red-light districts.[36] The supernumerary sex workers, when their employers are not subjecting them to violence, go about their work relatively cheerfully. Their stage business is characterized by sassiness and humour. In short, their behaviour easily leads a spectator to believe they are working by choice. This stands in stark contrast to the behaviour of Konstanze and Blonde, who we know have been kidnapped and are being held against their will. It is hard to reconcile all the disparate elements of Bieito's brothel. This is a brothel that advertises, and so is presumably a legal one. But this is also a brothel in which uncooperative trafficking victims are leashed and held in cages, and in which any woman might be spontaneously murdered as a show of power.

I do not mean that legal brothels never feature violence or exploit women. But this kind of representational blurriness between sex work and sex trafficking risks conflating the two in a problematic way, especially with regard to the agency of the women in Bieito's production. Prohibitionist feminists argue that sex work is necessarily violent and reinforces a system of

[35] For a discussion of the East/West European representational framework of sex trafficking rhetoric, see: Rutvica Andrijasevic, "The Figure of the Trafficked Victim: Gender, Rights and Representation," in *SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Evans et al. (London: SAGE Publications, 2014), 359–73.
[36] Window prostitution involves sex workers dancing or otherwise advertising themselves in small cubicles visible from the street that open onto private rooms in which they work, for instance, in Amsterdam's red-light district.

patriarchal dominance, and that consent in relation to sex work is impossible.[37] For prohibitionists, the distinction between sex work and sex trafficking is meaningless because they do not believe that it is possible for a woman to truly consent to prostitution in any case. A common criticism of this position is that the prohibitionist insistence that prostitution turns women into objects makes it impossible to understand prostitutes as agents capable of self-determination.[38] The women in Bieito's *Entführung* are examples of this model in action. These are women who are completely without power, who are unable to give or withhold consent, and who are treated literally as objects that the men can use to experience pleasure, make money, and demonstrate their power to others.

Representing sex trafficking victims as devoid of agency is a common occurrence in contemporary media discourse. Jane Arthurs has observed that anti-trafficking media campaigns often depend on the trope of a sexually innocent young women snatched from her home and held in sexual slavery. This is a story that "constructs women as passive victims who are unable to influence their own lives and therefore are in need of rescuing by someone with more power and agency."[39] At its worst, this narrative also "offers a moral lesson that death is the only escape from earthly suffering for women who have been sexually violated."[40] Both of these messages ring true for Bieito's trafficking narrative. Blonde and Konstanze are passive in the plot of the opera, waiting to be "abducted" from the seraglio by Belmonte. At the opera's conclusion,

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[37] See Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Andrea Dworkin, *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Melissa Farley and Vanessa Kelly, "Prostitution: A Critical Review of the Medical and Social Sciences Literature," *Women and Criminal Justice* 11, no. 4 (2000): 29–64; Janice G. Raymond, "Ten Reasons for *Not* Legalizing Prostitution and a Legal Response to the Demand for Prostitution," *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 315–32; Kathleen Barry, *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997); Donna M. Hughes, *The Demand for Victims of Sex Trafficking* (Kingston: University of Rhode Island, 2005).
[38] Carol Wolkowitz, *Bodies at Work* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006.
[39] Jane Arthurs, "Deliciously Consumable: The Uses and Abuses of Irony in 'Sex-Trafficking' Campaign Films," in *Handbook of Gender, Sex, and the Media*, ed. Karen Ross (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 474.
[40] Ibid.

Konstanze's suicide confirms the dark implication of so many sex trafficking narratives that death is the only alternative to sexual servitude. Besides proliferating harmful ideas about women as passive victims in contrast to heroic men, these kinds of stories about sex trafficking also set up the cultural idea that there is an ideal victim of sex trafficking against whom real victims may be judged. The ideal victim is kidnapped from her home and imprisoned in a brothel. She is not a migrant and she certainly is not already a sex worker. Real trafficking victims who may not align with this idealized image can face real consequences in the way sex trafficking is understood by the public and even the way it is legislated.[41]

Maybe the unnamed sex workers in this production are trafficking victims, like Konstanze and Blonde seem to be, and they act cheerful around the boss as a means of self-preservation. Or maybe this is an illegal brothel featuring both trafficking victims being held against their will (Konstanze and Blonde), and migrant sex workers who are choosing to work but are not recognized by the legal system (the supernumerary sex workers). Maybe the trappings of advertisements around the set are simple tools to aid the audience in identifying the setting as a brothel and are not meant to signify legality at all. The point is, Bieito's representation of the sex trade in this production is confusing and at times self-contradictory. I fear the production plays into the cultural idea that sex workers are necessarily victims of coercion and abuse, and it may suggest that the very specific horrors we witness are indispensable to any system of sex work.

[41] For an overview of research on the representation and legislation of sex trafficking, see Andrijasevic, "The Figure of the Trafficked Victim."

Violence and Desensitization

Until this point, my interrogation of the representations of violence in this production has sidestepped the psychological effects of witnessing fictionalized violence. There was a boom of activity in psychology and the social sciences in the 1980s and 1990s looking into the effects media violence was having on the populace. The majority of these studies found positive relationships between antisocial behaviour and exposure to violent media.[42] While the focus of most of this research has been on the effects of television and film violence on the developing minds of children and teenagers, the results are difficult to dismiss. One study in 1984 stands out in the context of my research: a group of college men who viewed "slasher" films for five days were found to be less sympathetic toward a rape victim in a documentary about a sexual assault case than were those in a control group.[43]

This kind of research into psychological effects on viewers just does not exist for opera and theatre violence. For one thing, television and video games can fill a person's life in a much more quantitatively significant way. Even the most avid opera goer cannot spend nearly as many hours in the opera house as people can spend in front of television screens. And even now that opera can be viewed on DVD or streamed online, it is unsuited to the kind of low attention "binge" watching that characterizes a great deal of television viewing. Yet if we are suffering from desensitization to violence caused by our consumption of popular media, that desensitization might affect the way we interact with violence onstage at the opera as well. Though operatic violence might not have the kind of effect on our psyche that television violence seems to, there is still certainly a culture of one-upmanship in *Regietheater* productions.

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[42] Susan Hearold, "A Synthesis of 1043 Effects of Television on Social Behavior," in *Public Communication and Behavior*, ed. George Comstock (San Diego: Academic, 1986), 1:65–133.
[43] Daniel Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod, "The Effects of Multiple Exposures to Filmed Violence Against Women," *Journal of Communications* 34, no. 3 (1984): 130–47.

Shocking audiences to jolt them out of their comfortable opera-watching reveries is a common goal in this art form, but for audiences who see a lot of *Regietheater*, the shock value of the productions must logically continue to increase or at least modulate. There seems to be a certain kind of desensitization to the violence of *Regie* at work in those reviewers of Bieito's *Entführung* who casually brush off the graphic violence of this production to the tune of "there goes Calixto, up to his tricks again."[44]

Although I approached this production as a critic informed about its contents, I could not share in this cynical immovability. I was eager to see "Martern aller Arten" for myself after reading abundant commentary about it. My first experience watching this scene was through grainy archival footage on my laptop screen on a sunny afternoon—surely not Bieito's intended circumstances—and even then, I was so troubled by the staging that I needed to walk away from this project for a few days. There is something striking about seeing this kind of violence in the context of live performance. Even a video of a live performance that took place fifteen years prior held for me a different kind of power than the same kind of violence represented in film—an aura of liveness. For one thing, there is no camera work when you are looking at a stage; no one can frame the image or cut away at key moments to guide an audience's eye. I was not asked to imagine anything but only to watch. I could not help but stare, horrified, at every moment. I felt trapped by the immediacy of the action until the moment the music stopped. The audience in the theatre also remained silent throughout this scene until the music ended, at which point they applauded, booed, and heckled with abandon.[45]

[44] This kind of sentiment is expressed in: Scally, "Sex, Drugs and…Opera"; Breiholz, "Die Entführung aus dem Serail"; Paulick, "A Violent, Drug-Addled, Hooker-Filled Opera."
[45] German opera audiences are much more willing to voice their displeasure during a performance than their North American counterparts, and so this rapt silence during the action is not necessarily a given.

This production, and the representation of suffering in "Martern aller Arten" in particular, is incredibly powerful regardless of one's judgment of its value. Besides the immediacy of its liveness, the association of this brutal imagery with Mozart's beloved music brings an incredible rhetorical weight to some of Bieito's ideas. In her review of this production, Eleonore Büning suggests that the beauty of Konstanze's aria softens our hearts and makes the image unbearable to us in spite of our typical desensitization to torture imagery in the media.[46] Büning goes on to say that this production shows that the opera house is not a place to be distracted from the world, instead it is a moral institution.

Indeed, the critique of *Entführung* embedded in Bieito's production is an important one. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is an opera about women held captive by men determined to have them as romantic and sexual partners against their will. Bieito's production recognizes the terrors implicit in this story, and by making them explicit he forces us to recognize what exactly it is we have been laughing at all this time. In so doing, he also shines light on the urgent contemporary issues of sex trafficking and organized crime. However, Bieito's often-objectifying use of the naked bodies of suffering women to tell his story undermines his criticism to some extent. We can also see in many of the reviews of this production that the extreme graphic nature of some of his representations of violence has distracted some audience members from the larger argument of his concept. It is on this note that we now turn to a very different *Entführung*, in which the violence implicit in the opera is not amplified, it is extinguished.

[46] Eleonore Büning, "Im Schwitzkasten des Bassa," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, June 21, 2004.

WAJDI MOUAWAD'S *DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL*

Opéra Lyon and the Canadian Opera Company co-commissioned Israeli-Canadian writer/director Wajdi Mouawad to create a new production of *Entführung* in 2016. Mouawad's telling of this story takes aim at the unflattering, uninformed representation of Islam. He remarks in his program note for the Toronto performances, "If I have a unique perspective to bring to Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, it is the fact that I have been shaped equally by Eastern and Western culture, and as a result, I'm incapable of condoning one at the expense of the other."[47] Mouawad adds a new narrative frame to the story, beginning his production at a party celebrating the return of the lovers to Europe after their rescue.[48] The events of the libretto become memories that the lovers share with each other and comment on from the present. Like Bieito, Mouawad uses as much of the original dialogue as he can and adds to it. But Mouawad's interpretation is carried by new dialogue in a way that Bieito's is not, so Mouawad's dialogue scenes are much longer and occur more frequently than Bieito's.

The lovers communally tell the story of the events of the opera with an interest in sharing their different perspectives. Konstanze and Blonde want to show Belmonte and Pedrillo that their captors were not as bad as they have been made out to be, while Belmonte and Pedrillo vilify the Muslim characters and hold them up for scorn. Over the course of the opera Mouawad reveals that although Konstanze remained chaste, she had fallen in love with the Pasha. Meanwhile, Blonde had been in a consensual sexual relationship with Osmin, resulting in a pregnancy. Mouawad specifies in the prologue to his production that the women had been in captivity for

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[47] Wajdi Mouawad, "Director's Notes," *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, program for Winter 2018 (Toronto: Canadian Opera Company, 2018), 28.

[48] A photograph by Bertrand Stofleth shows ensemble members from the Lyon performance playing a racist party game in Mouawad's newly written opening scene: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803201607/https:/static01.nyt.com/images/2016/07/17/arts/17AIX1/17AIX1-superJumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp.

two years.[49] It gradually comes out that Pedrillo also had mixed feelings about his captivity. In one of the new dialogue scenes, he expresses to Blonde that "there [in Turkey], like here [in Europe], I was in a master's service, they call me servant there, like here" and recalls wondering, "what's there at home to return to in such a rush?"[50] These explicit equivalences pervade Mouawad's new dialogue. Blonde and Konstanze both remark on the similarity between being a slave in the seraglio in Turkey and being a woman in patriarchal eighteenth-century Europe. Blonde tells Pedrillo he is exactly the same as Osmin, who was her slave master: "Here or there, there or here, you or he, he or you, neither is better than the other."[51]

Even with all of the new dialogue, there are some fundamental tensions between the story Mozart set, and the one Mouawad wants to tell. One of the ways his concept works in spite of these tensions is by questioning whether the text preserved from the original libretto is always trustworthy. Because Mouawad brings an element of self-conscious storytelling to the opera's narrative, we cannot necessarily take all of the musical scenes at face value. The presence of four narrators each informed by their own biases and emotions has the potential to shape the stories they tell. Mouawad also sows seeds of doubt about Stephanie's libretto with lines like this one from Konstanze in an added dialogue scene in the present: "Despite the cruelty of [Selim's] words, I knew he was a good man."[52] The words do not matter, Mouawad tells us. The libretto is fallible and incomplete; Mouawad seems to share this conviction with his heroine. He wrote a synopsis in the program specific to his production that takes on some of the work of explaining his version of events. In the second scene between Konstanze and Selim, Selim's previously

[49] Stephanie's libretto does not specify the length of captivity.
[50] Wajdi Mouawad, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, 2016. "Was gab es bei mir Zuhaus so wichtiges, um so zu hetzen? Dort wie hier stand ich bei einem Herrn in Diensten, dort wie hier nannte man mich Diener, aber dort schien die Sonne, wenn es hier regnet." For dialogue quotations, I will use the English translation as projected in the surtitles at the COC in 2018 and include the German (which was spoken in the theatre) in a note.
[51] "Ob hier oder dort, dort oder hier, ob du oder er, er oder du, der eine taugt nicht mehr als der andere!"
[52] "Und trotz der Grausamkeit seiner Worte wusste ich, dass er gut war."

benevolent demeanour cracks and he tells her, "You won't have that satisfaction [of suicide]. Here the road to death is a long, slow torture."[53] This moment feels extremely out of character for Mouawad's version of the Pasha, but he needs to say something to justify Konstanze's aria, "Martern aller Arten," which follows. In the synopsis for the next scene, Mouawad writes, "Selim, horrified by the threats he has just uttered, is called away by muezzin. The hour of prayer will give him back some sanity." This element of Mouawad's story exists only in the program, which is acting here as a necessary supplement to an otherwise confusing bit of stage action.

With the stage action, the new dialogue, and his notes and synopsis in the program, Mouawad shapes his *Entführung* into an entirely different story while preserving all of the musical numbers with their texts intact. The strength of this production lies in Mouawad's commitment to updating the opera's representation of Islam. The aforementioned prayer session that Selim retreats to takes place onstage directly following intermission. Before Mozart's music resumes, a cantor—in Toronto, Iraqi actor/musician Ahmed Moneka—leads a group of the inhabitants of the Pasha's palace, including Blonde and Pedrillo, in prayer. The Pasha is played by Israeli actor Raphael Weinstock. But the representation of Islam is not *Entführung*'s only representational problem. While Mouawad's production is impressively reparative on the East/West problem, the representations of Konstanze and Blonde are confused and troublesome in the midst of Mouawad's apologetics for Selim and Osmin.

COC Artistic Director Alexander Neef introduced Mouawad's staging in his own note in the program. But whereas Mouawad's note focuses on redeeming the portrayal of The East in the opera, Neef wants to promote this production based on its gender politics. He writes that Konstanze prefigures "a more hopeful voice, in so far as she gains what the contemporary writer

[53] "Dieses Vergnügen wirst du nicht finden. Der Tod geht hierzulande, mit Martern aller Arten, langsame und schmerzhafte Wege."

Rebecca Solnit identifies in her book of essays, *Men Explain Things to Me*, as a small but essential victory in women's ongoing struggle for equality: 'The ability to tell your own story.'"[54] He goes on to applaud Mouawad's production for "granting the opera's female characters a new audibility and ownership in the narrative: complex, fully human voices to share their perspectives on what the ostensible culture clash of an East/West binary looks like from their lived experience of it."[55] I find it noteworthy that while Mouawad describes his concept as primarily concerned with responsible cultural representation, Neef hardly mentions this element of the production and opts instead to align it with contemporary feminism. Another indication of the COC's desire to promote this production as specifically a feminist one is the inclusion in the program of an interview with soprano Jane Archibald, who sings Konstanze, in which she is quoted as saying that Mouawad approached *Entführung* "very much through a feminist lens" and that he allowed for her character to be "an actual human being."[56]

Mouawad certainly amplifies Konstanze's and Blonde's narrative voices in his production; he writes a great deal of new dialogue for them and much of the action of the original opera is inflected as a story they are telling Belmonte and Pedrillo. Yet as I will argue, centring the women's voices does not necessarily empower them. As a general rule, in this production Mouawad eliminates or dials down the violence against Konstanze and Blonde in the service of redeeming their captors. But the way that he removes the violence, and what takes its place, is important.

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[54] Alexander Neef, "A Message from General Director Alexander Neef," program for Winter 2018 (Toronto: Canadian Opera Company, 2018), 5.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Jane Archibald quoted in Catherine Kustanczy, "'An Actual Human Being': Jane Archibald Talks about Konstanze and Working with Wajdi Mouawad," program for Winter 2018, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, (Toronto: Canadian Opera Company, 2018), 39.

Agency and the Absence of Violence in Mouawad's Seraglio

Selim and Konstanze's first scene together, built around her aria "Ach, ich liebte," bears little resemblance to the same scene in Bieito's production. Mouawad's Selim is soft spoken and gentle. He pleads with her to share the source of her unhappiness with him and when she resists, he assures her that he loves her. Raphael Weinstock's performance encourages us to believe him. Konstanze sings about missing Belmonte, but her affections are obviously split; Selim rests his head in her lap and she strokes his hair for a time before abruptly stopping herself and standing up.[57] She tells him in the following dialogue, "I never dreamed my heart would be so torn. Your two faces meld into one another. You are powerful, brilliant, and generous as no other man. He exudes innocence and youth. You make me tremble, while he makes my heart beat faster."[58] Mouawad allows a glimmer of Selim's domineering side to come through in this scene, but it is tempered with an insistence that his behaviour is not entirely unreasonable. He tells Konstanze, "I couldn't bear seeing you turn to another. Not that. What man wouldn't say that about the woman he loves madly?"[59] Even when Selim explicitly threatens her with forced marriage (and its implied consummation), the larger context of Mouawad's new dialogue asks, in his situation, "what man wouldn't?" At one point when Konstanze resists Selim's advances, he suddenly asks her, "Do you think your world is better than mine?"[60] Konstanze's struggle against his attempt at forced marriage and rape is thus reframed as a question of East versus West. Mouawad recasts Konstanze's interest in protecting her bodily autonomy from her captor as a colonialist disdain

[57] A photograph by Michael Cooper shows Konstanze (Jane Archibald) and Selim (Raphael Weinstock) sharing a romantic moment: https://web.archive.org/web/20191213130436/https:/operacanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/coc-abduction__1518132655_50.100.150.254.jpg.
[58] "Nie hätte ich geahnt, dass mein Herz einmal so zerrissen wäre. Eure Gesichter fließen ineinander. Du bist mächtig, brillant, großzügig wie kein anderer Mann, während seines geprägt ist von Unschuld, von Jugend, und wenn du mich erzittern lässt, so lässt er mein Herz höher schlagen."
[59] "Aber ich könnte es nicht ertragen mitanzusehen, wie du dich einem anderen zuwendest. Das nicht! Welcher Mann sagte das nicht über die Frau, nach der er verrückt ist?"
[60] "Meinst du, deine Welt wäre besser als die meine?"

for Eastern cultures. Mouawad's goal is to humanize the Muslim men in this opera, but a side effect of that humanization is to quietly excuse the misogyny that fuels these men's speech. Again and again, the new dialogue encourages us to sympathize with Selim even as he threatens to torture and rape Konstanze. In order to defend Selim in the present day, Konstanze tells Belmonte, "Despite the cruelty of his words, I knew he was a good man." Selim's threats are excused and then swept away entirely by Konstanze's insistence that he is good, which we are expected to believe.

In the case of Blonde and Osmin, we find again that we are expected not to take their words at face value. Mouawad's dialogue encourages us to see Blonde's relationship with Osmin as parallel to her relationship with Pedrillo. Before her first aria, "Durch Zärtlichkeit und Schmeicheln," Blonde wonders, "Why do I always fall for infantile men who never stop complaining?"[61] In having Blonde refer to Osmin as just another man she has fallen for, Mouawad momentarily disguises the fact that Blonde was given as a slave to Osmin. And moments later, when Bretzner's slave-master language comes up, Mouawad has Blonde direct her admonishments to both Pedrillo in the present and Osmin in the past: "Why do I always attract the good-for-nothings? Get it into your head that I don't like this. I'm telling you Pedrillo, as I told Osmin. Do you think you're dealing with a slave who, trembling, obeys your every command? I'll never fulfill that fantasy of yours."[62] Blonde makes the literal slavery of the seraglio indistinguishable from the figurative slavery of being a woman in misogynistic eighteenth-century Europe. When she finishes her aria about how to properly treat a woman,

[61] "Warum kriege ich immer die Kindsköpfe ab, die immer nur am Klagen sind!"
[62] "Warum locke ich immer die größten Nichtnutze an! Mach dir ein für alle Mal klar, dass mir das hier nicht gefällt! Das sag ich dir, Pedrillo, Osmin hatte ich das auch so gesagt! Du bildest dir wohl ein, es mit einer Sklavin zu tun zu haben, die zitternd deinen Befehlen gehorcht? Solchen Phantasien gibt man sich bei mir nicht hin, bei mir benimmt man sich anders."

Osmin scornfully speaks his words from the original libretto: "Tenderness and flattery? We're in Turkey! I'm the master, you're my slave. I command, you obey."[63] Mouawad adds an aside from Pedrillo, who is listening in from the present and laughing: "It's the same in Europe!"[64]

In service of this equation of Pedrillo's and Osmin's relationships to Blonde, Mouawad goes out of his way to make Osmin as endearing as possible and Pedrillo a violent boor. The duet between Osmin and Blonde, "Ich gehe, doch rate ich dir," becomes a playful quarrel between lovers that builds up to the reveal to the audience that Blonde is pregnant.[65] At the point in the text where Blonde threatens to scratch Osmin's eyes out, the pair roll around the stage giggling and cuddling. The light, jolly, buffa music is not entirely out of place for this staging of the duet, but the words of the libretto become entirely meaningless—Blonde's resistance is nullified. Pedrillo and Blonde's interactions in contrast are steeped in threats and mockery even when none are present in the original libretto. At one point, Pedrillo warns Blonde, "Be quiet or I'll behave like a Turk!"[66] This line is an effective distillation of what Mouawad set out to do with the Blonde-Pedrillo-Osmin triangle in his production. By this point, the audience has already received Mouawad's message very clearly: European Pedrillo already exhibits all the bad behaviour toward women that *Entführung* typically locates in Osmin and "Turkishness."

The vast majority of the new dialogue written for Konstanze and Blonde in this production serves to defend the characters of the men who hold them captive. One exception to this is in a brief conversation between the two women after Konstanze's aria "Welcher Wechsel."

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[63] "Zärtlichkeit und Schmeicheln! Wir sind in der Türkei! Ich bin dein Herr und du bist meine Sklavin: ich befehle, du gehorchst!"
[64] "In Europa läuft das genauso!"
[65] A photograph by Gary Beechey shows Blonde (Claire de Sévigné) admiring the mobile that Osmin (Goran Jurić) has made for their future child: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803202114/https:/res.cloudinary.com/schmopera/image/upload/v1545409169/media/webhook-uploads/1518193679940/153.jpg.jpg.
[66] "Sei bloß still oder ich mache dir den Türken!"

They only exchange a few lines, but it is the only scene they have alone together. It is notable that while in the original libretto they daydream about Belmonte and rescue, here they do not talk about the men at all. Still, their relationship is challenging to read in the midst of the contemporary value system of Mouawad's production, because while the women may behave as friends, Blonde is Konstanze's servant. In "Durch Zärtlichkeit," we saw Blonde thinking through the figurative slavery of being a woman—and specifically a lower-class woman—in Enlightened Europe by equating her relationships with Pedrillo and Osmin. But she does not direct any of this revolutionary attitude toward her mistress. Instead, Blonde comforts Konstanze, who is having a harder time adjusting to life in the seraglio by telling her, "I've often experienced exile. Changing countries and languages becomes an advantage in the long run, an identity."[67] Konstanze expresses envy for Blonde's courage and Blonde jokingly suggests that they should change places before telling Konstanze, "Who understands me better than you, and you, better than me? We were mistress and servant, now we're two women, side by side."[68] This female camaraderie initially has a sheen of empowerment, but it quickly corrupts under scrutiny. This new equality that Blonde feels is possible in the seraglio because the class distance between them has dissolved, but it has dissolved because now they are both servants. Mouawad romanticizes their captivity, first by having Blonde express gratitude for the learning experience, then by casting it as the catalyst to bring these two women together in a way that would have been impossible while Konstanze still had her high status.

Like Bieito's *Entführung*, Mouawad's also offers a critique of the rescue genre. Bieito accomplishes this goal by revealing the hero to be no different than the villain at the opera's

[67] "Ich habe mehrfach das Exil erlebt. Das Land zu wechseln und die Sprache, macht man sich mit der Zeit zu einem Gewinn, zu einer Identität."
[68] "Wer könnte mich besser verstehen als du, und ich, als dich? Wir waren Herrin und Dienerin, jetzt sind wir zwei Frauen, Seite an Seite."

conclusion when Belmonte takes ownership of the brothel and leaves Konstanze very much un-saved. Mouawad's critique is more subtle and hinges on the idea that the women did not necessarily need rescuing at all. His representation of Belmonte indicates that the rescue storyline is more about the ego of the hero than the needs of the damsel. During his aria, "Wenn der Freude Thränen fliessen," Belmonte sings about the joy of being reunited with his lover, but he addresses the entire aria to the audience and fails to interact with or even make eye contact with Konstanze who is onstage with him. In contrast to Belmonte's self-serving heroism, Mouawad gives the final line of dialogue in the opera to Selim, who tells Osmin, "Love your Blonde more than anything else and let her go."[69] So ultimately, it is the Muslim men who prove themselves actually capable of selfless action to benefit the women they love, in contrast to Belmonte and Pedrillo whose clueless callousness in the prologue is the impetus for the entire action of the opera. Bieito's rescue critique generates sympathy for the women who have been failed by the false heroics of their lovers, whereas Mouawad's generates sympathy for the women's captors, whom he assures us are the real heroes of this story once we get past our Western bias.

The problem with Mouawad's approach is best encapsulated in one of his added dialogue scenes after the lovers' quartet, in which the men question the women about their faithfulness:

> BLONDE. You wanted to save us only on the condition that we had been faithful to you…
>
> KONSTANZE. What would have happened if we hadn't been? Would you have left? On your boat? We don't want any of those unfaithful girls, now do we?

[69] "Liebe deine Blonde über alles und lass sie gehen."

> BLONDE. The most unbearable part was that we were forced to lie to you to save our own lives![70]

At first, this is a strong criticism of the original libretto; Konstanze and Blonde point out the false virtue of the men who only want to rescue them from slavery under certain conditions. But Blonde goes on to tell Pedrillo, "Two years sleeping in the same house with a man who did nothing but seduce me and win me over, offering me gift after gift, making me the queen over everything, over his life, what did you want me to do?"[71] She is arguing here that she had no choice but to give in to Osmin's seduction, but Mouawad combines coercion and imprisonment with Blonde's tender feelings for Osmin. She had sex with him both because she could not effectively resist him any longer as her captor, and because he made her happy. I think Mouawad is wrong to try to have this both ways. As a slave, Blonde cannot consent to sex with her master.

This issue of sex and romance with one's captor constitutes the central problem with Mouawad's concept in this production. It is difficult to accept Konstanze and Blonde's respective tender feelings for Selim and Osmin as real love blossoming across cultural borders, when it looks so much more like Stockholm syndrome. Stockholm syndrome refers to a condition in which captives develop an emotional bond with their captors. The name was coined by the media in coverage of a bank robbery in Stockholm in 1973, in which four hostages held by the robbers defended their captors and refused to testify against them in court after being liberated. While not a medically accepted psychological disorder, Stockholm syndrome is widely familiar to the public in part thanks to its frequent occurrence as a trope in television and film. I recognize this

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[70] "BLONDE. Ihr wolltet uns gerne retten, unter der Bedingung, dass wir euch treu geblieben sind… KONSTANZE. Was wäre passiert, wenn wir es nicht gewesen wären? Wärt ihr wieder losgesegelt, auf eurem Schiff? Untreue Frauen wollen wir nicht? BLONDE. Am unerträglichsten war, dass ihr uns gezwungen habt, euch anzulügen, um unser Leben zu retten."

[71] "Zwei Jahre lang im Hause eines Mannes zu schlafen, der mich unentwegt zu verführen versucht, mich zu erobern, der mir ein Geschenk nach dem andern macht, mich zu seiner Königin bestimmt, zur Königin seines Lebens, was soll ich denn machen?"

trope in Mouawad's *Entführung* in the way this production romanticizes the captivity of the women and works hard to stoke compassion for their captors. A part of this problem lies in Stephanie's libretto. When Selim first asks Konstanze to give herself to him, she replies, "most generous man! If only I could."[72] It is not impossible that she is lying to him, but Mouawad takes this kind of language from Konstanze as the truth of the matter. He further extends this logic to Blonde's feelings for her captor, although she gives no indication in the original libretto that she feels anything other than contempt for Osmin. Bieito's production is worth consideration here as a counterpoint. His staging highlights the ways in which Selim manipulates Konstanze's emotions to keep her under his control. The scene in which Konstanze stops Selim from strangling himself lays bare the extent of Selim's emotional manipulation. This scene casts the rest of the tender things Konstanze says to Selim in a new light. Bieito's Selim is severely unbalanced and Konstanze says what she needs to say to keep herself alive and to keep her hands free of his blood. Mouawad has us take Konstanze at her word when she speaks Stephanie's tender words to Selim, but Bieito's production encourages us to read this element of Konstanze's speech as either manipulation by Selim or self-preservation—that is, in the context of abuse.

Mouawad's *Entführung* tries to be reparative in its representations both of the Middle East and of women, but the feminist themes are inconsistent and confusing. He may have set out to redeem the "Turkish" characters by envoicing the women with a more multicultural sensibility, but within an eighteenth-century frame and to a modern audience it does not quite work. While it is admirable to assert that misogyny is misogyny no matter where it happens and "Enlightened" Europeans are not exempt, Mouawad's insistence on claiming a direct moral equivalence does not work. This production treads dangerously close to being an apologia for sex

[72] "Großmütiger Mann! O daß ich es könnte, daß ich's erwidern könnte."

slavery and rape. Our two female characters have been held against their will as concubines for years, and it is problematic that in Mouawad's telling both of them came to love and desire their captors. *Die Entführung* is the wrong opera to use to tell a cross-cultural love story. These women are prisoners, which makes it impossible for me to read their residual feelings for their captors as love.

Both of these productions recognize and attempt to address some of the problems of representation that arise in staging *Entführung* in the twenty-first century, though they take opposite approaches to the violence in this story. Bieito brings every hint of violence in the text and scenario of this libretto to the surface of his staging with excruciating explicitness. Mouawad uses the voices of the female characters as a framing device to counteract and cancel out all of that implied violence in the service of telling a story about cultural difference and respect.[73] These productions stand as a pair of exemplars that demonstrate, perhaps counterintuitively, that putting less violence against women on stage is not necessarily the more feminist choice in staging the opera canon. Despite the dangers of Bieito's production in terms of the potential for objectifying women's bodies and revelling in explicit sexualized violence, he forces us to confront the problems that already exist in *Entführung*. Mouawad does not present us with any sexual or violent imagery at all. The problem is not that no violence occurs onstage, but that Mouawad has reimagined the scenario of the opera to exclude any implicit force or coercion in the women's captivity. A story about women being held as slaves in an eighteenth-century seraglio is problematic as a starting point for a story about cultural acceptance. Mouawad's focus

[73] Traditional productions of this opera tend to live somewhere in between these two extremes in terms of the seriousness of the violence threatened by Selim and Osmin and the emotional investment of the women with their captors.

on redeeming the Muslim characters in this opera is understandable—and to some spectators perhaps even a net positive—but he sacrifices the opera's female characters to the cause. Mouawad argues again and again that the women's experience in the seraglio is not fundamentally different from their experience in the systemic misogyny of Western Europe. While the latter is certainly not a system exempt from criticism, it is misguided to argue that it is no different from the literal captivity and slavery of *Entführung*'s fantasy seraglio.

In the introduction to their essay collection, *Rape and Representation*, Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver point out the simultaneous pervasiveness and invisibility of rape as a theme in our cultural texts. They suggest that therefore for feminist critics,

> The act of reading rape…requires restoring rape to the literal, to the body: restoring, that is, the violence—the physical, sexual violation. The insistence on taking rape literally often necessitates a conscious critical act of reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where is has been deflected, either by the text itself or by the critics: where it has been turned into a metaphor or a symbol or represented rhetorically as titillation, persuasion, ravishment, seduction, or desire.[74]

In *Entführung* as written, the sexual violence implicit in the scenario is made invisible by Selim's gentle entreaties to Konstanze, Blonde's good humour, the cheerful musical character, and a performance history that rarely challenges the opera's status as a charming—if a touch outdated—romp. Bieito excavates *Entführung*'s invisible violence and holds it up for scrutiny. But the good that his production does in making this sexual violence visible is tempered by the specific ways in which he stages that violence. By contrast, Mouawad's stage action and additions to the libretto further the project of burying and abstracting the sexual violence of this story. To use Higgins's and Silver's language above, Mouawad masks the sexual violence

[74] Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, "Introduction: Rereading Rape," in *Rape and Representation,* ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 4.

through rhetorics of persuasion (Selim and Konstanze) and desire (both women desire their captors).

Entführung continues to be deeply challenging for modern audiences and I think that it should be. In this story, the women are reduced to merely a "site of transaction" between men, to cite Teresa de Lauretis, and by extension a site of transaction between cultures.[75] At the end of Bieito's production, Konstanze is forced to realize that even though she shot her captor in the chest she is still not free from the system of misogynistic tyranny of the brothel itself. At the end of Mouawad's production, Konstanze continues to be essentially collateral in the animosity and then reparations between powerful men. Both directors also populate their stages with a group of women living in the seraglio. Mouawad's harem women are not objectified sexually as Bieito's are, but neither set of women are given anything to say, despite the myriad rewrites and additions to Bretzner and Stephanie's dialogue that both directors make. *Entführung*'s problems of misogyny and Islamophobia look different in these two productions, but in neither have they been solved despite extensive rewrites.

The two productions in this chapter outline an overarching tension in my dissertation between a European *Regie* culture that trades in shock and outrage, and an Anglo-American culture concerned with the politics of representation in art works. If there is a conclusion to be drawn from the comparison in this case study, it might be that these two schools of opera direction could stand to learn from one another. Bieito's production is daring and his willingness to be scandalous—even to be hated—allows for interesting and original artistic choices. But he is also a bull in a china shop of representational politics. While I find elements of his production truly brilliant, it is also messy and brutal, and it reinforces negative stereotypes about sex

[75] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), chapter 5.

workers. Mouawad wants to craft ethical representations that push back against stereotypes, but in *Entführung* he has done so in a way that anaesthetizes the drama of the story and reinforces some of the opera's problematic content.

CHAPTER 3

Salome as Victim

> *Salomé, I pray thee be not stubborn. I have ever been kind toward thee. I have ever loved thee… It may be that I have loved thee too much.*
>
> –Oscar Wilde*, Salomé*

These words, spoken by Herod while he entreats Salome to reconsider her demand for the head of John the Baptist, carry a menacing implication for the relationship between stepfather and stepdaughter in Oscar Wilde's play. This sentiment has inspired a host of contemporary opera directors to interpret Richard Strauss's operatic adaptation of *Salome* as a story about incestuous sexual violence. The productions in this chapter depict Salome as a survivor of a childhood sexual trauma whose bloodthirsty obsession with Jochanaan is causally aligned with her victimhood.

Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* came out of a fin-de-siècle obsession with this mysterious dancing princess. Wilde captured the Orientalism, eroticism, and scopophilia that characterized many depictions of Salome's body in contemporary art, and he also gave her something new—a powerful and deviant sexual desire. Wilde's Salome tells us definitively, "It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Jokanaan in a silver charger."[1] She is not her mother's pawn and this is no whim; she desires Jokanaan for her own pleasure and she will have him to do with as she pleases. This Salome has great potential for queer readings that empower her when we think

[1] Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, in *The Plays of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 117.

about her desire in terms of non-normative sexuality.[2] Even Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations, published with the play, highlight the homoeroticism in the text and he blurs the lines between masculinity and femininity in his figures.[3] In 1977, Lindsay Kemp led an all-male production of Wilde's play in which he played the title character. In the Dance of the Seven Veils, Kemp stripped away his drag to reveal his own body and in so doing, dramatized a popular interpretation of Salome as Wilde himself.[4] Reading Salome as a stand-in for Wilde also guided Kate Millett's 1970 characterization of *Salomé* as "a drama of homosexual guilt and rejection," and Patrick Conrad's 1978 film *Mascara* which, as Carolyn Abbate writes, "asks us to consider whether Salome is revealed (as the final veil falls) as a man—not literally a biological man, but bearing nonetheless some frightening sign of maleness, symbolizing visually her usurpation of powers conventionally assigned to men."[5] More recently, the Lazarus Theatre Company's decision to case a male actor as Salomé in their 2019 production at the Greenwich Theatre in London indicates that a queer reading of this character continues today.

The queer readings that orbit Wilde's *Salomé* are largely absent from the performance tradition of Strauss's opera. This is likely attributable to the relative personae of Wilde and Strauss as well as the opera's mainstream popularity which far outstripped the popularity of the play. While the operatic Salome may not be a figure of empowerment for a queer male identity, she does represent a monstrous and revolutionary female sexuality. The Dance of the Seven Veils

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[2] Petra Dierkes-Thrun has observed two large trends in contemporary interpretations of Wilde's *Salomé*: "One is to enlist Wilde in contemporary antihomophobic projects via a sentimentalization and allegorization of his personal struggles; the other is to present Salomé as a feminist icon by focusing on the liberating force of her excessive sexuality." Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 161.
[3] Elaine Showalter, "The Veiled Woman," in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990), 152; Elliot L. Gilbert, "'Tumult of Images': Wilde, Beardsley, and 'Salome,'" *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1983): 133–59.
[4] Ibid., 167–68.
[5] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1970), 153; Abbate, "Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women," 225.

in particular has frequently been appropriated as a showcase for erotic feminine power. When *Salome* had its American premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in 1907, the opera was banned after opening night and the remainder of the performances cancelled, but the Dance of the Seven Veils lived on in American vaudeville, dance, film, and burlesque.[6] Susan Glenn has argued that in the twentieth century, Salome was "an important resource for women performers and audiences, a vehicle for self-expression and sexualized assertiveness."[7]

The modern operatic *Salome*s in this chapter hang their interpretations on very different themes in the text. There are bits of textual evidence in the opera's libretto, like the quote that opened this chapter, that can be understood to support a reading of Salome as a rape victim. In addition to the line quoted at the outset, Herodias scolds Herod for looking at Salome too much, and the very act of requesting a dance from his young stepdaughter for himself and his guests speaks to an inappropriate desire. But I would like to stress that incestuous desire is not the same as rape; the choice to stage a rape or to allude explicitly to a rape is a choice independent of recognizing perversity in Herod's treatment of Salome. While Wilde's Salome certainly explores sexual perversion and savagery, she is also importantly a virgin.[8]

In this chapter, I first present an analysis of Atom Egoyan's *Salome*, which premiered at the Canadian Opera Company in 1996, and which is the earliest production of the opera in this pattern that I have found. I then survey other members of this group of *Salome*s, both concentrating on those elements that differ from Egoyan's production and from one another, and

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[6] Mary Simonson, "Choreographing Salome: Re-creating the Female Body," in *Body Knowledge: Performance, Intermediality, and American Entertainment at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Davinia Caddy, "Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 1 (2005): 37–58. The phenomenon was known as "Salomania."

[7] Susan Anita Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[8] Richard Ellmann emphasizes this dichotomy between virginity and cruelty/savagery in his discussion of Wilde's *Salomé* in his biography. Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987).

highlighting those themes and commonalities that arise among the group. I focus in particular on the staging of the Dance of the Seven Veils; in these productions, the Dance almost always contains the act or acts of sexual violence and the locus of Salome's trauma. Outside of the Dance, I consider primarily those elements of the staging that play into the directors' overarching concepts as they relate to sexual violence and child abuse.

My analysis of the productions is organized around the two poles of agency and style: Salome's agency in the events of the story, and the stylistic modes through which the acts of sexual violence and their repercussions on and through Salome's body are represented onstage. My analysis is ultimately geared toward contemplating how the sexual violence in these productions shapes our perception of the characters, story, and messages of the opera—that is, what introducing sexual violence *does*. This performative focus makes vital not only the content of the representation of violence but the world in which the representation takes place, complete with its contemporary culture and ideas. Thus, my interest is not in the politics of sexual violence in Strauss's or Wilde's cultures, nor in first-century Judea. I am looking at these productions in the context of the cultures in which they are performed now. My conclusions about the effect of this addition of sexual violence on perceptions of the opera are based on my own analysis, statements from the directors of the productions when available, and critical discourses in the press immediately following performances of the operas.

Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the power that production choices and trends have to alter the perceived and popular meanings of even canonic operas. When the changes in meaning hinge on representing trauma and sexual violence, as they do here, the stakes concern not only the legacy of *Salome* as a historical work of art, but the political and social connotations of putting highly sensitive imagery onstage.

ATOM EGOYAN'S *SALOME*

In 1996, Canadian Opera Company General Director Richard Bradshaw approached director Atom Egoyan about creating a new *Salome* production for the company. Bradshaw had seen Egoyan's latest film, *Exotica* (1994), in which a father who has lost his young daughter becomes obsessed with a stripper with a school-girl persona. The themes of trauma, sexuality, and scopophilia make *Exotica* an interesting parallel to the Salome story. The COC remounted Egoyan's *Salome* 2002 and 2013. My analysis focuses on the 2013 production, one performance of which I saw live. This version featured an updated Dance of the Seven Veils, and I will discuss the changes made from the earlier version below.

The guiding logic of Egoyan's *Salome* is the politics of looking. At the centre of his production is the idea of the frustrated gaze; to quote Egoyan, "the page is infatuated with Narraboth, who does not return her gaze, and Narraboth is totally consumed with Salome, who does not return his gaze, and Salome of course is completely consumed with Jochanaan, who does not return her gaze."[9] This frustrated gazing all takes place within a culture of surveillance in which the guards carry handheld video cameras in the earlier productions, and cellphones in 2013. So Salome is being watched all the time, not only by Narraboth and the other men onstage who desire her, but by Herod's cameras. Egoyan describes his setting as a kind of panopticon, not achieved by architecture as in Jeremy Bentham's formulation, but by video technology. Video clips are projected on the upstage wall of the set, and we see Salome on video before we see her in person. According to David Levin, "Egoyan derives not just a theatrical effect from

[9] Atom Egoyan, interview with the author, 6 March 2019. In Wilde's play, the page of Herodias is male, and in love with Narraboth (the young Syrian). In Strauss's setting, the role of the page is written for contralto, and is most often sung by a woman. Some productions of the opera, including Egoyan's, make the character of the page female instead of treating it as a pants role.

this gambit, but a dramaturgical focus.…By introducing us to a Salome beyond the space and medium of her stage presence, Egoyan prepares us for the possibility that her pathology originates in some offstage space and medium as well."[10]

This offstage locus of pathology is revealed to the audience during the Dance of the Seven Veils. As a striptease (an act of revealing) the Dance would seem a natural fit for the atmosphere Egoyan has created, but Egoyan does not stage Salome's dance. When the time comes for Salome to dance, she sits on a swing hanging downstage and is lifted up into the rafters. Her dress unfurls as she rises and becomes a projection screen, which fills most of the proscenium. We see a video projection of Salome as a young girl on a swing, smiling into the camera. The footage has the feeling of a home video. After a few moments (letter G in the score), the video changes to show child-Salome wearing a blindfold in the woods. She begins to walk in place, still blindfolded, holding her arms out in front of her as the forest moves past. After she wanders for a time, Herod appears onstage in front of the screen and watches the video. When Herod leaves, child-Salome in the video removes her blindfold.

The projection is now replaced by a shadow-play ballet performed behind the screen as the orchestra begins to play a Viennese waltz (7 mm. after letter P)—the first explicit dance music in the movement. We see the silhouette of a dancer portraying Salome, who dances and removes her clothing. As the waltz accelerates, several more dancers appear: Herod followed by three men. They encroach on dancer-Salome and the light sources behind the screen move so that the shadows of the men appear more than twice their real size. The tempo suddenly increases ("sehr schnell" at letter Y) and the men begin to toss Salome around from one to another. They

[10] Levin, "Operatic School for Scandal," 243.

lift her off the ground and one man holds her over his head as she kicks the air.[11] She fights and struggles but cannot keep them off her. Eventually, Herod forces Salome onto her back on the ground. He undresses and crouches down between her legs. She struggles as he pins her down and at what seems to be the moment of penetration the lights cut out and the screen is filled with another video projection: an extreme closeup of an eye with the footage of child-Salome on the swing filling the pupil. The eye may be Salome's own, which could indicate a flashback to a simpler time as a form of escapism in this moment of horror. Or perhaps the eye is Herod's, which could indicate that as he looks into his adolescent stepdaughter's face, he sees her as she was when his obsession began.

In addition to the imagery of the videographic panopticon, Egoyan's preoccupation with looking comes through the use of blindfolds. The first blindfold we see is on Jochanaan when Narraboth brings him out of the cistern. Jochanaan removes his blindfold right away but does not once look at Salome throughout their long interaction. When he utters his final rejection and damns Salome, he ties the blindfold back over his own eyes—a conscious act of self-blinding to further disempower the spectacular Salome. Salome's use of the blindfold later in the opera recalls its connection with Jochanaan and will be discussed in detail below.

Agency in Egoyan's Dance of the Seven Veils

The addition of a rape storyline to *Salome*'s narrative serves, first and foremost, to explain away the heroine's troubling, gruesome actions in the second half of the opera. In an interview for the COC in 2013, Egoyan said that he wanted to use the Dance "as a way of gaining some insight into Salome's state of mind: what leads her to this extraordinary act of

[11] A photograph by Michael Cooper shows Salome (Carolyn Woods) struggling against her captors in shadow: https://web.archive.org/web/20171213225608/http:/files.coc.ca/images/parlandoblog/salome-curtain.jpg.

violence, asking for the head of the man that she is obsessed with? So, we're thinking that there's something else going on in this family, in her background, and the music of the Dance of the Seven Veils is a way of accessing that."[12] In his program notes, Egoyan says further that he felt "a pressing need to make certain things clearer—to find some justification for Salome's horrific behaviour."[13] A preoccupation with finding logical, comprehensible motivations for Salome's monstrosity seems to be one of the guiding aspects of all of the *Salome* productions in this chapter, and Egoyan articulates it clearly. This interest in locating Salome's behaviour in her psychology, and even manufacturing life experiences to lay the groundwork for that psychology, allows us to reimagine *Salome* as a post-Freudian pop-psychology story which has a certain modern-day appeal.[14] But it also serves to strip Salome of her choices in a tangible way. The story becomes about what—or who—*caused* Salome to take these actions.

Early Salome narratives come from the biblical story told in the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, and Josephus's historical volume *Jewish Antiquities*. They tell of Herodias's grudge against John and make Salome an arm of her mother's will in demanding the head of the Baptist.[15] Wilde's Salome gains a new agency by virtue of her sexual obsession. She wants the head for herself and her own pleasure; Herodias's desire to see the prophet dead is mere happenstance. By contrast, understanding Salome as a victim of rape and incest underwrites her

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[12] Atom Egoyan, interview with Stephen Weir, "Atom Egoyan on Canadian Opera Company Toronto Salome," YouTube video, 4:55, posted by "Canada Art Channel," April 20, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96WsfJ8FziY. Video archived at: https://archive.org/details/egoyan-coc-interview.

[13] Atom Egoyan, "Director's Notes," program for *Salome* (Toronto: Canadian Opera Company, 2013), 2.

[14] Throughout this chapter, when I refer to Freud, I am referring not so much to Freud the man and his writings as to Freud the popular cultural idea. What I am identifying as Freudian in this sense is the belief that sexual dysfunction in adults has its locus in childhood experiences.

[15] Mark 6: 17–29 and Matthew 14: 3–11 tell the story of the daughter of Herodias who dances for Herod to obtain the head of John for her mother. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities,* book XVIII specifies that the name of Herodias's daughter was Salome.

desire with trauma and psychological pathologization. The agency she was awarded by Wilde is lost again.

Salome's pathology in Egoyan's production appears to be an essentially Freudian one. Her present-day psychological malady is implicitly attributed to childhood trauma as revealed, albeit vaguely, in the Dance of the Seven Veils. The figure of Salome we see raped in the Dance seems to be closer in age to the present Salome than the child Salome in the video, but the precise age at which Salome's stepfather raped her is less important than the fact that it is tied up in her consciousness with her experiences of childhood. And even if the rape we see is the only rape in Salome's past and is a more recent memory, the imagery of the child wandering blindfolded through the dark forest under Herod's leering gaze speaks quite clearly to some kind of traumatic experience with her stepfather in childhood.

Soprano Erika Sunnegårdh performs her present-day Salome with a childlike physicality that also speaks to a past trauma manifesting in a sort of developmental regression, as if she is frozen psychologically at the moment of trauma.[16] The swing that lifts Salome into the rafters for the Dance of the Seven Veils is set on the stage from the beginning of the opera and Salome frequently sits on it. There is some level of childlike whimsy in being on the swing at all, which is compounded by the image we get in the Dance of Salome as a smiling child also on a swing. When Egoyan's Salome seduces Narraboth to convince him to bring Jochanaan to her, her body language is a troubling blend of coy womanly sexuality and childish pleading. She lets her robe fall around her elbows and moves around him with a studied shyness, averting her eyes and peering at him over her exposed shoulders. But she also tugs on his arm petulantly and spins herself around on the swing when he resists. Many of the traditional wiles of femininity are

[16] Sunnegårdh sang Salome in 2013. The role was performed by Ljuba Kazarnovskaya in 1996, and by Helen Field in 2002.

uncomfortably close to those displayed by children, and this becomes especially clear as Salome seductively pouts her way to exactly what she wants. Egoyan and Sunnegårdh also depict Salome's fear of Herod in childlike gestures. When Herod makes his first entrance after Salome's conversation with Jochanaan, Salome abruptly sits up from the posture of prostrate ecstasy she had assumed at the end of her encounter with the Baptist and clutches her knees to her chest. She sits in this fetal huddle and holds her robe around her bare legs throughout the entirety of the following scenes until she agrees to dance for Herod.

In this context, the memories presented in the Dance of the Seven Veils begin to look like symptoms of this larger psychological malady as well. Does the staging of the Dance represent a series of involuntary flashbacks triggered by performing a dance of seduction for her abuser? Salome is objectified by the constant desirous gaze of the other characters in the opera, but Linda Hutcheon, Michael Hutcheon, and Lawrence Kramer have argued that by performing the Dance of the Seven Veils Salome gains agency by using the power of that gaze to her own advantage.[17] In the Dance, she gets to control exactly how she is seen, and she uses the power of her own bodily spectacle to compel Herod to give her what she desires. Mary Simonson sees Salome's dance as "modeling feminine possibility and reminding us that it is not only voice and vocality that promise to recover female character but also bodies, dance, and movement."[18] This revolutionary character of the Dance of the Seven Veils is compromised in Egoyan's production because we do not get to see the dance Salome performs for Herod. We assume that from the perspectives of the other characters onstage a dance happens, but our gaze is redirected to

[17] Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, "Here's Lookin' at You, Kid": The Empowering Gaze in 'Salome,'" *Profession* (1998): 11–22; Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Kramer argues that Salome ultimately loses the power she seizes in the Dance, while Hutcheon and Hutcheon believe that Salome is empowered by being gazed at throughout the opera.
[18] Simonson, "Choreographing Salome," 47.

Salome's thoughts and memories. Rather than watch the Dance of the Seven Veils, which Salome controls, we watch a danced pantomime of what we might assume was the worst moment of her life. Again, some of the little agency Salome carries in this story is wrested from her in Egoyan's interpretation. We are left with a Salome that cannot control our gaze and cannot control the telling of her own story. She loses herself in her traumatic memories in the Dance of the Seven Veils, and everything that follows is symptomatic of that trauma. Pathologizing Salome's non-normative desire in this way renders her obsession for Jochanaan tragic. Her monstrosity is not attributable to her character but is rather a symptom of her abuse.

I have shown how Egoyan's Salome is portrayed as a victim of her circumstances and specifically her abuse, but this is not sufficient for understanding her character in this production. Within the framework of sexual violence and trauma, Egoyan still traces a kind of development toward agency with his Salome, though it may not be the one we are accustomed to seeing. His Salome does not achieve agency through the Dance of the Seven Veils but in spite of it. I return here to the politics of looking which are so central to Egoyan's understanding of the Salome story. His Salome begins to come to terms with her trauma through her use of Jochanaan's blindfold to see and unsee her world as she chooses.

We first see Salome's blindfold in the video portion of the Dance of the Seven Veils. After the shot of child-Salome on the swing, the screen cuts to black with the exception of a single illuminated image of the child tying a blindfold over her eyes and beginning to walk as the forest backdrop fades in around her. This section ends with a zoom in on the little girl's face. She removes the blindfold and her image fades out as the dancer-Salome's shadow appears on the screen. I understand the blindfold in this dreamscape of Salome's memories as having to do with the knowability or unknowability of her trauma. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth defines the

experience of trauma in a structure of belatedness: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on."[19] The blindfold symbolizes Salome's inability to comprehend the memory of her trauma in full, both as the girl wandering through a metaphorical forest of terrors and as the woman reliving this ill-defined memory. But it is significant that Salome dons the blindfold herself—this is a gesture of self-preservation.

When child-Salome removes her blindfold, there is a moment in the crossfade to the shadow-play when it feels as if she can see dancer-Salome. The act of unblindfolding implies a new sense of clarity for Salome, even an act of recovered memory. As the two Salomes briefly glimpse one another, Egoyan dramatizes a revelation for Salome about her own history—a glimpse of a truth in her past that she had been unwilling or unable to see until now. Egoyan speaks about the forest via Bruno Bettelheim as a "place of nascent sexuality" where Salome has been sent with "her hands reaching out."[20] This element of the forest as a metaphor for sexual revelation complicates the image of the removal of the blindfold. It is difficult to celebrate Salome's unblinding as an achievement of sexual self-knowledge and agency when the metaphor of the forest is also so tied up with the repressed trauma of her childhood.

The next blindfold Salome wears is the one she removes from Jochanaan's decapitated head—the one he used to block her from his sight. She dons Jochanaan's blindfold in what Egoyan describes as "a moment of communion" with Jochanaan.[21] She wears this blindfold when she kisses the head, and after the kiss she removes it and holds it over her head, stretched

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[19] Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4. Emphasis in original.
[20] Egoyan, interview with the author.
[21] Ibid.

taut between her hands.[22] When Herod commands her death, he snatches the blindfold and strangles her with it. But Herod is not alone in weaponizing the blindfold. Egoyan describes Jochanaan's blindfold as "the thing that ignites the Liebestod…the thing that actually makes that happen. It's the weapon."[23] Egoyan weaponizes the idea of invisibility, the capacity of an individual to control access to what is and is not seen. Jochanaan wields the blindfold against Salome by refusing to look at her. Salome wields it against the voyeuristic society in which she lives when she refuses to participate in its economy of the gaze by kissing Jochanaan's head with her eyes covered. And in a sense, Egoyan wields the blindfold against his audience in the Dance of the Seven Veils. He covers the proscenium with a cloth to block the stimulating visual spectacle we expect and makes us watch a brutal and unexpected rape instead.

Salome cannot control the gaze of the other so effectively. She is leered at from the beginning of the opera to the end and even her ability to choose the way she is seen in the Dance of the Seven Veils is compromised in this production. But by donning and removing the blindfold in her ultimate procurement of Jochanaan, Salome demonstrates the power she has achieved to control at least her own gaze. She kisses Jochanaan while she wears his blindfold in an act of defiance against the rules of the surveillance society in which she lives. When she kisses Jochanaan's head, she chooses not to possess it by gazing on it, the way her own image has been possessed by Herod, his men, and his cameras, but on her own terms: blind. When she removes the blindfold, she holds it over her head victoriously for her final ecstatic "I have kissed thy mouth, Jochanaan," over the crashing orchestral climax.[24]

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[22] A photograph by Michael Cooper shows Salome (Erika Sunnegårdh) holding the head of Jochanaan aloft just before kissing it: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803203457/https://images.thestar.com/content/dam/thestar/entertainment/stage/2013/04/21/atom_egoyans_salome_review/the_kiss.jpg.

[23] Egoyan, interview with the author.

[24] "Ich habe deinen Mund geküsst, Jochanaan." For quotations from the text, I will use Wilde's English in text, to avoid retranslation, and note Lachmann's German below.

Salome's command over how and what she sees at this moment cannot go unpunished in Herod's world of surveillance and control. Herod kills her with the blindfold that symbolizes the little power she has won. In one sense, Salome is only ever a victim of the gaze and of her own beauty. The power she wins at the conclusion of the opera cannot alter this. What she claims is a different kind of power. It is a power over her own perceiving, and it is allied with her newfound perception of the truth of her past trauma. Although she cannot be allowed to survive to the end of the opera, Salome dies victorious in at least this one way. She dies with her eyes uncovered, having truly seen Herod and what he has done to her.[25]

Egoyan's Salome is a complex figure. Directorial changes to the story strip away much of the power with which Wilde imbued her. By rendering her obsessive desire symptomatic of a pathology of childhood trauma, Egoyan reduces the amount of agency Salome has to make choices. But he gives her a dense, carefully spun trajectory toward self-knowledge and self-determination through the use of the blindfold. The tension here between victimhood and agency recalls a question penned by Melanie Boyd about the father-daughter incest storyline in Egoyan's 1997 film *The Sweet Hereafter.* On Egoyan's choice to depict the relationship between teenaged Nicole Burnell and her father as quasi-consensual, Boyd asks, "How should politically concerned viewers judge the revision? Do we condemn its failure to represent an innocent victim, or celebrate its ability to represent an empowered one?"[26] Egoyan's depiction of Salome is similarly confusing. She is one of the great female monsters of the Western artistic canon, and Egoyan presents her to us as a victim of a deeply sympathetic trauma. I root for Salome and want her to

[25] The earlier version of Egoyan's production did not make as much of the blindfold prop. In 2002, Herod strangled Salome with his bare hands, the blindfold not having figured into the final scene as much.
[26] Melanie Boyd, "To Blame Her Sadness: Representing Incest in Atom Egoyan's *The Sweet Hereafter*," in *Image and Territory: Essays on Atom Egoyan,* ed. Monique Tschofen and Jennifer Burwell (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 277. Egoyan adapted the screenplay of *The Sweet Hereafter* from the 1991 novel by Russell Banks.

win some power back in the story, but when she gets it, she uses it to have an atrocity committed in her name. While the question Egoyan explicitly asks is, What circumstances in her past would lead Salome to commit these crimes? the question I find myself stuck with is, How far can our sympathy for Salome as a rape victim go?

Style in Egoyan's Dance of the Seven Veils

The shadow-play depicting Salome's gang rape is danced throughout. The violence is precisely choreographed and highly stylized. Levin notes, "the aestheticization acts as a kind of fulcrum, allowing the horror to teeter between a mimetic performance (Salome's dance as rape) and a performative mimesis (Salome's rape as dance)."[27] Levin brings up the idea of aestheticization of the rape as a way of understanding its dramaturgical function, but Egoyan's choice to stylize and make art of this rape requires further unpacking. The greatest change between the 1996/2002 productions and the 2013 production was to further stylize the Dance of the Seven Veils. In the earlier version, the shadow-play of the rape was more graphic. With a single, motionless light source, the shadows cast were true to life and Salome's penetration and violation were more apparent to the audience.

In *Theatre & Violence*, Lucy Nevitt warns that "an image of rape has such power that it can easily escape its context and come to dominate a spectator's experience of the performance."[28] This seems to be evident in the 2002 staging of Egoyan's *Salome*. The critical response to the production centred on the rape, and an article by Tamara Bernstein, to be discussed later in this chapter, stirred up outrage among other critics and spectators. Egoyan told me that the audience reaction to the 2002 staging did play into his decision to soften the

[27] Levin, "Operatic School for Scandal," 246–47.
[28] Lucy Nevitt, *Theatre & Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 33.

depiction. He said that in the earlier production the rape was "incredibly raw" and "very, very upsetting to people, maybe even more than it needed to be."[29] He understood this to be essentially a problem of calibration and felt privileged to have the opportunity of a restaging in 2013 to make adjustments.

In 2013, Egoyan collaborated with shadow artist Clea Minaker to rethink this portion of the Dance. Egoyan says of the changes: "We mitigated [the graphic nature of the violation] with this new imagery.…We made it more lyrical, I suppose. It was less harsh. The first presentation was extremely harsh."[30] The new imagery included a carousel of ballerina figures casting shadows and flurries of leaves in the forest shots. Most apparently, the gang rape is rendered harder to see because of the motion of multiple light sources and the inclusion of the shadows of tree limbs that recall the imagery of the forest and distract from the action. The whole scene is more metaphorical, even somewhat veiled, and the moment of penetration is obscured. Caryl Clark describes the new rape scene as "filtered through Minaker's gossamer design aesthetic" and notes that the shadows of the ballerinas "provide a measure of agency to Salome even as they portend her fate.…These shadowy figures create a sense of beauty, sensuality and wonder in conjunction with the menacing image of the darkened forest and leering glare of the lurking Herod, foreshadowing the trapped dancer and sexual violence to come."[31]

Clark suggests that Egoyan and Minaker's reinterpretation of the rape is "more distancing viscerally and emotionally…more nuanced and possibly even more powerful for having been rendered more suggestive."[32] But I wonder whether this emotional distance and aesthetic softening might serve to glamourize and fetishize the violence being depicted. In the context of a

[29] Egoyan, interview with the author.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Caryl Clark, "The Dirt on Salome," in Rowden, *Performing Salome, Revealing Stories*, 167.
[32] Ibid., 167.

performance of *Salome*, this relationship between the content and form of violent representations is further complicated by the music. The music of Strauss's Dance of the Seven Veils has been widely lambasted as kitschy, Orientalist, and uninspired. But because of Strauss's generally high standing as a composer among musicologists, a number of scholars have searched for ways to understand these qualities of the music as intentional or in some way dramatic. Lawrence Kramer has remarked that "the famous 'badness' of [the music] seems meant to guarantee both a certain power and a certain sleaziness."[33] Similarly, Robin Holloway remarks that "we all know how strangely potent cheap music can be."[34] There are a couple of dominant theories about why Strauss may have wanted this music to be "cheap" and "sleazy," and they come down to the question: Which character's point of view does this music represent?

Derrick Puffett has suggested that because the orchestra sensually "heaves and gyrates" in the Dance, Salome cannot be chaste.[35] Kramer also attributes the music to Salome, but to a deeper level of her consciousness. He understands the Dance as a form of psychoanalysis and as "the one moment in her opera when Salome, with uncontested success, translates the unspeakableness of her desire at full tilt into a body language."[36] To subscribe to the idea that the music speaks for Salome and expresses her sexuality and her desire is to render Egoyan's stage action inappropriate. Another camp sees the music as speaking more to Herod's experience of the dance than Salome's. Davinia Caddy suggests we might see the Dance as a moment of repositioned subjectivity where the "heaving" and "gyrating" reflect Herod's sexual climax

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[33] Lawrence Kramer, "One Coughs, the Other Dances: Freud, Strauss, and the Perversity of Modern Life," *Muzikoloski Zbornik* 45, no. 2 (2009), 41.
[34] Robin Holloway, "'Salome': Art or Kitsch?" in *Richard Strauss: Salome*, ed. Derrick Puffett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 149.
[35] Derrick Puffett, "Postlude: Images of Salome," in Puffett, *Richard Strauss: Salome*, 164.
[36] Kramer, "One Coughs, the Other Dances," 40.

rather than Salome's.[37] Holloway's colourful descriptions of Strauss's music are frequently cited as examples of the alleged musicological distaste for the music of Strauss's Dance of the Seven Veils—in particular his oft-quoted descriptor, "bargain-basement orientalism."[38] But Holloway's critique actually rests on the tension between recognizing the "badness" of the music and still being stirred by it. I find that Holloway's dual recognition of badness and arousal lends itself quite well to an interpretation of the music of the Dance as representing Herod's experience. Our discomfort may be attributable in part to being made to feel allegiance with a distasteful character, his incestuous desire, and his violent point of view.

Egoyan described the music of the Dance to me as a "very perverse soundtrack to a whole series of possible imaginings."[39] He also said: "[Herod's] ability to extract a performative element [of Salome's] own sexuality was something that I found quite disturbing and I wanted to give us a glimpse into how that relationship might have worked."[40] So in Egoyan's understanding the music belongs both to Salome and to Herod. It is a self-consciously performative rendering of Salome's sexuality, endowed with layers of repressed trauma from her past sexual abuse. It speaks to both the darkness in Salome's past and the cheap sexuality demanded by her abuser.

In one sense, the "flagrant…bump-and-grind exoticism" of the dance music is a deeply troubling accompaniment to Salome's rape.[41] But even in its softened, aestheticized 2013 form, the rape itself is still too horrifying to be rendered sexually arousing by the music. Instead, the music takes on the violence of the action. Egoyan is aware that representing violence in an

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[37] Caddy, "Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils," 56. Ultimately, though, Caddy argues that the music in the Dance of the Seven Veils is elastic, and its role in the drama shifts according to the dancer and the historical and narrative context.
[38] Holloway, "'Salome': Art or Kitsch?," 149.
[39] Egoyan, interview with the author.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Kramer, "One Coughs, the Other Dances," 41.

aesthetic medium carries the risk that viewers may find such imagery titillating. When I asked him about his approach to this fine line between stylization and fetishization, he stopped himself mid-sentence and said, "I was going to say you have to be cautious, but you don't have to be cautious at all. I think you have to be bold and you have to test what those balances are, and sometimes you're going to go too far."[42]

The performative nature of the Dance of the Seven Veils and its music persists through the series of images that Egoyan presents us with in place of Salome's actual dance for Herod. I appreciate that in Egoyan's staging the rape is not pornographic—Salome's flesh is hidden from us and the sex acts we see are not performed for realism. Yet the presence of the gaze is felt powerfully in the opera and amplified further in Egoyan's staging. And the music that underscores the images of Salome as a child and Salome being raped is music intended for and associated with a striptease. The music sexualizes the child Salome and turns her trauma and loss of innocence into spectacle.

Lucy Nevitt uses the example of Peter Brook's famous 1955 staging of *Titus Andronicus* at Stratford's Shakespeare Memorial Theatre to explore the issue of stylized violence. Lavinia appeared with highly stylized wounds symbolized by scarlet streamers coming from her wrists and mouth. Nevitt argues that the beauty of the imagery "foregrounds the spectator's sympathy for Lavinia's plight. She is an innocent victim, and the spectator is guided to contemplate her suffering without being asked to imagine too precisely its actual manifestation on her body.…Brook's choice was to communicate *suffering*. The image communicates very little about brutal violence in rape."[43] In this instance, Nevitt sees the veiling of the harsh realities of Lavinia's injuries as a tactic to keep the audience trained on Lavinia's pain—to make them cry

[42] Egoyan, interview with the author.
[43] Nevitt, *Theatre & Violence*, 21–22. Emphasis in original.

rather than to make them sick. I agree that a beautiful representation of violence can evoke pity where a graphic representation would trigger some amount of spectatorial revulsion or even perverse pleasure. Yet I wonder what else making violence beautiful accomplishes. Making Lavinia's injuries beautiful poeticizes them, and by locating her suffering in the realm of art it becomes a spectacle *to be looked at*. Suffering loses its immediacy; audience members are not bystanders of a horrible event but spectators of a tragic artwork. This kind of aestheticization mitigates outrage, but maybe we should be outraged.

Serge Bennathan's choreography for the rape ballet in Egoyan's 2013 Dance of the Seven Veils is beautiful but does not exclude violence. Levin says of the dance choreography, "[Salome] is whirled about overhead, and in the process, her figure remonstrates with the frantic melodramatic gestures of early twentieth-century modernist dance-theater."[44] The movement is all highly stylized, but within that framework we see dancer-Salome kicking and writhing as she is violated. Still, the beauty of this ballet gives me pause. While this kind of veiled half-seeing of the rape may prevent fetishized looking at realist depictions of nudity, blood, and sweat, I worry about the stylization itself being an act of fetishization. The projection screen separates the shadow-image of Salome's dancing feminine shape from the body of Salome we have seen onstage to this point. Singer-Salome is objectified by the gaze of the soldiers, the audience, Herod, and his surveillance, but she is also deeply embodied. Paul Robinson and Carolyn Abbate have argued that the incredible acoustic power of women's voices in opera prevents female characters from being experienced simply as passive victims.[45] Salome's embodied power is also typically expressed through the Dance of the Seven Veils, but again, the dance we see is not the

[44] Levin, "Operatic School for Scandal," 246.
[45] Paul Robinson, "It's Not Over Until the Soprano Dies," *New York Times Book Review*, January 1, 1989; Abbate, "Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women." Both articles are responses to Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*.

dance Salome performs but rather a representation of her trauma. At this moment in Egoyan's production, when we come to understand Salome as a victim, she is without her voice and her dancing body is flattened into silhouette. Griselda Pollock has argued that throughout art history, men's representations of women are typified by bodily presence and vocal absence.[46] The shift from the embodied singer-Salome to the disembodied silhouette of dancer-Salome encourages us to perceive the depiction of the assault at a distance—that is, fetishistically. And as per the performance convention of this opera, the separation between Salome's body and her shadow is amplified by the knowledge that the singer and dancer are different performers.

The shadow-play places Salome's exotic dance and striptease in troubling proximity to her rape. The choreography from the earlier version of this production wove even more of Salome's sensual dance throughout the attack. In the 2013 version, once the men become aggressive Salome stops performing her striptease and her choreography consists entirely of stylized resistance to the men. Both of these versions risk prompting audience members to associate the rape causally with the striptease. Rosalind Gill has outlined a number of popular rape myths about sexual violence perpetuated by the news media, two of which are pertinent to this scene: "One of the most pervasive and established beliefs about rape is that victims in some way provoke it—by their dress or conduct"[47] and another is that "the male attacker is assumed to be full of pent-up sexual feelings, and is driven beyond normal self-control by the lust engendered by a particular woman."[48] By including Salome's performance of an erotic dance in the same shadow-play as the rape, Egoyan encourages us to understand the two events in tandem. And doing so plays into pervasive myths about rape familiar to audiences from the real

[46] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 218.
[47] Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 139.
[48] Ibid., 141.

world. As much as the depiction of the rape itself is unquestionably violent and nonconsensual, its proximity to Salome's striptease sets up a narrative where, even if we do not personally blame her for what happened, we can say, Salome got raped because…

Finally, there is the issue of the scrim of Salome's skirt that blocks elements of the rape from view. We see what is happening only in shadow, and in Egoyan and Minaker's 2013 revision, in distorted shadows. Themes of veiling and specifically of selectively blocking what is seen are part of Egoyan's overarching approach to this opera. What I find particularly interesting is that while this act of violence against Salome by Herod is veiled and partially obscured, Herod murders Salome at the close of the opera in full view of the audience. This second act of violence is as vivid as it is unexpected, and the shock is amplified by the fact that the rape was somewhat masked.

The scrim, as a veil, acts in part as a demarcation of past from present. The images and events presented on the screen are removed in time from the rest of the opera. Memory preserves events imperfectly and subjectively, and the images we see projected onto the scrim are likewise blurred—emotionally evocative rather than dispassionately precise. The projections during the Dance also mark this scene as a representation and highlight its constructedness. The events and ideas we see are mediated not just through Salome's memory, but through Egoyan's, Minaker's, and Bennathan's art. The artfulness of the Dance of the Sevel Veils is marked in contrast to the rest of the opera. This movement in particular requires an act of interpretation by its audience.[49] Subjective and in some senses unknowable, this mode of representation might be seen in the context of ideas from trauma studies about the nature of trauma and memory. Cathy Caruth

[49] A photograph by Michael Cooper shows Salome (Linnea Swan) in shadow amid the towering figures of her attackers: https://web.archive.org/web/20200820202549/https://images.thestar.com/content/dam/thestar/entertainment/music/2016/02/25/twerk-it-or-work-it-dance-scandals-for-the-ages/dance-of-the-seven-veils.jpg.

writes that the history that a traumatic flashback tells is "a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood."[50] The drastic shift in Egoyan's style for the entire flashback sequence of the Dance of the Seven Veils establishes that the images we see have a different relationship to reality than the rest of the opera. We appear to be in Salome's mind as she remembers her own childhood in a series of flashes and metaphors. The home-video footage of the child on the swing stands in stark contrast to the blindfolded girl wandering alone through the endless forest. The camera failed to capture the dark truth of Salome's childhood. The traumatic events portrayed in the shadow-play defy simple comprehension. Egoyan's Dance of the Seven Veils dramatizes Salome opening her eyes to the trauma in her past, but the way she comes to perceive that trauma is necessarily irrational. The artfulness of the Dance represents the impossibility for Salome to precisely report what happened to her, even within her own mind.

OTHER PRODUCTIONS, 2008–2018

Egoyan's production works as a template, whether conscious or not, for at least a dozen other productions of *Salome* in Europe and North America since 2008. While these productions encompass a diverse range of settings, time periods, and general aesthetic approaches, they all share Egoyan's conceit to disclose sexual abuse of Salome by Herod in her childhood during the Dance of the Seven Veils. Below, I outline the different ways this history of abuse is represented in thirteen productions encompassing ten years of practice, arranged into groups based on thematic or story patterns. Some of these productions use their violent sexual backstories

[50] Caruth, introduction to "Recapturing the Past," in Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Emphasis in original.

primarily to add context for the existing plot (as Egoyan's does), whereas in others the directors have significantly altered the onstage events, particularly at the opera's conclusion, to tell a different kind of story about sexual abuse. I will summarize the way these productions incorporate sexual violence into the Salome story before analyzing how the representations of sexual violence work. A chart listing these productions and some of the larger emergent trends can be found in Appendix 2.

Salome and Freudian Regression: Freud's influence on these interpretations of Salome, seen through the idea that childhood trauma is the locus for sexual dysfunction, is strong throughout, but it is especially blatant in the following four productions. The most explicitly psychoanalytic *Salome* comes from Alexandra Szemerédy and Magdolna Parditka for Theater Bonn in 2015. Set in the early twentieth century, this production resonates with Freud both in its time period and its pervading dream-logic. Like Egoyan, Szemerédy and Parditka conceive of the Dance of the Seven Veils as a moment of psychic dislocation for Salome. While in the world of the opera Salome performs a dance for Herod, we in the audience are made privy to her internal experience of trauma stirred up by the dance. This production makes the split between Salome's physical and psychological selves visible by using a dance double who looks just like Salome. The double performs a ballroom dance with a tuxedoed partner for Herod's delight. The other Salome—the inner Salome—replicates her double's choreography before peeling off and sitting downstage apart from the dancing.[51] She grows more and more visibly distraught and writhes in pain. She removes the white evening gown that her double continues to wear, dons a blue-and-white sailor

[51] A photo by Thilo Beu shows Salome (Nicola Beller Carbone) sitting downstage while her double (Nathalie Brandes) dances with her partner (Olaf Reinecke): https://web.archive.org/web/20200803204024/http:/www.omm.de/veranstaltungen/musiktheater20142015/bilder/BN-salome3.jpg.

dress, and puts a bow in her hair.[52] Her clothes now match those of a badly tattered baby doll that Salome carries around with a large red stain between its legs.[53] The dance then gives way to what feels like a scene from Salome's dreams. She is surrounded by banquet guests and her family who present her with a large birthday cake. The chandelier above drips blood onto the white frosting. The nightmare escalates into Salome single-handedly massacring everyone present with a shard of glass.

After the dance sequence, back in reality, Salome demands the head of the Baptist, but is delivered Jochanaan's decapitated body instead. In the final image of the opera, Salome, Herod, and Herodias sit around the table with Jochanaan's headless corpse on the ground as a waiter serves the trio three heads on silver platters—their own.[54] The lines between reality and fantasy in the action following the dance are blurred. It is unclear whether Salome's fantasy about killing everyone was more than a fantasy, and thus unclear who, if anyone, is left alive at the end. What is clear, however, is the Freudian approach we are encouraged to take to interpret dream-images concocted by a developmentally stunted victim of childhood abuse. Salome's infantile regression prompted one reviewer to note that when Salome turns into her own baby doll, "she says 'I want the head of Jochanaan' with the sound of 'Titti wants an ice cream.'"[55]

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[52] A photo by Thilo Beu shows Salome (Nicola Beller Carbone) in her sailor outfit sitting on Herod's (Roman Sadnik) lap as Herodias (Anjara Bartz) looks on: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803204300/http:/www.magdolnaparditka.com/tl_files/upload/images-upload/salome/gallery-s/salome-homepage06.jpg.

[53] A photograph by Thilo Beu shows Herod (Roman Sadnik) examining a baby doll with a red stain between its legs while Salome (Nicola Beller Carbone) watches: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803204451/http:/www.magdolnaparditka.com/tl_files/upload/images-upload/salome/gallery-s/salome-homepage03.jpg.

[54] A photograph by Thilo Beu shows a waiter (Rolf Broman) presenting Salome (Nicola Beller Carbone), Herod (Roman Sadnik), and Herodias (Anjara Bartz) with their own heads on platters. The decapitated body of Jochanaan lies in the foreground: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803204654/http:/www.magdolnaparditka.com/tl_files/upload/images-upload/salome/gallery-s/salome-homepage09.jpg.

[55] Markus Schwering, "Oper Bonn: Matrosenmädel im Kaffeehaus," *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, Feb. 2, 2015.

Three other productions in my collection fit into this pattern, representing Salome's trauma either through a specifically Freudian psychoanalytic lens or marked with childlike physicality more generally. In these productions, the seven veils of the dance are often veils in Salome's mind—psychic partitions behind or beneath which she has tried to conceal her trauma. Daniel Slater's 2015 *Salome* for Santa Fe Opera stages the Dance of the Seven Veils as an exposition of Salome's repressed memories. Alongside pantomimes of Herod molesting Salome as a child, we see visions of Salome's late father who closely resembles Jochanaan.[56] In Matthias Kaiser's 2010 production at the Theater Ulm in Germany, Salome changes into a pleated pink overall skirt and ties her hair into pigtails with pink ribbons as Herod dons a surgical coat and rubber gloves to stage the Dance of the Seven Veils as a perverted game of "doctor."[57] David McVicar also evokes a childlike image of Salome in his 2008 production for London's Royal Opera House, though somewhat more subtly.[58] Salome plays the part of her childhood self in a series of flashbacks in place of the Dance of the Seven Veils, and then in the present-day events that follow she continues to display childlike body language by seizing Jochanaan's head from the executioner and wrapping her whole body around it.[59]

In these productions, encumbering Salome with an explicit childhood sexual trauma serves to compromise the agency with which she desires Jochanaan and manipulates Herod. The reduction of Salome to a stunted woman-child undermines her ability to choose these paths.

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[56] A photograph by Ken Howard shows Salome (Alex Penda) writhing in Jochanaan's blood in front of an image of a frightened little girl: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803204905/http:/santafenewmexican.com/content/tncms/assets/v3/editorial/d/be/dbea1e76-30c9-11e5-92f9-2f8cbc66ad03/55b027f417b78.image.jpg?resize=1200%2C811.

[57] A photograph by Jochen Klenk shows Salome (Oxana Arkaeva) in a school-girl outfit holding the severed head of Jochanaan: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803205104/https:/www.tagblatt.de/Bilder/Verzweifeltes-Maedchen-Oxana-Arkaeva-als-Salome-Foto-Jochen-139403h.jpg.

[58] McVicar's production was remounted in 2012 and 2018.

[59] A photograph by Clive Barda shows Salome (Angela Denoke) limp in Herod's (Gerhard Siegel) arms during a flashback in the Dance of the Seven Veils: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803205301/https:/live.staticflickr.com/4074/4754987650_a76b12cc51_b.jpg.

These Salomes cease making choices at all; their actions are symptoms of their trauma as we understand it.

Salome Takes Revenge: The next four productions all see Salome through an extra-textual revenge fantasy of one kind or another. The Salome in Guy Joosten's 2009 production for Barcelona and Brussels stands out for her capacity to leverage her past trauma to achieve her goals with Herod. The first significant change is Narraboth's death. Instead of unintentionally driving him to suicide during her encounter with Jochanaan, Joosten's Salome murders Narraboth. When the time for the Dance of the Seven Veils comes, Salome dances briefly and taunts and teases Herod before screening a video that exposes her stepfather's abuse in front of her mother and the assembled banquet guests.[60] The video contains footage shot by Herod of Salome as a child cut together with footage of her as a woman. We see Herod's recognizable hand reach into the frame and touch Salome. Toward the end of the video, Herod tears the projection screen down, but Salome turns the projector around into the audience. The onstage spectators stare out at the audience and react in horror to the remainder of the video, which presumably contains an explicit act of sexual abuse, and which we in the audience can no longer see as it is projected onto the imagined fourth wall. Unlike the Salomes above who have involuntary flashbacks during the Dances of the Seven Veils, this Salome chooses to reveal the past in order to shame Herod and compel him to give her Jochanaan's head. The ending of Joosten's staging is curious and suggests a greater sense of triumph for Salome than is typically possible for the murdered heroine. Alone at a deserted banquet table, Salome sings her final line

[60] A photograph by Antoni Bofill shows Salome (Nina Stemme) sitting downstage while Herod (Robert Brubaker) watches the film roll: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803205508/http:/www.musicweb-international.com/SandH/2009/Jul-Dec09/Salome2%20%C2%A9A%20Bofill.jpg.

of music, slumps back with an expression of ecstasy, and goes limp in her chair with her eyes open but glazed over. Herod comes back onstage, observes Salome's limp body for a moment, and then orders her death, but she still does not move. At the percussive chords in the orchestra that typically accompany Salome's murder, an inexplicably recapitated Jochanaan walks into the scene. Herod sees him and runs away, terrified. Salome sits up in her chair suddenly and the lights go down as she and Jochanaan look at each other.[61] Reviews of the production have surprisingly little to say about this final twist. I understand this ending as a kind of Liebestod for Salome. She expires having accomplished everything she desires and is united with Jochanaan in death. There is a great sense of fulfilment that comes from seeing Salome and Jochanaan share the stage in these final moments.

Tatjana Gürbaca's 2009 *Salome* in Dusseldorf simplifies the revenge storyline. After we witness a flashback exposing Herod's sexual abuse during the Dance of the Seven Veils, Salome kills everyone on stage by stabbing the majority and shooting Herod.[62] Mariame Clément staged a *Salome* in 2018 at the Aalto Theater in Essen that hearkens back to some of the themes in the childhood-regression *Salome*s above, but her Salome finishes the dance ready to fight.[63] When Herod initially refuses her request for the head of Jochanaan, she holds a gun to his head to force him to comply.[64]

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[61] A video of the production's ending, posted to Liceu Opera's YouTube channel in 2009, can be found here: https://archive.org/details/joosten-salome-end.

[62] Gürbaca's production was remounted in 2020. A photograph by Klaus Grünberg shows Salome (Morenike Fadayomi) at the opera's conclusion: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803210708/http:/www.klausgruenberg.de/bilder/salome/salome-gruenberg-ende-silhouette.jpg.

[63] A photograph by Martin Kaufhold shows Salome (Annemarie Kremer) in a tutu and neutral mask performing her dance: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803211134/http:/www.mariameclement.net/img/salome/13-Salome-PhotoMartinKaufhold.jpg.

[64] A photograph by Martin Kaufhold shows Salome (Annemarie Kremer) holding Herod (Rainer Maria Röhr) at gunpoint: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803211327/http:/www.mariameclement.net/img/salome/18-Salome-PhotoMartinKaufhold.jpg.

Finally, a production by Ted Huffman for the Staatenhaus Köln-Deutz in 2018 also fits into the theme of Salome's revenge and has been heralded in the press as a laudably feminist *Salome*.[65] Huffman took full advantage of the backdrop of Cologne's Statehouse and created a patriarchal dystopia in a modern political setting. The columned hallway is lined with identically dressed women sitting leashed on stools. Throughout the action, we witness men leading the women offstage and then returning them to their perches while the women grow increasingly disheveled. This Dance of the Seven Veils is remarkable among this group of productions because it is actually a striptease. As Salome dances and undresses for Herod, she exudes a power and confidence in her motives that has been largely absent from these other Salomes. As the dance progresses, the sex-slaves get riled up and join in. They fight back against the men that are holding them and dance energetically around the stage and on the banquet table. After the dance, when Herod finally agrees to deliver Jochanaan's head to Salome, guards escort an alive and intact Jochanaan onto the stage. While Salome sings her final soliloquy, she kills Jochanaan herself by cutting his throat and then smothering him. Salome's silent confidante—an addition by Huffman—frees the sex-slaves from their bonds and then all the women jointly kill every man onstage.[66] Salome shoots Herod herself and she is alive when the curtain falls.

In Huffman's production, it is not actually made explicit whether Salome herself has been raped. She is spared the debasement of the sex-slaves, which is presumably a privilege of her class. But even though this Salome is not necessarily a victim of rape, as a woman she is still certainly a victim of this culture of extreme male dominance and sexual violence. The act of

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[65] A promotional video, posted to Oper Köln's YouTube channel in 2018, can be found here: https://archive.org/details/huffman-promo. The video contains depictions of violence including Salome's murder of Jochanaan.

[66] A photograph by Paul Leclaire shows Salome (Ingela Brimberg) after shooting Herod, surrounded by the freed sex slaves: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803211537/https:/bachtrack.com/files/92481-ingela-brimberg--salome---statisterie-der-oper-koln.jpg.

revenge here is shared by all of the women oppressed by Herod and his patriarchal order. This Salome is the only one we have seen that remains essentially in control of herself in her dance, despite the trauma and oppression of her life. There are glimmers of her inner turmoil at moments in the Dance, but primarily we see a crafty manipulator at work. The Dance of the Seven Veils retains its status a tool for Salome to harness Herod's gaze and gain an advantage. She executes her dance with a cool professionalism that makes its transactional character clear, while behind her we see the stirrings of rebellion in the other women—Salome's sisters in oppression.

Salome is Denied the Head of Jochanaan: Huffman's *Salome* also belongs to a group of productions in which Salome never holds the decapitated head of Jochanaan. In Szemerédy and Parditka's Freudian Salome above, Salome is delivered Herod's head instead of Jochanaan's at the opera's conclusion in a Freudian twist—Jochanaan, the object of her hysterical sexual desire, is swapped out for her stepfather. Two other productions not yet discussed fit into this category. Francisco Negrin directed *Salome* at the Palau de les Arts in Valencia in 2010.[67] At the end of this production, Salome is delivered the full corpse of the Baptist, under whose head Herod slides a silver platter with an air of mocking compliance.[68] Negrin has said that he dispensed with the delivery of the head simply because he interpreted Salome's demand as an expression meaning she wants him killed.[69] But regardless of Negrin's intent, the absence of the lone head in Salome's final soliloquy feels like an anticlimax here—even a failing on Salome's part—because

[67] Negrin's production was remounted in 2018 at the Asociación Bilbaína de Amigos de la Ópera in Bilbao, Spain, and had been scheduled for a 2020 revival at the Houston Grand Opera before cancellation due to COVID-19.
[68] A photograph by Moreno Esquibel shows Salome (Camilla Nylund) with the body of Jochanaan (Albert Dohmen): https://web.archive.org/web/20200803212517/http:/negrin.com/francisco/wp-content/uploads/salome-richard-strauss-bilbao-spain.jpg.
[69] Francisco Negrin quoted in Federico Simón, "Mujeres trágicas tras el telón," *Ediciones El País,* June 2, 2010.

of both the ubiquity of the image of the decapitated head on the silver platter and the fervency with which Salome again and again insists she be given "den Kopf des Jochanaan."[70] Romeo Castellucci's abstract, symbolic staging for the 2018 Salzburg Festival ends in similar disappointment.[71] This Salome is delivered the head of a black horse (earlier in the staging the horse symbolizes the Baptist) and then later, Jochanaan's headless body.[72] Salome is clearly disappointed by these deliveries; at one point she holds the horse's head over the neck of the corpse and later she holds her hands over the severed neck, mimes the shape of an invisible head, and kisses an invisible mouth.

Compared to these other productions that deny Salome the head of the Baptist, Huffman's production, wherein Salome is given Jochanaan alive, does not read as a disappointment in the same way. Huffman's Salome has different priorities from the other Salomes discussed here, and from the Salomes of more traditional productions of the opera. While we have no reason not to believe that her desire for Jochanaan is motivating her, the real thrust of Huffman's story is toward the violence the women wreak on their oppressors at the opera's close. The spectacle of Salome gleefully smothering the bloody and struggling Jochanaan displays an interest in vengeance more than a sexual desire for his mouth. This is a man Salome can punish, both for his own sins against her and as a scapegoat for the sins of her stepfather and his cohort.

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[70] She asks for the head eight times before Herod agrees, and goes through the gamut of German verbs to request: "ich möchte… will ich… ich verlange von dir… ich fordre… gib mir… *den Kopf des Jochanaan*."

[71] Castellucci's *Salome* is not necessarily a victim of sexual assault, but this is one interpretation of the staging. She is costumed in a white dress with a large red spot on the back at the height of her buttocks. The spot appears to be blood, but this could be a sign of menstruation, speaking to Salome's womanhood and fertility—this connects with the significance of the full moon in the libretto—or the blood could indicate violent sexual penetration, likely from an abuse. There is no violence in the Dance of the Seven Veils, but Salome lies motionless on a stone, evoking images of the ritual sacrifice of young women.

[72] A photograph by Ruth Walz shows Salome (Asmik Grigorian) in a pool of milk with the body of Jochanaan and a horse's head: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803212815/https:/www.operanews.com/uploadedImages/Opera_News_Magazine/2020/2/Recordings/RecordingsSalome_onstagehdl220.jpg

Herod Rapes Salome in the Present: In addition to disclosing sexual abuse in Salome's childhood, several productions include a rape in the present during the Dance of the Seven Veils. Of those productions already discussed above, Clément's and Negrin's Salomes are both raped offstage. During Clément's dance scene, Salome alternates between dancing and performing a pantomime depicting acts of assault and self-harm. She is eventually interrupted by Herod, who forces her under the table with him and out of sight. The guests look away, embarrassed, but do not intervene. Salome eventually emerges from beneath the table disheveled and takes a drink of wine. For Negrin, Salome's dance is interrupted by Herod projecting voyeuristic footage he has taken of Salome as a child. Unlike Joosten's production, in which Salome chooses to show similar footage in order to expose Herod's paedophilic tendencies, Negrin uses this footage as a weapon of intimidation that Herod wields against his stepdaughter. Herod then drags Salome into an adjacent room offstage and when he reemerges he is fastening his clothing. Salome crawls out behind him, clearly weakened and in pain.

McVicar's *Salome* belongs to this subgroup as well, though his dance scene plays with time in a way that makes it difficult to ascertain whether the implied rape at its conclusion takes place in the past or the present. Salome and Herod move through time and enact scenes from their past together. The last scene concludes with Herod pulling Salome urgently toward himself followed by a full blackout. After this scene, Herod marches back onto the set in the present, glowing, as he sings, "Ah! Splendid! Wonderful! Wonderful!"[73] Salome staggers in behind him, doubled over and wringing her hands. I read this scene as a rape in the present day, which Salome understands as a culmination of years of sexual harassment and grooming.

[73] "Ah! Herrlich! Wundervoll! Wundervoll!"

Two additional productions fit this pattern. In her 2011 *Salome* for Kiel Opera, Silvana Schröder's Dance of the Seven Veils culminates in Herod forcing Salome to perform oral sex on him, which she punctuates with some half-hearted dancing. Meanwhile, a video projection shows a great dark hand pull back seven blankets from a child Salome's sleeping figure. Here, the sevenfold unveiling of Salome's body is transferred from the context of an exotic striptease to that of the sexualization and abuse of an unconscious child. Kay Metzger's 2015 production of *Salome* in Detmold does not imply a history of sexual abuse, but its staging of a rape during the Dance of the Seven Veils is striking and is worth consideration, especially in the larger context of my project. Herod rapes Salome in Metzger's production while Salome fantasizes about Jochanaan. The Baptist is actually onstage in place of Herod as Salome's imagined stand-in for her stepfather.[74] When the rape occurs, Salome moves between experiencing it as a fantasy union with Jochanaan, and as the violation it is in reality. Metzger's production also participates in the revenge trope discussed above; Salome closes the opera by massacring all present with wild gunfire.

Finally, Sofia Jupither's *Salome* for the Royal Swedish Opera in 2013 is worth consideration here. Like Metzger's, this production does not imply childhood sexual abuse, but stages an attempted gang rape during the Dance that is interesting in my larger context. Jupither's Salome is mobbed by Herod's banquet guests and passed around while he watches. Herod himself does not touch Salome in this dance, but he takes part in humiliating her and

[74] A photograph by Kerstin Schomburg shows Salome (Susanne Serfling) dancing with Jochanaan (James Tolksdorf) who has taken Herod's place in her imagination during the dance: https://web.archive.org/web/20190129071458/http:/theaterpur.net/assets/components/phpthumbof/cache/015ac43cf045d73d78e2afbdf3ea9ac2.0f8b86db055ec23fa875088a2b4d1550.jpg. Some footage of the dance can be seen between 2:09 and 3:09 of this promotional video, posted to the Landestheater Detmold Youtube channel in 2015: https://archive.org/details/metzger-promo. The video contains depictions of attempted rape and violence including gun violence.

sprays her with champagne in a gesture both decadent and degrading. Salome is left trying to rub herself clean the rest of the opera.

SALOME'S RAPE AND PERFORMATIVITY

In this section, I am interested in the above productions as a group. As I have shown through my analysis of Egoyan's *Salome*, these productions individually may be quite nuanced in the way they characterize Salome as a rape victim, yet I am extremely troubled by the implications and popularity of this trope generally. To answer the question of what the rapes in these productions *do*, I return to the two poles of agency and style. I also consider trends in the critical discourse surrounding these operas as evidence of their reception.

Issues of Agency

As we saw in Egoyan's interpretation, one of the principal things that giving Salome a history of sexual abuse does is account for her actions after the Dance of the Seven Veils. I have mostly focused on how justifying Salome's actions in this way serves to qualify them and thereby to strip them of much of their power. It is also important to consider the ways in which this interpretive project humanizes Salome. Levin applauds Egoyan for "[refusing] to reproduce a conventional account of the eponymous heroine as a cunning little vixen."[75] Similarly, Clark writes that "rather than being reduced to a seductive *femme fatale* figure or hysterically decadent woman, Egoyan's Salome emerges as a youthful and sympathetic character, an adolescent who is

[75] Levin, "Operatic School for Scandal," 248. Levin also writes that he finds Strauss's opera deeply problematic and appreciates that Egoyan's production begins to suggest how and why.

tragically molested and abused both physically and psychologically."[76] For a female monster written by men, a project of sympathetic humanization certainly has value.

I also do not mean to understate the kinds of agency that the Salomes introduced in this chapter have. In most of these stories, Salome still exerts an incredible amount of power after the Dance of the Seven Veils. With the exceptions of Castellucci's and Szemerédy/Parditka's productions, these Salomes still succeed at getting their hands on Jochanaan's head one way or another. Some of these Salomes take new action not assigned to them in Wilde's and Strauss's texts. The Salomes of Huffman, Gürbaca, and Metzger kill Herod after getting what they want from him. Clément's and Joosten's Salomes humiliate Herod to achieve their goals. Still, as I have detailed above, the introduction of a traumatic pathology complicates Salome's agency.

The power differential between Salome and Herod is already immense in Wilde and Strauss's *Salome*, and it is exacerbated in these productions where Herod is Salome's rapist. This power relationship is the reason I have not hesitated to refer to Herod's sexual abuses of Salome in this chapter incest. Feminist analyses of father-daughter incest have focused on the power differential between a male parent and female child rather than details of genetic relation or specific sexual acts.[77] Dominelli defines incest as "all unwanted sexual advances that occur between individuals who are involved in relationships of trust and in which one individual is subordinate to and possibly dependent on the other."[78] Herod is not only a parent to Salome, but is also a political leader; his power over her is both patriarchal and political. In Wilde's story, the fact that Salome is able to wield any power and take any action against Herod is exceptional.

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[76] Clark, "The Dirt on Salome," 170.
[77] Salome's father, Herod II was the half-brother of Herod Antipas (the basis for the Herod in this story). The historical Salome and Herod Antipas were related by blood, but that element of their family history is not included in the text of Wilde's or Strauss's *Salome*.
[78] Lena Dominelli, "Betrayal of Trust: A Feminist Analysis of Power Relationships in Incest Abuse and its Relevance for Social Work Practice," *British Journal of Social Work* 19, no. 4 (1989): 297.

Introducing the rape backstory tempers this power extraordinarily. Pathologizing Salome's motives for wanting Jochanaan's head takes some of that agency out of her hands. Further, her choice to use her body and sexuality to get what she wants from Herod is deeply complicated by the introduction of a history of nonconsensual sexual behaviour.

The productions above that infantilize Salome through childlike body language and costuming crystallize a lot of what is troubling in casting Salome as a victim. Her power over Herod is no longer something she consciously wields, but something she carries in spite of herself. Film theorist Mary Ann Doane describes the *femme fatale* as "an ambivalent figure because she is not the subject of power but its *carrier* (the connotations of disease are appropriate here)."[79] Although, as Clark has pointed out, these Salomes circumvent typical *femme fatale* representations, Doane's characterization of the relationship between the *femme fatale* and her power feels relevant to the Salomes in this chapter. Yes, these Salomes are powerful, but within these structures of trauma and pathology they cannot understand that power or wield it with real agency. Their power, like their trauma, are diseases caught and carried, whose effects in the characters' lives are enormous but essentially involuntary.

Salome's lack of control over her power, both in terms of its motivation and its execution, can be seen in the choice by several of these directors to equate Herod with Jochanaan. Most explicit is Metzger's production, in which Salome fantasizes about Jochanaan while Herod rapes her during the Dance. The staging actually swaps Herod out for Jochanaan, leading the audience to identify Herod's violence with Jochanaan's body. Clément's Salome has flashbacks to self-harming in the scene when Jochanaan rejects her, and so similarly maps trauma caused by Herod onto Jochanaan as a scapegoat. And in Szemerédy and Parditka's Salome, we see Salome sitting

[79] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 2. Emphasis in original.

across from Jochanaan's headless body but presented with Herod's head on a platter. Equating Jochanaan with Herod in Salome's mind does a couple of things to the story. It suggests that her desire for Jochanaan's head has more to do with wanting him dead (as a stand-in for Herod) than sexually desiring the head itself. It also complicates her desire from the outset by aligning her sexual interest in Jochanaan with sexualized feelings for her stepfather. All of this contributes to the overall diminishing of Salome's agency in these rape stories. Even her desire for Jochanaan cannot begin to be understood outside of the terms of her abuse in these productions.

The worst thing that the Salome-as-rape-victim trope does is sanitize Salome's radical femininity. Traditionally, Salome's social power comes from her adherence to a typically masculine constellation of sexuality, power, and violence.[80] Her predatory sexuality is abnormal in a woman, and this is behind both the fear she instills and the history of reading Salome as inherently male. By making Salome a victim of rape, these productions place her firmly back on the feminine side in the patriarchal order. She is made to be the receptor of sexualized violence first, so that her later forays into a violent sexuality can be explained by means of this instigating trauma.

There is a potential antidote to the tragic victimization of Salome in these productions in the revenge-fantasy trope. Many of this subgroup of productions revel in their violence in a way that reminds me of those Renaissance paintings of Judith beheading Holofernes that emphasize the brutality of the act and the power of the woman.[81] At its best, introducing a storyline about sexual violence to this opera motivates Salome into an ultimate act of triumphant, revolutionary

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[80] For more on the connections of typical "masculine" sexuality with violence and "feminine" sexuality with pain, see Irina Anderson and Kathy Doherty, *Accounting for Rape: Psychology, Feminism and Discourse Analysis in the Study of Sexual Violence* (London: Routledge, 2008), 6.

[81] Female painters are relatively well represented among these depictions. See Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1610) and Elisabetta Sirani, *Judith and Holofernes* (mid-seventeenth century).

female rage. And in the absence of a canonical opera about Judith, Salome does seem a good candidate for such directorial treatment.[82] Huffman's revenge *Salome* stands out: a grotesque exploration of deviant sexuality this production is not, but Huffman's Salome claims agency in different ways. Not only does she kill Jochanaan herself, she plots to free all the other women onstage and leads them in a massacre of the men. Huffman invokes sexual violence in his *Salome* to tell a story about radical female agency, but he tells it through the mode of violence more than the mode of sex. His Salome still manipulates Herod during the Dance of the Seven Veils, but only as a precursor to staging a bloody revolution.

Issues of Style

Although all of these productions rely on the understanding that Herod has raped Salome, only a few of the directors follow Egoyan in staging a sexual assault: Schröder, Jupither, and Metzger. In Schröder's Dance of the Seven Veils, Salome is forced to perform oral sex on Herod, and the representation is starkly realist. The placement of Salome's body between Herod's legs means there is no need for onstage nudity, but the implication is unambiguous. It is jarring to see a real-time assault take place to Strauss's music for the Dance of the Seven Veils.[83] The music's exaggerated performance of Orientalist eroticism interacts uncomfortably with the disturbing, realist stage action.

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[82] I direct interested parties to Alexander Serov's 1863 opera *Judith*.

[83] A number of opera reviewers of these productions have perceived an incongruity between music and stage action in many of these dances. José Miguel Balzola, "R. Strauss Salome," *ÓperaActual.com*, February 17, 2018; Göran Forsling, "Must-See Salome in Stockholm," *Seen and Heard International*, December 3, 2013; José M. Irurzun, "Strauss: Salome," *Seen and Heard International, MusicWeb International*; Thibaut Radomme, "Un spectacle sans queue… ni tête," *Rue du Théâtre*, February 12, 2012; Redactie (username), "Pervers-Sensuele Salomé," *Klassiek Centraal*, June 28, 2012; Sylvain Rouvroy, "Nicola Beller Carbone, suberbe Salomé à Bruxelles," *ResMusica*, February 19, 2012.

I discussed Metzger's rape scene briefly in terms of its equation of the bodies of Jochanaan and Herod. During the Dance of the Seven Veils, we seem to watch Salome and Jochanaan engage in consensual, romantic foreplay before Jochanaan seizes her roughly and rapes her as she struggles to get away. The Jochanaan in this scene is wearing a tuxedo like Herod's instead of the straitjacket we see him in earlier. Despite the inversion of the principal male characters, the depictions of lovemaking and then rape are essentially realist here too. In seeing Herod as Jochanaan, we are seeing inside Salome's sexual fantasy, which only begins to break down as the violence continues. The rape stands out as particularly brutal and frightening after the sweet romantic play at the beginning of the encounter. As spectators, we are made to adjust the image of the rape in our own minds' eyes. We remind ourselves that the man raping Salome is not who he appears to be. Actually, he is Herod. He is her stepfather. The act of correction required of us as spectators highlights the wrongness of the incest while we watch the horrors of the rape.

Finally, Jupither's production may be seen to simulate a rape onstage as well. During the Dance of the Seven Veils, Salome struggles to continue dancing while the banquet guests pass her around and simulate lewd advances toward her that escalate to stylized depictions of rape. The Dance concludes with Salome leashed and bound and Herod soaking her with champagne. It is unclear whether we are meant to read the Dance as a true representation of events—an act of humiliation. It is also possible to understand it as a metaphor for a gang rape stylized for the stage; to me, the vivid imagery of Herod's ejaculating champagne bottle implies a metaphorical meaning. This Salome applies warpaint to her face in preparation for the Dance, as if going into battle. She anticipates the horrors that await her in the Dance and decides to bear them in order to get what she wants out of Herod. There is a power in this, but I am not convinced it is enough to

counteract this particular representation of gendered violence. The choreography of this Dance emphasizes again and again the dominance of this group of men in every way over their female victim. And after the dance, Salome tries to rub the paint from her face (perhaps a gesture of regret?) but cannot remove the stain.

There are many reasons for not staging a rape in the other productions that subscribe to the trope of Salome-as-raped. Locating the rape offstage avoids a great number of practical problems that arise from performing rape, including risk to performers and audience outrage. It cordons off sexual assault as an unspeakable horror that can be alluded to but never made clear. But directors who do not stage the rape must sacrifice some of their control over how it will be understood. In her analysis of Mary Birnbaum's 2015 staging of *The Rape of Lucretia* for Juilliard Opera, Ellie Hisama applauds the production for leaving "no doubt as to the sincerity of Lucretia's vigorous resistance."[84] This kind of clarity is important. The tension between Wilde's sexually predatory Salome and the sexually traumatized Salomes of these productions means there is a real risk of implying Salome's culpability in her own abuse. But by staging the rape, Egoyan and Metzger can show us Salome desperately fighting her rapist; Egoyan does this with stylized body movement, and Metzger with a direct audience view of her face as she panics and struggles. They leave no room for questions about whether Salome wanted or enjoyed the encounter, and that is crucial given the way our cultural conversations about sexual violence so often employ victim-blaming and rhetoric about "blurred lines" around consent. When directors tell stories with sexual violence at their centre, making strong, thoughtful choices about how to represent that violence allows them to push back against problematic social ideas and conventions.

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[84] Hisama, "A Feminist Staging of Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*," 240.

The role of the gaze is central to Wilde and Strauss's *Salome*. Salome is an object of constant visual fascination and scrutiny by the other characters and by the audience. In this context the choice to make her rape visible—to make it a spectacle—is a vital one. Egoyan's production makes the rape spectacular through the visual form of dance. Jupither also stages Salome's abuse in the context of a performance, but her Salome is performing for the other characters, whereas Egoyan's shadow-play is only perceived by the audience. In both cases, the context of performance sets up a kind of self-conscious spectatorship. Salome's abuse is framed as entertainment in a way that is deeply troubling.

Spectacle is a fraught medium through which to perceive traumatic experiences. What does it mean to ethically perform trauma and to consume trauma as entertainment? Anna Harpin has analyzed Philip Ridley's 2005 play *Mercury Fur* with an eye to these questions. In that case, she finds that the play thematizes sight and viewing, and dramatizes "the folly of presuming that looking is purely passive."[85] Harpin finds that Ripley's audience becomes not merely spectators but witnesses to another's pain. Several of the productions here highlight the centrality of looking in *Salome*, but none so much as Egoyan. Egoyan's *Salome* actually opens with a similar gambit to *Mercury Fur*, with a single flashlight beam guiding the audience's eyes around the darkness onstage.

By making his audience aware of their role as spectators, Egoyan, like Ridley, encourages *Salome*'s viewers to engage with the traumatic experience as witnesses to pain. Harpin says of Ridley's theatrical practice: "Far from being a tantalizing display of violent nihilism, *Mercury Fur* demands a thoughtful and sensate engagement with the traumatic experience."[86] If our aim in putting rape onstage is to represent suffering in an ethical way, it is vital to take some steps in

[85] Anna Harpin, "Intolerable Acts," *Performance Research* 16, no. 1 (2011): 108.
[86] Ibid., 110.

the creative approach to problematize or challenge an audience's tendency to revel in "violent nihilism" or to fetishize the suffering object as a voyeur. Egoyan does this by not only thematizing the gaze in his production, but by erecting an obstacle to simple perception and understanding with the multivalent symbolism of the Dance of the Seven Veils. The dreamy interplay of the video, shadow projections, and dance demands active interpretation on the part of the audience. This Dance asks its viewers to work in order to understand, and thereby to assume a critical distance. The artistry of Egoyan's Dance works as a stumbling block for voyeurism; his audience members are implicated in the trauma they work to reconstruct.

In an exploration of contemporary approaches to staging rape in spoken theatre, Lisa Fitzpatrick has noticed two contrary tendencies in representing sexual violence: methods focused on showing the harsh reality of sexual violence, and methods that seek "to present the subjective embodied experience of sexual violence affectively."[87] Schröder and Metzger both tend toward "reality" in their depictions of the acts of rape. These scenes of implied oral and vaginal penetration respectively are incredibly difficult to watch, and there can be value in this discomfort. These representations make plain to their audiences that sexual violence is humiliating, terrifying, and painful. I think Metzger exceeds Schröder in the ways that both directors reach beyond realism in their respective Dances of the Seven Veils. Schröder adds a video projection of a large dark hand pulling seven blankets off the sleeping child-Salome. While this visual informs us that Herod's abuses began in Salome's childhood, the camera's gaze encourages us to objectify and sexualize the child as we see her through Herod's lecherous eyes. Metzger, on the other hand, shows us Salome's subjective experience of the attack. Here, we see through Salome's eyes when we initially perceive Herod as Jochanaan in her fantasy.

[87] Fitzpatrick, *Rape on the Contemporary Stage*, 215.

Among those *Salome* productions that do not stage the sexual assault implied by their Dances of the Seven Veils, there are examples of further exploration of Fitzgerald's subjective, affective mode of representation. I have expressed discomfort about the way that the Salomes in almost all of these productions are not allowed to dance during the Dance of the Seven Veils. I maintain that this is a key moment for Salome's character because it demonstrates her ability to harness the objectifying gaze of her stepfather to her advantage. Still, in a production in which Salome carries the trauma of a childhood sexual abuse at Herod's hands, I can appreciate that denying us Salome's dance can be thought of as serving a feminist approach to staging. In those productions by Szemerédy/Parditka, Slater, and McVicar, in which the Dance is staged as a psychological exploration of Salome's memories and trauma, we are given access to Salome's experience of the dance, rather than the dance as it is perceived by Herod and his guests. If the Dance for these traumatized Salomes is not a power play but rather a retraumatizing concession to their abusers, then the choice not to stage it can be seen as a move to refocus our attention from the abject horror of the incest to a sympathetic alignment with Salome's subjective experience.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE

I touched on the reception of Egoyan's *Salome* above, which was largely shaped by an oft-cited review by Tamara Bernstein for the *National Post* on January 21, 2002. Egoyan responded to Bernstein's review in the *Post* on January 24, explaining his concept and requesting an apology, and Bernstein wrote a follow up the next day doubling down on her criticism.[88] One

[88] I should note that one of Bernstein's major criticisms was of the production's alleged antisemitism. For my purposes, I am focused on Bernstein's concerns about misogyny and the staging of the rape.

topic of debate from this series of articles that is especially germane to my discussion regards Salome's agency. Bernstein argues that the rape "robs Salome of the only power she has in the opera, turning her sensuality into the rapist's lust."[89] Egoyan counters her in his response, claiming that his production "gives Salome much more power than merely through her sensuality. It gives her the power of understanding Herod's history of abuse against her, and the knowledge that she has found a way of being able to use that knowledge against him, to empower herself."[90] Bernstein remains unconvinced, responding bitingly, "Since when does getting gang raped and strangled constitute 'empowerment'?"[91] Of course, Bernstein is oversimplifying Egoyan's argument about empowerment to make her point; she goes on to clarify that "surely Salome's deed remains a desperate, twisted act of manipulation, not the kind of positive self-determination the word 'empowerment' suggests to me."[92] Bernstein cannot believe that meaningful self-determination is available to Salome after her sexual trauma. My initial response to this production was very similar in this regard, but as I have outlined above, the particulars of Egoyan's production make for a more nuanced representation of trauma.

In the rest of this section I outline some of the most common through-lines that emerge in the reviews of the other productions I have discussed in this chapter. While I expected some of these trends, others were surprising and sometimes troubling. The reviews cited here include both professional reviews for print and online sources, as well as less formal reviews self-published online. Because my interest is in reception and the legibility of a production concept to its audience, the opinions of both compensated and uncompensated critics are useful.

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[89] Tamara Bernstein, "A Night of Violation, Both Musically and Personally," *National Post*, January 23, 2002.
[90] Atom Egoyan, "Don't Let Salome Be Misunderstood: In My Vision of the Opera, Her Motivation Is the Key [The Director Answers Tamara Bernstein's Review]," *National Post*, January 24, 2002.
[91] Tamara Bernstein, "We Have No Moral Obligations to 'Great' Art [Tamara Bernstein Replies to Atom Egoyan on Salome]," *National Post*, January 25, 2002.
[92] Ibid.

I begin with one of the more troubling tropes of this discourse: the rhetorical downplaying of the severity of Salome's abuse. Reviewers of the productions by Joosten, Clément, and Szemerédy/Parditka refer to Herod and Salome's "incestuous relationship" or "disturbed relationship."[93] By placing the focus on Salome and Herod's familial bond, rather than the abuse that all three productions make quite clear, this language suggests Salome's complicity in this "relationship." This is one of the risks of alluding to sexual violence without representing it onstage: harmful cultural misconceptions about abusive relationships can creep in to fill those blanks. Yet even with its more explicit depictions of sexual violence, Jupither's production, in which Herod watches his stepdaughter's sexual humiliation, was described by more than one reviewer as concerning a "dysfunctional family," which strikes me as a rather gross understatement.[94]

Another handful of reviews go beyond suggesting Salome's complicity in her abuse to ask if she is even the *real* victim of the story. They characterize Salome as the abuser of Jochanaan to the exclusion of her own abuse. This abused-becomes-abuser trope comes in reviews of the productions by Joosten, Negrin, Metzger, McVicar, Slater, and Szemerédy/Parditka.[95] Of this list, only the Salomes of Joosten and Metzger perform extra-textual acts of violence, though we do see Szemerédy/Parditka's Salome fantasize about a

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[93] Frederike Berntsen, "Er ist toekomst na een getormenteerde jeugd," *De Verdieping Trouw*, January 30, 2012; Ana Maria Dávila, "El Liceu desvela el ultimo secreto de los siete velos de Salomé," *ElMundo.es*, June 16, 2009; Jan-Jakob Delanoye, "Salome: Hoe een dwaling een dwaling wordt," *Cutting Edge*, February 5, 2012; Thomas Kümmel, "Salome," in "Theatertipps: Aalto Theater Essen," *Thomas Kümmel, Diplom Regisseur*, March 31, 2018; Redactie, "Pervers-Sensuele Salomé"; Ansgar Skoda, "Verruchte, dunkle und schwere Klänge lassen eine unheilvolle Familiendynamik erbeben," *Kultur-Extra*, February 6, 2015; Aksel Tollåli, "A Quest for Love: Salome at the Royal Swedish Opera," *Bachtrack*, December 3, 2013.

[94] "Salome with Swedish Star Crew," *MyGuide2Stockholm*, November 13, 2016; Tollåli, "A Quest for Love."

[95] Jesús Aguado, "Otros mundos posibles," *Mundoclasico.com*, February 28, 2018; Jean-Marie Binst, "Regisseur Guy Joosten doorgrondt moderne Salome," *Bruzz*, January 1, 2012; Koen van Boxem, "Richard Strauss 'Salome' in De Munt broeierig incestdrama," *De Tijd*, January 27, 2012; Thomas Hilgemeier, "Wenn Opfer zu Tätern werden," *Theater Pur*; Barbara Luetgebrune, "Landestheater bringt Richard-Strauss-Oper 'Salome' auf die Bühne," *LZ.de*, January 29, 2015; Mary Nguyen, "Looking At Salome Through a Post-Weinstein Veil," *TrendFem*, January 12, 2018; Skoda, "Verruchte, dunkle und schwere Klänge."

massacre. One reviewer suggests that by the end of Slater's production, in which Herod is revealed to have murdered Salome's father, Salome "has become just as incestuous and murderous as her hated uncle."[96] I assume the incest to which the reviewer is referring is an imagined incest, because Jochanaan is closely connected with and resembles Salome's father in this Dance of the Seven Veils flashback. In Wilde's *Salomé*, and in the absence of a rape storyline, Jochanaan is the victim of the story as he falls prey to the lecherous desires of a spoiled princess. And in these productions about rape and child abuse, Salome is still responsible for Jochanaan's murder. But these reviewers are too quick to dismiss Salome's own victim-status in these productions. The reviewers that either foreground the harm Salome inflicts or downplay Herod's culpability in abusing his stepdaughter essentially decline to accept the directorial gambit of framing Salome as a sympathetic victim whose actions are rooted in trauma.

I have described many of these directors' approaches as acts of pathologizing Salome. A number of reviewers have not only perceived that these Salomes have psychopathologies behind their actions but have even offered up diagnoses for the traumatized heroine. These diagnoses range from the broad to the specific, from "completely insane" to a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder.[97] Much of the pathologizing is closely allied with turn-of-the-century ideas about psychology—primarily via Freud. The explicit Freud connections are confined to reviews of the productions by Szemerédy/Parditka and Slater, both of which are set at the turn of the

[96] Charles T. Downey, "Powerful 'Salome' and Problematic Mozart at Santa Fe Opera," *Classical Review,* August 8, 2015.
[97] On Szemerédy and Parditka's production, Peter Bilsing, "Salome: Ein surrealistischer Alptraum," *Musenblätter,* February 5, 2015; on Joosten's production, Binst, "Regisseur Guy Joosten doorgrondt moderne Salome."

twentieth century and clearly thematize Freudian psychology.[98] Schwering's review of Szemerédy/Parditka's production describes Salome as a "schizoid" demonstrating infantile regression. Downey's review of Slater's production brings up the neo-Freudian Electra Complex, and while the fun of diagnosing one Strauss heroine with recourse to another does not escape me, it once again implies Salome's complicity in her abuse.[99]

Many of the reviewers of these *Salome* productions are preoccupied with the idea that the way we judge Salome, and specifically whether we are able to forgive her, is central to the reception of this story. Diagnosing Salome serves this line of thinking by supplying spectators with a reason to forgive her. I find it a curious way to interact with this story, but I wonder whether it necessarily follows readings of Salome as a victim of sexual assault. Perhaps these reviewers are projecting contemporary anxieties about victim-blaming onto this narrative. But as we saw in the reviews above that wonder who the true victim is, Salome is quite a fraught example of victimhood and an uneasy fit with contemporary discourses about survivors of sexual violence in the real world. One of the central problems with the sex-abuse version of the Salome story is that it is challenging to reconcile Salome's weaponized sexuality (which she employs against Narraboth and Herod) with a victimhood powerful enough to justify her desire for the head of the Baptist. If Salome's trauma is so all-encompassing that we can excuse her violent appetite for Jochanaan, her ability to cunningly seduce Narraboth and outsmart Herod appear

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[98] On Szemerédy/Parditka's producition: Andreas Falentin, "Im Café Freud," *Concerti*, February 2, 2015; Schwering, "Oper Bonn: Matrosenmädel im Kaffeehaus"; "Tod im Caféhaus," *Theatergemeinde Bonn*, January 9, 2015. On Slater's production: Downey, "Powerful 'Salome'"; Gregory Sullivan Isaacs, "Thinly Veiled: At Santa Fe Opera, Richard Strauss's *Salome* Has Excellent Singers but the Director's Concept Is Misguided," *Theater Jones*, August 2, 2015. One of Jupither's reviewers facetiously notes that he thinks Salome's is more a case for Dr. Phil than Dr. Freud. Lars Sjöberg, "Ett fall för doktor Phil," *Kultur, expressem.se*, November 14, 2016.

[99] Carl Jung proposed the Electra Complex as an inverse of the Oedipus Complex to refer to a female child's sexual competition with her mother and desire for her father.

incongruous. But if she is a conniving seductress at these points in the opera, it is hard to accept the directorial vision of her as a sympathetic victim who cannot be blamed for her actions.

I was initially surprised to find so many productions that fit this pattern of sexual violence and childhood trauma, but it seems this approach to *Salome* is familiar enough to some European audiences to have become passé. Reviewers of Joosten, Negrin, Clément, Kaiser, Gürbaca, Huffman, and Szemerédy/Parditka all refer to this interpretation as a trend in one way or another, and many refer specifically to other productions on my list.[100] One of Jupither's reviewers referred to the abuse of women as "the new black" in Swedish opera in 2013.[101] Along with recognizing the trendiness of an abuse-victim *Salome*, some reviewers have accepted the incestuous abuse element of the story so completely that they imagine its invention lies with Wilde and not with contemporary directors.[102] Although some amount of incestuous desire on Herod's part is absolutely clear in Wilde's *Salomé*, I will say again that incestuous desire and incestuous rape are not coterminous. These directors have made the choice to turn Herod's incestuous desire into action, and specifically action against a child in his paternal care. Some of these reviewers express distaste with the child-abuse storyline, but they do so on the grounds that it is dramatically unnecessary because incest is allegedly already present in the text, rather than

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[100] Irurzun, "Strauss: Salome"; Claude Jottrand, "Même pas peur! Salome-Bruxelles (La Monnaie)," *ForumOpera.com,* January 28, 2012; Jürgen Kanold, "Ein Klangerlebnis: James Allen Gähres dirigiert die 'Salome' am Theater Ulm," *Südwest Presse Neckar-Chronik*, April 24, 2010; Karsten Mark, "Der Fanatiker sitzt im Keller ein," *choices.de,* May 30, 2018; Javier del Olivo, "'Salome' con Jennifer Holloway en la temporada de abao," *Platea Magazine*, February 18, 2018; Stefan Schmöe, "Amoklauf einer traumatisierten Tochter aus reichem Hause," *Online Musik Magazin*, September 19, 2009; Stefan Schmöe, "Eine schrecklich verstörte Familie," *Online Musik Magazin*, February 1, 2015; Stefan Schmöe, "Empört Euch!," *Online Musik Magazin,* March 31, 2018; Stefan Schmöe, "Die Rache der Frauen," *Online Musik Magazin,* October 18, 2018. Stefan Schmöe is behind four of these reviews for the same online music magazine. He points out the links between the four productions he has reviewed: those by Gürbaca, Szemerédy/Parditka, Clément, and Huffman.

[101] Ditte Hammar, "Salome med brutala penseldrag," *Nummer.se,* December 3, 2013.

[102] Boxem, "Richard Strauss 'Salome' in De Munt broeierig incestdrama"; Delanoye, "Salome: Hoe een dwaling een dwaling wordt"; Mark, "Der Fanatiker sitzt im Keller ein"; Redactie, "Pervers-Sensuele Salomé"; Rouvroy, "Nicola Beller Carbone"; Schmöe, "Empört Euch!"; Schwering, "Oper Bonn: Matrosenmädel im Kaffeehaus." Boxem seems to locate the incestuous abuse is specifically Strauss's opera as opposed to Wilde's play.

because they take issue with the story. One reviewer, writing about Metzger's murderous Salome, suggests that even the brutal ending of the production, in which Salome massacres everyone, is itself somehow prefigured in Wilde's poetry.[103]

This collection of reviews reveals shifting attitudes about sexual assault in the wake of global conversations around the #MeToo and #TimesUp phenomena in 2017. Reviews about the productions by Huffman and Clément, both staged in 2018, refer explicitly to contemporary feminism and #MeToo.[104] Schmöe's review of Huffman's production even brings up Justice Brett Kavanaugh's 2018 appointment to the Supreme Court to set the scene for the importance of a feminist Salome. And while there are a number of productions on my list directed by women, reviewers note the "female perspective" of Clément's staging in much greater numbers, and more positively, than in any of the earlier productions by women.[105] One reviewer, writing about McVicar's Royal Opera House production, talks about the complications of watching Salome in 2018 in the midst of so many sexual harassment scandals, a cultural moment she summed up as "post-Weinstein."[106]

Even outside reviews of productions that explicitly make Salome a victim of sexual violence, some critics want to read these themes into Strauss's *Salome* itself in recent years. A review of Florida Grand Opera's 2018 production in the *Miami Herald* summarizes the plot of *Salome* as the story of "an abused, sexualized girl."[107] This production does not fit the pattern I

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[103] Ilse Franz-Nevermann, "Theaterpremiere: Salomes tödlicher Liebestraum," *LZ.de*, February 9, 2015.
[104] Manuel Brug, "Mörderin Salome: Der Amerikaner Ted Huffman inszeniert in Köln 'Salome' als definitive letzte 'House of Cards,'" *Brugs Klassiker*, November 8, 2018; Peter Franken, "Kremer en Netopil delen hoofdrol in Salome," *Place de l'Opera*, April 3, 2018; Schmöe, "Die Rache der Frauen."
[105] Ullrich Haucke, "'Salome' als Psychothriller," *Online Merker*, April 2, 2018; Kümmel, "Theatertipps: Aalto Theater Essen"; "Mariame Clément deutet in Essen Strauss' Oper 'Salome' feministisch um," *wa.de*, April 6, 2018; "'Salome' im Aalto-Theater: Aufbegehren einer Femme fatale," *WAZ*, March 28, 2018.
[106] Nguyen, "Looking at Salome through a Post-Weinstein Veil."
[107] Fabiola Santiago, "No, Florida Grand Opera, Sexual Assault Isn't a Thing of the Past. Ask Bill Cosby," *Miami Herald*, July 31, 2018.

have established in this chapter. It is in fact a relatively traditional *Salome*. Yet thanks to the flurry of public discourse about sexual harassment, women's rights, and women's sexuality at the time of its performance, reviews of this production have also engaged with *Salome* in terms of popular contemporary feminism. One reviewer notes that Salome's behaviour, while unsympathetic, represents "in these #MeToo times a vicarious triumph for women being viewed as sexual objects."[108] In another *Miami Herald* review, Celeste Landeros titles her article "#Salometoo" despite the fact that her article cites the director Bernard Uzan insisting he sees no connection between *Salome* and #MeToo. He clarifies that "it's not a man's world. It's a decadent world."[109] In a rather chilling sequence of events, Uzan was named just a few months after this interview in the *Washington Post* exposé on sexual assault in classical music. He left Florida Grand Opera, and indeed the field, after he was accused of sexually harassing and assaulting four women.[110]

The remarkable popularity of this interpretation of Salome-as-raped may be in part symptomatic of the proximity of both Expressionist music and *Regietheater* to psychoanalysis via their preoccupation with emotional interiority. Arnold Schoenberg referred to the power Expressionism has to represent the artist's inner processes.[111] Musicologist Gary Schmidgall has extended this interiority to fictional characters in Strauss's opera, understanding the music of

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[108] Lawrence Budmen, "A Problematic Princess Dilutes Impact of FGO's Dramatic 'Salome,'" *South Florida Classical Review*, January 28, 2018.
[109] Celeste Landeros, "#Salometoo: In a Critical Moment, Florida Grand Opera Explores a Woman's Sexuality," *Miami Herald*, January 23, 2018.
[110] Elizabeth Finny, "Florida Grand Opera Director and Company Part Ways after Allegations of Sexual Assault," *Miami Herald*, August 1, 2018, https://www.miamiherald.com/entertainment/performing-arts/article215936700.html.
[111] Jelena Hahl-Koch, ed., *Arnold Schoenberg/Wassily Kandinsky: Letters, Pictures and Documents* (New York: Faber, 1984), 98.

Salome as a kind of compositional psychoanalysis. He argues that Strauss's music does not aim to set Wilde's stilted poetic language, but rather takes into account "the play's second, submerged level of potential musicality—the level upon which exist the poisonous melodies of sexual fixation and frustration, nervous exhaustion, and neurosis. Strauss, in short, responded to the psychological implications rather than the textual sonorities of 'Salomé.'"[112] Lawrence Kramer has similarly connected psychoanalysis to what he calls "post-Wagnerian compositional logic" in an article that likens the relationship between John the Baptist and Salome to that between Freud and his patient Dora.[113] He suggests that Salome sings to Jochanaan's head as if it is her psychoanalyst, freely associating without pause for eighteen minutes. The twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon of *Regietheater* itself owes a great deal to Freudian psychoanalysis. Wieland Wagner's post-World War II productions of his grandfather's operas in Bayreuth focused on the symbolic and psychological elements of the works. As the popularity of conceptual productions of canonic operas grew in the late twentieth century, directors largely continued this legacy of uncovering—or creating—an underlying psychology.

While the psychoanalytic bent of so much musicological discourse about both Strauss's Expressionism and the tradition of *Regietheater* can explain in part where this production trend of Salome-as-raped comes from, I am more interested in what this concept *does*. In this chapter I have explored the ways we come to understand this character and this story differently in these productions where Salome is traumatized. The strength of Egoyan's production is that it allows us, through the framework of a familiar story and a favourite anti-heroine, to contemplate the profound effects that sexual violence can have on a developing sexual subject. The story is recast

[112] Gary Schmidgall, "Richard Strauss: Salome," in *Literature as Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 251.
[113] Kramer, "One Coughs, the Other Dances."

and rendered unexpectedly tragic by the choice to imagine Salome not in terms of her monstrosity but in terms of her pain. But it is a problem to take this interpretation as the truth of the story, or even as the most convincing reading. When *Salome* becomes, in the public imagination, a story about the consequences of childhood sexual abuse, then I believe we begin to lose something important about the Salome that Wilde imagined—she no longer stirs fear and we no longer revel in perversely aligning ourselves with her most beastly tendencies.

Egoyan told me that with his initial approach to *Salome* in 1996, he could take for granted that the COC audience was familiar with a traditional production of the opera that they had been living with through several remounts. He says:

> What I did in 1996 was a response and a dialogue I was trying to create with that more traditional production that people had seen. Now, over twenty years later, a new generation is removed from that production, and it does give me pause to think, what if someone is seeing my production of *Salome* for the first time and it's their first exposure to the piece? Is that responsible? And that's a good question.[114]

It is among my aims with this research to expand this question of responsibility. I believe that the stakes of introducing sexual violence to a work and putting it on stage are greater than those relating to spectators misapprehending a work's original or intended meanings. In *Theatre & Violence*, Nevitt writes "production decisions about how violence and its effects will be represented offer a judgment about that violence.…It makes a difference whether the image is beautiful or ugly. Those choices are both aesthetic and political."[115] I have demonstrated in this chapter some of the larger ramifications the abused-Salome trope can have. These directors have the power to reinforce or challenge toxic cultural ideas about female victimization, victim-blaming, and rape culture, and so it is vital for us as audiences and critics to think through the implications of their choices.

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[114] Egoyan, interview with the author.
[115] Nevitt, *Theatre & Violence*, 23.

At its best, the addition of sexual violence to Strauss's *Salome* turns it into a story of righteous, incandescent female rage. At its worst, the sexual violence makes this a maudlin tale of yet another woman victimized and broken by a cruel man gluttonous for power over her. There is no set of directorial choices that will necessarily distinguish the former from the latter when producing a *Salome* in this fashion. I have modelled a way of thinking through the effects that this production concept for *Salome* has on the story and its characters, and the work it does in the world of contemporary academic and popular feminist ideas. The most successful productions according to my framework are those that find ways to grant new agency to Salome's character in light of the agency she loses when her violence toward Jochanaan is pathologized.

The way acts of sexual violence are staged, if they are staged at all, in these productions is somewhat more complicated. An aestheticized depiction can have the benefit of focusing audience attention on Salome's suffering by removing potentially gratuitous nudity. And yet in our current cultural moment, in which we are struggling to see sexual violence understood as the egregious crime that it is, there is a benefit to depicting these acts in a way that gestures toward their harsh reality. But audiences are multifaceted, and there is also the risk that the same shockingly realistic representation of sexual violence that may help some audience members to appreciate that rape is a crime of domination rather than of lust, may serve to retraumatize others. There is not a single right way to ethically represent sexual violence. The stakes are too high for too many for a single formula to be sufficient. I can only urge opera creators to think hard about what they want to achieve in putting sexual violence onstage.

I advocate for a mode of criticism for opera production whose scope stretches beyond judgments about perceived authenticity and allegiance to the score to ask instead what kinds of

stories we want to tell with the canon now. I do not believe that a production in which Salome is raped by Herod, past or present, is an accurate interpretation of what Wilde and Strauss have written, but that is not the only valuable question to ask of this interpretation. I have asked instead how this reading works in practice: How does it affect the story and its characters? How does it influence both its audiences and our understanding of the work? Despite my disbelief that Strauss or Wilde intended a backstory about Salome being raped, Egoyan told me a coherent story in his production in partnership with Wilde's text and Strauss's music. I left the theatre that night in 2013 troubled by the rape scene and its implications on the story in large part because Egoyan had made it work. But the power that a directorial concept can have to help us see new truths in the works we love is threatened if that concept itself becomes canon. I would be greatly saddened to see the rape-victim reading of *Salome* become the principal way that directors and audiences interact with the story, because more often than not the introduction of the rape storyline operates at the expense of what I have found to be the most compelling, revolutionary aspects of Salome's character—her unapologetically non-normative sexual desire and her absolute objectification of Jochanaan, which is still today a powerfully subversive position for a woman to take.

CHAPTER 4

Watching *Don Giovanni* for Sexual Violence

LEPORELLO: Bravo! Due impresses leggiadre!
Sforzar la figlia, ed ammazzar il padre!
DON GIOVANNI: L'ha voluto, suo danno.
LEPORELLO: Ma Donn'Anna cosa ha voluto?

LEPORELLO: Bravo, two charming deeds: force the daughter and murder the father!
DON GIOVANNI: The old man asked for it.
LEPORELLO: And Donna Anna, what did she ask for?

–Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Don Giovanni*

Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni* is a fraught subject in conversations about sexual politics and sexual violence in opera. Before asking *how* to put sexual violence on the stage in this opera, directors must first ask themselves *whether* they do. *Don Giovanni* is a work that features multiple attempted rapes—except when it is not. It is a work that offers a deep character study of a cunning sexual predator—except when it does not. *Don Giovanni* as written has the capacity to support a diversity of interpretations effectively, and this elevates the role that production plays in interpretation. Different productions of this opera can mean different things and support different morals even without straying from the given text. What does Don Giovanni get out of his exploits with women? Does he deserve the divine punishment he is dealt at the opera's conclusion? Who exactly is punishing him: a just god or the vengeful spirit of the Commendatore? What exactly happens between Donna Anna and Don Giovanni to spur the events of the opera into motion? What exactly happens between Zerlina and Don Giovanni offstage in the Act 1 finale before she screams for help? I do not think it is useful to judge

productions of *Don Giovanni* based on their faithfulness to the opera's text or to Mozart and Da Ponte's imagined intentions. I want to think instead about what different interpretations of *Don Giovanni*'s sexual violence do for the story and for opera audiences. Determining whether Don Giovanni is or is not a sexual predator based on the opera's text is not my goal. Rather, recognizing that audiences may be inclined to read him as a sexual predator, I want to look at the impact that this reading has on the story. Unlike the productions discussed in my other chapters, the productions of *Don Giovanni* I will address here often feature no acts of sexual violence onstage. Yet sexual violence looms over almost all of Don Giovanni's interactions with women in the opera and informs the ways we interact with the story and its characters.

Don Giovanni has a rich history of interpretation which continues to evolve in the ways we speak about and stage the opera. But where historical and many contemporary interpretations of *Don Giovanni* focus on how we might best understand its titular anti-hero, in this chapter I propose shifting focus to the female characters. Through analyzing the ways Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Zerlina are represented in a group of productions of *Don Giovanni*, I will explore how this story as we are telling it on stage today resonates with modern-day feminist thought about sexual assault and harassment. I am not concerned here with the sexual mores of eighteenth-century Prague and Vienna, nor with Mozart and Da Ponte's intentions. I am asking instead how different stage interpretations of *Don Giovanni* work now, when they are being performed for audiences who are increasingly informed about sexual violence and rape culture.

DONNA ANNA, DONNA ELVIRA, AND ZERLINA ONSTAGE

In an article about teaching *Don Giovanni* published twenty years ago, Liane Curtis starts from the realization that the way her students were thinking about the opera was informed by their contemporary understandings of sexual violence, at a time when its prevalence on college campuses was becoming an increasingly pressing concern.[1] More recently, Mary Hunter similarly realized that the women's studies students in her opera course were thinking about female opera characters differently than she was used to and in a way directly informed by feminist politics.[2] These modes of interpreting *Don Giovanni* have become more and more common as movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp have amplified conversations about sexual violence and brought feminist ideas about consent, victim-blaming, and trauma into the public consciousness. It is increasingly unacceptable to ignore the connotations of sexual violence in works like *Don Giovanni* just because they were written in another time with another set of cultural values and norms. We are performing this opera for audiences now, in our Zeitgeist, and not all audience members are comfortable trying to divorce their own beliefs from those expressed in a historical work of art. Many audience members, like Curtis's and Hunter's students, are responding to what they see onstage in a way informed by their own culture and their own politics. These approaches to the opera are valid.

One common theme throughout the following analysis is the way the productions of *Don Giovanni* reinforce or challenge popular rape myths. Rape myths are common, prejudicial beliefs about sexual violence that serve to excuse perpetrators and discredit victims. Prominent examples that come up in this chapter include the ideas that women routinely lie about rape for

[1] Curtis, "The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's *Don Giovanni*."
[2] Allanbrook, Hunter, and Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," 57–62.

revenge and that women secretly want to be raped. The common parlance of calling these ideas myths can lead to some confusion. It is not controversial, for instance, that some women have lied about sexual assault or have said no to a sexual encounter when they meant yes. But when media representation amplifies anti-victim stereotypes about sexual violence, public perception can become skewed and real-life victims are put in the position of having their own stories doubted based on their resemblance to the stereotype.[3] Opera productions are not rape trials; choices about how fictional sexual violence plays out are entirely at the discretion of the creative team behind the production. It is worth thinking about how these productions as cultural texts interact with popular ideas and conceptions about sexual violence.

My sample group for this analysis comes from the selection of productions of *Don Giovanni* available through popular online opera streaming services, produced since 2000.[4] These productions are readily available for many scholars, students, and fans seeking out productions of this opera. For my purposes, they constitute a ready-made survey group of twenty-first century productions. I do not assume this is a representative sample of all productions of *Don Giovanni* over the past twenty years. This group of productions is merely a jumping-off point for a close look at specific representations of sexual violence in productions of this opera with a relatively wide audience reach. The earliest production I include is the Metropolitan Opera's 2000 revival of Franco Zeffirelli's production. Richard Will points to the changes made in the staging of this revival as an indicator of the shift to a gritty new norm of

[3] Extensive studies have been done measuring rape myth acceptance in various groups beginning with Martha R. Burt, "Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 38, no. 2 (1980): 217–30. The results have generally suggested that rape myth acceptance significantly influences the perceptions of jurors in rape cases. Jennifer Temkin, "'And Always Keep A-Hold of Nurse, for Fear of Finding Something Worse': Challenging Rape Myths in the Courtroom," *New Criminal Law Review* 13, no. 4 (2010): 710–34. Russell Norton and Tim Grant have suggested "rape stereotype" would be more accurate. Russel Norton and Tim Grant, "Rape Myth in True and False Rape Allegations," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 14, no. 4 (2008): 275–85.

[4] Namely, Medici TV, Alexander Press (Opera in Video), and the Metropolitan Opera on Demand.

Don Giovanni productions.[5] I feel that this line in the proverbial sand is a useful one—the streaming productions from before this time feel like they belong to a different cultural moment for this opera and typically feature charming, swashbuckling Giovannis whose violent deeds are largely underplayed. The included productions are: Metropolitan Opera, 2000, revival of Zeffirelli's production directed by Stephen Lawless; Gran Teatre del Liceu, 2002, directed by Calixto Bieito; Teatro Real Madrid, 2005, directed by Lluis Pasqual; De Nederlandes Opera, 2006, directed by Jossi Wieler and Sergio Morabito; Royal Opera House, 2009, directed by Francesca Zambello; Glyndebourne Festival, 2010, directed by Jonathan Kent; Metropolitan Opera, 2011 and 2016, directed by Michael Grandage; Monte Carlo Opera, 2015, directed by Jean-Louis Grinda; and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, 2017, directed by Jean-François Sivadier.[6]

I will be analyzing the ways these productions represent the women as victims of abuse along three axes central to contemporary feminist understanding of sexual violence: consent, trauma, and believing victims. My focus is on the stage action, which is variable among all of these productions. Musical analysis comes up only tangentially in this chapter, and only at moments where the alignment between music and stage action stands out as particularly interesting or unusual.[7] In Appendix 3, I have included a complete list of the *Don Giovanni* productions streaming on major online services at time of publication with brief notes on the portrayal of some of the most general elements of sexual violence in the opera.

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[5] Richard Will, "*Don Giovanni* and the Resilience of Rape Culture," in Cusick et al., "Colloquy: Sexual Violence in Opera," 218–22.
[6] Bieito's production premiered in 2001 at the English National Opera, but its 2002 revival in Barcelona is the version available online.
[7] The question of disjunction between stage action and music will be treated in more detail in Chapter 5.

Consent

Consent is central to defining rape and other acts of sexual assault. Feminist criticism around sexual violence has worked toward expanding and improving the ways we think about consent, for instance by challenging the idea that consent within marriage is automatic.[8] Similarly, feminists have worked to shift perceptions of rape from stereotypes about attacks by masked strangers to include acquaintance and date rape.[9] In *Don Giovanni*, Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Zerlina all have experiences that raise questions about consent.

Donna Anna: *Don Giovanni* opens with Leporello alone onstage, standing guard outside a house while his master Don Giovanni is inside with a woman. Donna Anna and Don Giovanni enter the stage in a flurry of action: Anna clutches at Giovanni, crying for help and vowing not to let him escape, while Giovanni insists that she will never discover his identity. Typically, we do not see what happened between the pair inside the house. The way the characters interact during this fight in the first scene informs what we suspect happened immediately beforehand.

Costuming and staging of this scene typically makes it clear that Don Giovanni's villainy offstage was to do with an unwanted sexual advance. In nearly all these productions, Donna Anna appears in sleepwear with her hair loose, indicating that Giovanni, who is wearing a mask,

[8] The United Nations' *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* in 1993 establishes marital rape as a human rights violation, but criminalization of marital rape has still not been carried out in all UN member states. In Canada, marital rape was criminalized in 1983.

[9] Large-scale studies of European countries, Canada, and the United States have found that between half and 75% of rapes are committed by assailants the victim knows. On American college campuses, a study found this number may be as high as 84%. Of these, a significant percentage of assailants are current or former intimate partners. United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010–2016 (2017); Jan van Dijk, John van Kesteren, and Paul Smit, "Criminal Victimisation In International Perspective: Key Findings From the 2004–2005 ICVS and EU ICS," Netherlands Research and Documentation Centre in Cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (2007); Jo Lovett and Liz Kelly, "Different Systems, Similar Outcomes Tracking Attrition in Reported Rape Cases Across Europe," Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University, funded by the European Commission (2009).

has interrupted her in a vulnerable, private moment. Of the eight productions that stage this fight between Anna and Giovanni, six depict Giovanni kissing or groping Anna throughout the encounter so that we see at least some of the sexual violence we imagine happened offstage.[10] Lawless's production is especially clear on this point; it depicts Giovanni lying on top of Anna and pinning her to the stage while he runs his hands over her body. More often than not, Anna's attempts to control Giovanni's movements—either to stop him from escaping, or to stop him from kissing and touching her body—are ineffective. She is typically depicted as physically much weaker than Giovanni, and her attempts to injure or restrain him prove futile. A few exceptions stand out in the productions by Lawless, Pasqual, and Sivadier. Lawless's Anna bites Giovanni's hand, causing him to let go of her and shout with pain even as they are singing. Pasqual's Anna grabs Giovanni's knife from the sheath at his waist and tries to stab him with it. Finally, Sivadier's Anna is more than a match for Giovanni physically. She is only bested when Leporello joins in the fight to pull her away from his master. On one hand, it is satisfying to see Donna Anna portrayed in these exceptional cases as strong and capable of defending herself. But I am also sensitive to rape myths about the ways that women are supposed to resist being raped. A popular misconception about rape has long been that women should be able to fight off their would-be rapists, and if they do not it is because they did not really want to.[11]

The stagings of this scene by Lawless, Zambello, Kent, Grandage, Pasqual, and Sivadier all evoke a classic stereotype of what an attempted rape looks like. Here we have a masked assailant who is unknown to—or at least, unrecognized by—the victim, and a victim who

[10] Two productions do not stage a fight here. Bieito's production will be discussed below in detail. Wieler and Morabito's production has Anna asleep and dreaming in this scene. Don Giovanni does not touch her. For a detailed analysis of this production, see Richard Will, "Zooming In, Gazing Back: *Don Giovanni* on Television," *Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2011): 32–65.
[11] Temkin, "'And Always Keep A-Hold of Nurse,'" 715.

violently attempts to fight him off.[12] While stranger-rapes are relatively uncommon compared with rape by intimate partners, family members, or acquaintances, they tend to be overrepresented in the media.[13] These scenes are easy to recognize as acts of attempted sexual violence, even for audience members who may be relatively unfamiliar with the larger vision of sexual violence feminists have been working toward. But not all approaches to staging this scene follow this stereotypical rape script.

The productions by Grinda and Bieito stage this scene differently, working to various degrees against the libretto to implicate Anna as Giovanni's sexual partner rather than as a potential rape victim. Bieito's *Don Giovanni* goes furthest, representing Donna Anna as fully engaged in intimate contact with Don Giovanni in this first scene. This production, set in Barcelona's Olympic Village circa 2000, opens with Leporello on the hood of a car that is bouncing on its suspension as the silhouettes of two figures jostle around inside. Don Giovanni and Donna Anna emerge from the car for their entrance, fastening and adjusting their clothes. Anna follows Giovanni around the stage, embracing him, groping his buttocks, and reaching into his pants. He lifts her onto the hood of the car, stands between her legs and begins unfastening his pants again when the Commendatore enters, and Anna runs away.[14] Giovanni does not wear a mask or anything resembling a disguise. Anna's text in this scene, in which she calls for help and swears she will die before letting Giovanni escape, is played humorously. She delivers her words coyly to him as they stroll around the stage and share a beer. Anna and Giovanni's exchange is

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[12] The Giovannis in these productions all wear half-masks over the top portions of their faces, except for Pasqual's production, in which he wears large sunglasses and a hat pulled down to obscure the top part of his face, accomplishing the same thing.

[13] Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 145.

[14] A photograph by Sergio Lainz shows Don Giovanni (Wojtek Drabowicz) and Donna Anna (Regina Schörg) on the hood of the car while Leporello (Kwanchoul Youn) watches: https://web.archive.org/web/20200128180218/https:/estaticos.elperiodico.com/resources/jpg/0/0/zentauroepp51948259-icult-don-giovanni-calixto-bieito200125194342-1579978005200.jpg.

playful, with the feeling of an inside joke. The singers, Wojtek Drabowicz and Regina Schörg, play their parts convincingly. Schörg delivers her musical lines with gracefulness and ease, deemphasizing the breathlessness and desperation that typically characterize Donna Anna's musical lines in this scene. The principal problem with Bieito's take on Anna and Giovanni's relationship only comes up later, when Anna recounts the story of this encounter to Don Ottavio, which will be discussed below.

Grinda's 2015 staging of *Don Giovanni* exists between the two extremes above, and represents a troubling trend I have encountered in a number of productions spanning from some of the earliest video recordings of the opera to the present. These Annas are not embroiled in a conflict with a predator in this opening scene, but a conflict within themselves. These Annas desire Giovanni against their better judgment. In Grinda's staging, we get a glimpse of Don Giovanni and Donna Anna during Leporello's opening music, before they enter. They cast shadows on the wall of the set, and we can see them sensually embracing. Just before they enter, we see Anna's shadow pulling away from Giovanni and raising her arms in a posture that could denote surprise. Giovanni strides onstage, masked, and Anna runs after him. At first they fight, and Giovanni easily overpowers Anna, holding her wrists in his hands when she tries to hit and grab him. But as the scene goes on, again and again there are moments where Anna stops struggling and embraces Giovanni. She caresses his arms while he holds her, and she turns her face toward him to sing right against his lips. After each of these moments of capitulation, Anna pushes him away and puts some distance between them, but this is played as an internal conflict for Anna rather than an external one between adversaries. Eventually, Anna stops fighting. They kneel on the stage and Giovanni slides the strap of her nightgown off her shoulder. As he leans in

toward her, she grabs the fabric of his shirt and pulls him closer. They kiss deeply, and then the Commendatore enters, causing Anna to leap to her feet and run away.

The shadow-play that precedes Don Giovanni and Donna Anna's entrance in this scene seems to show Anna engaging in some intimate contact with Giovanni, mistaking him for her lover. This is what she says later, and it corresponds to what we see in the shadows quite well. Her moment of surprise, when she moves quickly away from him, seems to be the moment at which she realizes the man she has been kissing is not Ottavio. There are a couple of ways we might read what happens on stage after, when Anna capitulates to Giovanni's continued advances. Perhaps upon witnessing how easily he can overpower her, she knows it is futile to resist and is trying to minimize injury. This is not an uncommon reaction to sexual assault.[15] But at the moments when Anna strokes Giovanni and turns her face toward his, Patrizia Ciofi's portrayal shows more signs of ecstasy than fear. Even in the moments when Giovanni cannot see her face, she emotes pleasure explicitly. With a few subtle changes, this staging could have shown us a pragmatic victim trying to mitigate harm to herself, but it simply does not. The reading that fits better, and which is not uncommon in productions of *Don Giovanni*, is that despite the fact that this man has snuck into her bedroom and tricked her intimacy, she still wants him. This representation depends on the particularly pernicious rape myths that some women want to be raped, and that when women say no to sex, they might really mean yes.[16] Even as Anna cries for help and calls Giovanni a betrayer and a villain, Grinda, like many directors before and after him, shows us an Anna whose body language is at odds with what she says. Grinda's Anna says no, but based on the staging of the scene she means yes—or at least maybe.

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[15] Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, "Coping Behavior of the Rape Victim." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 133, no. 4 (1976): 413–18.
[16] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 346–47.

In the productions in which Anna fights with Giovanni, especially when he tries to kiss and touch her in explicitly sexual ways that she rebuffs, her nonconsent is crystal clear in her body language as well as in the words she sings. Bieito transforms this scene up to the entrance of the Commendatore entirely, so that what we are witnessing is not the moment after an attempted rape, but rather a cheeky post-coital game between intimate partners. Grinda shows us a Donna Anna who is attracted to the masked man who has tricked her into intimate contact. It is unclear from this scene alone how the embrace we see in shadow started, but when Giovanni emerges wearing a mask we can presume that Anna does not know who he is. By disguising his identity, Giovanni is attempting a rape by deception.[17] Anna is incapable of giving informed consent while Giovanni is deceiving her into thinking he is someone else: first, her betrothed, and then a stranger (note that Donna Anna knows Don Giovanni, though she does not recognize him yet). A similar scenario occurs later on in the opera between Donna Elvira and Leporello, who also dons a disguise.

Donna Elvira: In the first scene of Act 2, Don Giovanni devises a plan to allow him to seduce Donna Elvira's maid: in the courtyard outside Elvira's window, Giovanni and Leporello swap clothes; Giovanni hides and calls up to Elvira while Leporello gestures along; Elvira comes down, expecting a reunion; and Leporello keeps her occupied while Giovanni moves on to the maid. Elvira believes that Leporello is Don Giovanni until the end of the next scene. Elvira's interaction with Leporello-as-Giovanni is marked by tender and erotic language. Leporello plays along, at one point remarking as an aside, "I'm starting to enjoy this."[18] The libretto does not

[17] Sex by deception is not strictly defined as rape under the law in Canada or the United States, though common law practices tend to criminalize deceptive sexual relations. Amit Pundik, "Coercion and Deception in Sexual Relations," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 28, no. 1 (2015): 97–127; Jed Rubenfeld, "The Riddle of Rape-by-Deception and the Myth of Sexual Autonomy," *Yale Law Journal* 122, no. 6 (2012–2013): 1372–669.
[18] "La burla mi dà gusto."

specify any more intimate contact than a caress and a kiss on the hand, and as soon as the need for distraction has passed, Leporello tries to extricate himself before he is discovered. Yet in performance, Leporello often goes further with the ruse and crosses over into the territory of clear sexual contact without informed consent. In Wieler and Morabito's production, Leporello and Donna Elvira get into bed together; in Zambello's, Leporello holds his hands over Elvira's breasts and is about to grope her when Giovanni makes a noise to usher them offstage; in Lawless's, Leporello hikes up Elvira's skirts and is crouching between her legs when they are interrupted; in Grandage's two performances Leporello puts his head up under Elvira's skirt; and in both Grandage's and Pasqual's, Leporello nuzzles his face into Elvira's breasts.

This scene is almost always played as strictly comic. Elvira's exaggerated, voluptuous overtures coax Leporello from nervous resistance to gleeful participation. Yet in spite of its consistently comic intent and approach, this seduction by deception, especially in the context of this opera, is problematic under further consideration. What happens to Elvira in this scene is similar to what we presume has happened to Anna offstage at the beginning of the opera. As Giovanni impersonates Ottavio to be intimate with Anna, Leporello impersonates Giovanni—albeit not of his own volition—to be intimate with Elvira. But while the opera casts the previous offence as serious, the latter is farce. The parallel of these two sexual deceptions is interesting; it is an unfortunate fact that in the history of legislating sexual violence, behaviour that appears obviously criminal in one case may be normalized in another.

Bieito's production is notable for portraying this scene in a more serious way. His setting is the bar from the Act 1 finale, now dark and littered with refuse from the party. Giovanni and Leporello are playing pool and are interrupted by Elvira, who is drunk. The men swap clothing, but in their contemporary street clothes, they lack the large hat or cape that typically helps to

carry off the disguise in productions with period costuming. Leporello sits on the bar behind Elvira who stands between his legs, both facing out to the audience. He embraces and caresses her and wraps her in a wedding veil left over from the previous scene, further obstructing her ability to see him. Standing behind the bar, Giovanni thrusts Leporello's hips into Elvira and in response Elvira appears to be performing or preparing to perform fellatio on Leporello beneath the veil before they are interrupted. Elvira continues drinking throughout this scene, and her drunkenness dominates the way we understand the deception. Bieito does not ask us to suspend our disbelief when Elvira mistakes Leporello for Giovanni; he makes it clear that she does not recognize him because the men are taking advantage of her drunkenness.

In addition to making Elvira's seduction by deception more believable in a realist modern setting, Elvira's drunkenness in Bieito's production references another popular rape myth: that if a victim of sexual assault is intoxicated, she bears responsibility.[19] An influential 2001 study found that approximately half of all sexual assault cases in America involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, victim, or both.[20] In this scene in Bieito's *Don Giovanni*, it is clear from the staging and the body language of the singers that we are meant to recognize Elvira as much more intoxicated than Giovanni or Leporello, who both seem relatively unaffected by their drinking in the Act 1 finale. Elvira is already unable to consent to intimacy with Leporello in this scene because she has been deceived about his identity. And now she appears to be incapable of consent due to her extreme intoxication.[21] An intoxicated Elvira makes this scene more realistic and highlights a real contemporary problem about alcohol-assisted sexual assault. It is not a

[19] For the impact this rape myth has on legal blame attribution, see Emily Finch and Vanessa E. Munro, "Juror Stereotypes and Blame Attribution in Rape Cases Involving Intoxicants: The Findings of a Pilot Study," *The British Journal of Criminology* 45, no. 1 (2005): 25–38.
[20] Antonia Abbey et al., "Alcohol and Sexual Assault," *Alcohol Research & Health* 25, no. 1 (2001): 43–51.
[21] Marc LeBeau and Ashraf Mozayani, *Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault: A Forensic Handbook* (London: Academic Press, 2001).

funny scene in Bieito's production. When Leporello remarks that he is enjoying the ploy after all, he does not deliver the line to the audience as other Leporellos often do, but instead to Don Giovanni, and the two of them share a laugh at the expense of a much more sympathetic Elvira.

Often, when *Regietheater* productions bring out or impose dark realism on comic scenes, there are complaints about the director ignoring the sense of the music. In the case of Peter Sellars's infamous *Don Giovani*, Wye Allanbrook has argued that to stage Zerlina's aria, "Batti, batti o bel Masetto," Sellars "had to ignore every musical cue. Mozart's aria might just as well not have been sung."[22] She argues that the music of "Batti, batti" makes Zerlina a powerful rhetorician, and the irony of her pleas for Masetto to beat her are clear. By having his Zerlina instead adopt a posture of submission within the story, Sellars—and also, incidentally, Bieito, who similarly stages domestic violence in "Batti, batti"—works directly against the music. Allanbrook's musical analysis is convincing, and I tend to agree that by changing the intention of Zerlina's text so drastically from skillful manipulation to submission, the scene does not quite work as opera—that is, as a fusion of music and drama. In the scene between Elvira, Leporello, and Giovanni at the beginning of Act 2, however, I do not sense the same kind of disconnect. The characters' motivations and intentions have not changed: Elvira still expresses her longing for Giovanni and her joy at what she believes to be their reuniting; Giovanni still aims to take advantage of her emotions to trick her for his own gain; and Leporello still begrudgingly but then eagerly takes part. The difference in Bieito's staging is not in what the characters are doing, but in how the audience interprets what they are doing. Bieito makes it much harder to laugh at Elvira's emotional excesses, because he explains them to us by means of her heavy alcohol consumption. And he makes it harder to laugh along with Giovanni's clever ruse, because it is

[22] Allanbrook, Hunter, and Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," 63.

clearer than ever that he is taking advantage of a vulnerable woman whom he has manipulated before. I would not suggest that all productions of *Don Giovanni* should perform this scene as the gritty examination of the relationship between alcohol, consent, and sexual abuse we see here. But Bieito's production models one way of engaging with problematic material in this opera informed by contemporary attitudes about sexual violence and at the expense of the humour of this scene.

Zerlina: Zerlina's interaction with Don Giovanni tells another story about consent. In their recitative and duet, "Alfin siam liberati…Là ci darem la mano," Giovanni invites Zerlina to return to his villa with him where they will be married. Zerlina refuses Giovanni's advances at first, but ultimately accepts him when she repeats his invitation, "andiam," back to him. We assume the promise of marriage is a ploy to gain her sexual consent, as it presumably was in the past with Elvira, who twice refers to Giovanni as her husband. Before Zerlina and Giovanni can leave together, Donna Elvira intervenes, tells Zerlina what kind of man Don Giovanni is, and sends her away. When Zerlina next encounters Giovanni, in the Act 1 finale, she is afraid of him. Her fiancé Masetto suspects she is afraid that Giovanni will expose her unfaithfulness, but Zerlina says in an aside that she is afraid of what Giovanni might do to Masetto. At the ball, Zerlina dances with Giovanni and eventually he pulls her offstage. She exclaims "O gods, I am lost" as he ushers her out of sight, and then from offstage she cries, "help," "scoundrel," and "save me, I am dying."[23] The party guests prepare to break down the door to save Zerlina, and Giovanni reappears with Leporello, who he blames.

[23] "O numi! son tradita!"; "gente, aiuto!"; "scellerato!"; "soccorretemi, son morta!"

The staging of "Là ci darem la mano" shapes the nature of Zerlina's consent in her first interaction with Don Giovanni. Unlike Anna and Elvira, she knows it is the nobleman Don Giovanni to whom she gives her consent though he has told her that he wishes to marry her, which we know is almost certainly not true. In all of these productions, Zerlina ultimately agrees to leave with Don Giovanni; her consent is in the text of the libretto. The music of the final "andiam" section rollicks merrily through a rustic 6/8, and none of these directors attempt to circumvent the quaint romance of this moment. But staging choices affect how we read the nature of Zerlina's initial refusal of Giovanni: does she express true nonconsent before Don Giovanni changes her mind or does she intend to leave with Giovanni from the start and only say no as part of a coy game of cat-and-mouse? The productions above are split on this point. In the productions by Lawless, Zambello, Grinda, Pasqual, and Grandage (2016), Zerlina portrays convincing reluctance and discomfort at the beginning of her time alone with Giovanni, and she does not respond to him positively until her "andiam." In the productions by Bieito, Wieler/Morabito, Kent, Grandage (2011), and Sivadier, Zerlina portrays quite minimal, often playful resistance throughout the duet and preceding recitative. These Zerlinas seem to say no as part of a seduction script, or perhaps out of curiosity to see what Giovanni might try next. Giovanni's tactics are quite varied between these productions. In Kent, Grinda, Zambello, Pasqual, and Sivadier, he is immensely subtle in his approach; he seems to know exactly how close he can get to Zerlina and where and when he can touch her without frightening her. His approach to her is perfectly calculated and honed by his experience. By contrast, the productions by Bieito and Wieler/Morabito stage more sexually aggressive advances; in the former, Giovanni undresses Zerlina without her involvement, and in the latter, he reaches up to grope under her skirts even as she recoils. Grandage's 2016 Don Giovanni stands behind Zerlina at one point in

the duet, and stretches his mouth open just to the side of her throat like a lion preparing to tear into its prey. The approach to staging Zerlina and Giovanni in this scene indicates whether a director perceives Giovanni as a deeply attractive paramour whom women cannot help but fall in love with, a sexual predator taking advantage of a vulnerable young woman beneath his station, or both.

These different versions of Zerlina and Don Giovanni raise different issues for audiences today in light of contemporary sexual politics. When Zerlina appears to be in control of the situation throughout "Là ci darem," and obviously intends to leave with Giovanni from the beginning but plays coyly with him through the duet, we might be happy to see this young peasant girl harnessing what little power her gender and sexuality grant her. But at the same time, she enacts a potentially dangerous myth of female sexuality: she says no, but she means yes. In these productions, Zerlina's body language communicates the truth of her desire for Giovanni even as the words she sings affirm her misgivings. This myth came up in the opening scene of the opera in those stagings that show Anna as desiring Don Giovanni even as she proclaims the opposite. In Zerlina's case, there is evidence in the libretto that she is charmed by this handsome stranger, and she does eventually agree to run away with him. Still, approaching the scene in this way reinforces the myth that women really want sex even as they are saying they do not. In studies of college students, there tends to be a gender gap in conceptions of consent. Whereas women tend to indicate that they grant consent verbally, men are more likely to interpret consent through body language.[24] This disparity can be dangerous in cases where a woman's words and

[24] Kristen N. Jozkowski et al., "Gender Difference in Heterosexual College Students' Conceptualizations and Indicators of Sexual Consent: Implications for Contemporary Sexual Assault Prevention Education," *The Journal of Sex Research* 51, no. 8 (2014): 909–10, 913. See also Terry Humphreys, "Perceptions of Sexual Consent: The Impact of Relationship History and Gender," *Journal of Sex Research* 44, no. 4 (2007): 313–14.

her body language are perceived as being at odds, as they are for these Zerlinas until they say "andiam."

In watching this scene today, audiences might also be more sensitive to the fact that Zerlina's ability to grant or withhold consent to Giovanni is affected by their relative classes. Zerlina even says in the recitative before "Là ci darem" that she knows noblemen are rarely honest and sincere with women.[25] Catharine MacKinnon argued in the 1990s that consent does not actually grant women the power that the law typically attests that it does. She writes, "The law of rape presents consent as free exercise of sexual choice under conditions of equality of power without exposing the underlying structure of constraint and disparity."[26] The disparity between Zerlina as woman and Giovanni as man is further amplified by their class disparity. The problems with using a woman's consent to classify a sexual encounter as not abusive is especially clear in some approaches to staging this scene. In Lawless's Met production, Giovanni feigns indifference toward Zerlina throughout the recitative. As they banter, she is the first one to close the gap between them onstage. Giovanni then gets to his feet, wraps his arms around Zerlina from behind, and holds her tightly in this position for the entirety of "Là ci darem." Zerlina looks truly afraid for the first portion of the duet as he moves his hands around her body and tries to lift up her skirts. Zerlina sings "andiam" only after she has already been held, immobile, by the much larger and stronger Giovanni for several minutes. She verbally consents, but from the context it does not appear that she has another choice. This is quite an obvious representation of coerced consent, but coercion takes many different forms, not all of which require physical force.

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[25] "Io so, che rado colle donne voi altri cavalieri siete onesti e sinceri."
[26] Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Rape: On Coercion and Consent," in *Applications of Feminist Legal Theory*, ed. D. Kelly Weisberg (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 474.

Legal philosopher Scott Anderson advocates for defining rape as coerced sex rather than nonconsensual sex. While the focus on consent succeeds in omitting the perception that rape relies on excessive force, it "fails to capture what is distinctively problematic about rape for women."[27] Anderson argues that by reconceptualizing rape as coerced sex, we can understand that when consent is achieved through coercion by a man who "simply refuses to take 'no' for an answer," rape is not precluded.[28] He notes that "uses of force and intimidation in intimate settings rely on contextual features such as a background of male social dominance and a propensity toward violence."[29] Don Giovanni's relative size compared with Zerlina in most productions, as well as his social status as a man and a nobleman, creates a severe imbalance of power within which Zerlina's eventual acquiescence can be read as coerced consent. Productions in which Zerlina's initial refusal of Giovanni is played as mere coquettishness resist this reading. But in Lawless, Zambello, Grinda, Pasqual, and Grandage (2016), in which Zerlina's initial refusal of Giovanni is clear, "Là ci darem" today reads less like romance and more like coercion.

Zerlina and Don Giovanni meet again in the Act I finale, after their encounter in "Là ci darem" was cut short by Donna Elvira. The productions surveyed here represent Zerlina's attitudes about Giovanni in this next meeting in two principal ways, which generally flow logically from their approaches to the relationship in "Là ci darem." In the productions by Wieler/Morabito, Kent, and Sivadier, Zerlina had put up only the most playful resistance to Giovanni, and now her anticipation of seeing him again is characterized by excitement more than fear. This excitement is palpably sexual in most of these cases; Wieler/Morabito's Zerlina even masturbates when she first encounters Giovanni in the finale. The remaining productions by

[27] Scott A. Anderson, "Conceptualizing Rape as Coerced Sex," *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy* 127, no. 1 (2016): 50.
[28] Ibid., 75.
[29] Ibid., 79.

Zambello, Grinda, Lawless, Pasqual, and Bieito represent a fearful and often sad Zerlina who tries to avoid Giovanni and does not wish to go with him to the party, though she does so in an attempt to show Masetto that everything is fine. Inside the villa, Giovanni enlists Leporello to help separate the lovers so that Giovanni can dance with Zerlina. Those Zerlinas who were excited to see Giovanni continue to behave flirtatiously as they begin to dance, whereas those who were afraid of him continue to be afraid and are tense and distracted, typically looking around for Masetto. Zerlina's behaviour up to this point in the finale primarily serves to reinforce the audience's ideas about her feelings for Giovanni as expressed in their duet earlier. Those Zerlinas who were the most flirtatious with Giovanni appear to feel the same now, despite Elvira's warning. Those who resisted have had their concerns confirmed by Elvira, and are now afraid to be alone with Giovanni.

After a few minutes of dancing, Giovanni takes Zerlina offstage, and a moment later she cries for help. The approach to this moment varies among these productions in terms of the kind and degree of force Giovanni uses to take Zerlina with him, as well as the state Zerlina is in when she reappears. Grandage, Zambello, Pasqual, and Grinda all present Giovanni's attack on Zerlina as a gradual escalation of his tactics. We do not see Giovanni behave especially violently onstage; instead he transitions from leading Zerlina in their dance to pulling her through the door with only a small degree of additional force. These productions all portrayed Zerlina as skeptical of Giovanni and resistant to his advances in their first meeting, and fearful of him at the beginning of the finale. The only time we see these Zerlinas react positively to Giovanni's advances is in the brief "andiam" section at the end of the duet. While at that point she did grant Giovanni verbal consent, her behaviour since then and the shifting circumstances unambiguously

indicate that Zerlina does not wish to engage in intimacy with Giovanni at the party. Her cries for help from offstage confirm this.

In those productions where Zerlina acts as an eager partner to Giovanni through most of the first act, the dynamics between the two characters when Giovanni forces her offstage are more complicated. Sivadier, Kent, and Wieler/Morabito all scale up the violence in Giovanni's treatment of Zerlina before she cries for help. Sivadier's Zerlina is carried struggling offstage by Giovanni and an associate of his who grabs her legs. Kent's Giovanni binds Zerlina's wrists with his scarf before dragging her offstage. Both stagings make it clear that despite Zerlina's previous interest in Giovanni, at this moment he is forcing her. In Kent's production, Zerlina appears to be intoxicated, as are all the women at this especially debauched party. This version of the scene evokes a familiar date-rape scenario: Zerlina is interested in Giovanni, has consented to some intimate contact in the past, and is now intoxicated. Research has established clear links between alcohol consumption and acquaintance/date rape and shown that victims are more likely to be blamed for such rapes if they are intoxicated when they occur.[30] But binding her wrists indicates that Giovanni knows Zerlina is unlikely to consent to have sex with him. By having Giovanni physically incapacitate Zerlina, and by showing her fear so explicitly, Kent makes clear that despite Zerlina's earlier involvement with Giovanni, what happens next is assault. This kind of clarity is vital in this scene. We hear a lot about Don Giovanni's seductions of women, but in the opera Zerlina is our only example. It says a lot about Giovanni that when his attempt to deceive Zerlina into sleeping with him in "Là ci darem" fails, his response is to force her at his next opportunity. This scene shows us what we were denied in the scene at the opera's opening with

[30] A helpful survey of many of such studies can be found in Claire R. Gravelin, Monica Biernat, and Caroline E. Bucher, "Blaming the Victim of Acquaintance Rape: Individual, Situational, and Sociocultural Factors," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2019): 2422–50.

Giovanni and Anna—this time we know exactly what happened, and we can see that as attractive as Giovanni might have been to Zerlina at first, she does not want him now. This is the pivotal moment in the opera when we see Giovanni act as a predator without question, and all of the above productions are agreed on this point.

The final production, by Wieler and Morabito, differs. Giovanni does not take Zerlina offstage at all during this finale. The pair continues to dance onstage, Zerlina wraps both her legs around Giovanni's waist, and he holds her up. She cries out for help from this position, and Giovanni lies her down on the stage and leaves her, revealing a large bloodstain on the front of her wedding dress and another on his white pants. I find this series of events much harder to interpret. If we are to assume that Giovanni penetrated Zerlina under her dress while we watched, when and why did she call out for help? Is the blood meant to indicate a violent, forced penetration, is this the first time Zerlina has had intercourse, or both?[31] What we can tell is that this Zerlina resists much less and much later than do the Zerlinas in the other productions. This seriously complicates our ability to call this an attempted rape and may suggest a more sympathetic interpretation of Giovanni and a less sympathetic one of Zerlina in this encounter. It evokes the myth that "women make rape allegations as a means of getting revenge or overcoming guilt following a regrettable sexual encounter."[32] This question of the believability of rape victims' stories will be treated in more detail below.

[31] Popular wisdom about the "breaking" of the hymen when women have intercourse for the first time is largely unscientific, but in the popular imagination, the red stain after penetration is an enduring symbol of the loss of virginity.

[32] Stephanie Scott-Snyder, *Introduction to Forensic Psychology: Essentials for Law Enforcement* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2017): 103.

Believing Victims

In his piece on *Don Giovanni* and rape culture, Richard Will cuts to the heart of the problem with making the women, especially Anna, complicit sexual partners for Giovanni: "If consenting women cleanse the story of rape, they also introduce one of the most familiar and debasing stereotypes of rape culture, lying women."[33] In the fourth scene of Act 1, Donna Anna recognizes Don Giovanni as her attacker and her father's murderer. In her recitative "Don Ottavio, son morta!" Donna Anna recounts the story of what happened between her and Giovanni just before the opera's opening. She says Don Giovanni entered her room late at night, disguising his identity: "Silently he approached me and tried to embrace me. I tried to free myself but he held me tighter. I cried out, but no one came. With one hand he covered my mouth, and with the other he held me so tight that I thought I was lost."[34] She describes how she ultimately freed herself and pursued her attacker as he attempted to flee. At the conclusion of her story, she moves into her rage aria, "Or sai chi l'onore," in which she asks Ottavio to avenge her father's murder. The staging of "Don Ottavio, son morta!…Or sai chi l'onore" shapes our understanding of what happened between Anna and Giovanni before the events of the opera, and it indicates a production's point of view regarding the prima donna.

The majority of the productions I have surveyed approach staging this scene in almost identical ways. This typical Donna Anna, dressed in elaborate mourning attire, performs her grief and rage to the audience or the camera. She rarely looks at Ottavio, to whom her words are addressed, and instead gazes into the middle distance with her pained expression clearly directed toward us. This scene is obviously a serious one, but Donna Anna's seriousness in most of these

[33] Will, "*Don Giovanni* and the Resilience of Rape Culture," 222.
[34] "Tacito a me s'appressa, e mi vuole abbracciar: sciogliermi cerco, ei più mi stringe; grido: non viene alcun. Con una mano cerca d'impedire la voce, e coll'altra m'afferra stretta così, che già mi credo vinta."

productions is so exaggerated that it feels like performance. When the staging emphasizes the distance between Donna Anna's opera seria pathos and her more comic surroundings, Anna's extreme emotion can feel absurd. We are not encouraged to identify with or feel for her. This approach to the scene in which Anna discloses her abuse feels outdated in light of contemporary victim-centred discourses about sexual violence. In the midst of current discourse about making space for victims to tell their stories, we might rethink the way that we stage Donna Anna telling hers.

Within the story of the opera, Don Ottavio believes Donna Anna when she tells him her story. But from the audience's perspective, the director can choose to make Anna's story a lie. For Bieito and Grinda, who both represent Anna as at least partially compliant in the opening scene of the opera, the story Anna tells in "Don Ottavio, son morta!" is not strictly true. In Bieito's production, Donna Anna is the willing intimate partner of an un-disguised Don Giovanni in the back of his car. She flees when the Commendatore and Giovanni begin to fight, and reappears to discover his body after Leporello and Giovanni leave the scene. When Donna Anna next encounters Don Giovanni, she and Don Ottavio ask for Giovanni's help to find her father's killer. Anna and Giovanni surreptitiously exchange glances and gestures in this scene that Ottavio is oblivious to, confirming that in this production Anna and Giovanni are having a secret affair. Donna Elvira enters and warns Anna and Ottavio not to trust Giovanni. As Giovanni tells the couple that Elvira is troubled, he embraces Elvira, and Anna looks furious. Giovanni and Elvira exit together embracing, and Giovanni blows a furtive, taunting kiss at Anna in parting. Anna, livid, turns to Ottavio and begins her recitative "Don Ottavio, son morta!" In this production, the entirety of the story she tells about Giovanni sneaking into her bedroom is a concoction. We know she is lying to Ottavio because we saw what really happened. Anna's

delivery of this untruth features a number of exaggerated, dramatic flourishes that stand out in the otherwise highly realist style of acting in this production. She performs false trauma to convince Ottavio of the lie she is telling him. In context, this lie appears to be an act of revenge on Don Giovanni for fraternizing with Elvira; Donna Anna feels betrayed by her lover, and so she tells her betrothed that he tried to rape her.

The version of Donna Anna's story in this production, considered in isolation, is not without value. The exaggerated, theatrical performance that Anna gives in this number is an interesting way of dealing with the tension many musicologists have noted between Anna's high opera seria style and the tone of the opera.[35] But Bieito's production does not exist in a vacuum, and reading his *Don Giovanni* in its larger context complicates our perception of his interpretation of the story. It has been well established that Donna Anna has not been treated generously in the reception history of *Don Giovanni*, with critics frequently reducing her to a "repressed hypocrite, vengeful harpy, or humorless ice princess."[36] Additionally, critics and directors have often suggested that Donna Anna may harbour a secret, burning desire for Don Giovanni.[37] Bieito exaggerates this reading of Anna in his seedy, contemporary setting, but the basic interpretation of her character is not new. Believing that Anna desires Don Giovanni necessitates interpreting the words she sings in the opera through a sceptical lens. In Bieito's

[35] There is contention among Mozart scholars about how the seria style should be viewed in his comic operas generally, and *Don Giovanni*'s already complicated relationship with genre amplifies the discord. For instance, while Allanbrook sees Donna Anna's heroic style as necessarily undercut dramatically by its buffa context, Hunter argues that in eighteenth-century opera buffa, the high style could be used seriously or as parody. Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart:* Le nozze di Figaro *and* Don Giovanni (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 228–29; Mary Hunter, "Some Representations of *Opera Seria* in *Opera Buffa*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 2 (1991): 107.

[36] Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007), 2. Brown-Montesano surveys leading interpretations of Donna Anna from early Don Juan stories to the present in her chapter "Feminine Vengeance I: The Assailed/Assailant."

[37] E. T. A. Hoffmann's reading, mentioned above, has been highly influential on this point. Hoffmann represents Anna and Giovanni as star-crossed lovers, whose paths tragically cross too late.

version of events, Anna's secret desire has become an explicit sexual relationship, and our scepticism about the story she tells Ottavio is now utter disbelief.

In addition to the context of the opera's reception history, there is the context of twenty-first century sexual politics, into which Bieito's production has been received since its premiere in 2001. The rape myth that women routinely lie about sexual violence is a relatively complex one. Concrete numbers about the percentage of false rape allegations are incredibly difficult to measure; rape cases are often difficult to investigate and prosecute, and many remain unsolved for lack of evidence. Accusations deemed "unfounded" often bolster the numbers of false accusations, though the classification refers more to an unavailability of proof than to any evidence or perception that the alleged victim has been dishonest. Despite the methodological challenges, the question of the prevalence of false accusations of rape is a hotly contested issue with high stakes for rape victims. There is a troubling and persistent disparity between researchers, who estimate very low rates of false allegations, and front-line criminal justice professionals, who insist a great number of rape accusations are false.[38] The nuances of this issue have been somewhat flattened in popular rhetoric about "believing victims." This rallying cry has its place though, as a reminder that when listening to accusations of rape, as with accusations of any crime, the best practice is to assume an alleged victim is telling the truth until their report is contradicted by some other evidence.[39] "Believing victims" is a response to a culture in which stories about women who wantonly lie about rape are overrepresented. When women accuse powerful men of sexual misconduct, we hear again and again that they are doing it for attention

[38] Candida L. Saunders, "The Truth, the Half-Truth, and Nothing Like the Truth: Reconceptualizing False Allegations of Rape," *The British Journal of Criminology* 52, no. 6 (2012): 1152. The study Saunders cites was done with a police department in the UK, but similar disparities are widespread and well documented. A survey of other sources from the 1990s to 2010 can be found in Saunders's introduction.
[39] Brent E. Turvey, *False Allegations: Investigative and Forensic Issues in Fraudulent Reports of Crime* (London: Academic Press, 2018), 192.

or out of spite. Rosalind Gill has argued that the prevalence of the stereotype of women crying rape for revenge or for attention has led to a situation where "it would not be an exaggeration to say that all rape claims are viewed through this sceptical lens—which constitutes a major barrier to women reporting sexual attacks, since many fear, quite rationally, that they will not be believed."[40]

Bieito's Donna Anna invents a story about rape and falsely accuses Don Giovanni because she is angry. The rape accusation allows Anna to tell Ottavio that it was Giovanni who killed her father, without admitting that it was her affair that motivated their confrontation. She convincingly accuses Giovanni of both the crime he committed against her father, which she had been covering up, and an invented crime against herself. When she asks Ottavio to seek vengeance for her, her father's murder and the concocted rape are merely excuses—she really wants to see Giovanni punished for being unfaithful to her. This is a shrewdly calculated lie told by a jilted lover as punishment. This kind of false allegation is exceptionally rare in reality, but dominant in the kinds of stories we tell about rape.[41] This stereotype dominates discourses around high-profile accusations of sexual misconduct. Look, for instance, at reactions to Christine Blasey Ford's 2018 testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee addressing her sexual assault allegation against Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Republican senators, President Trump, and Kavanaugh himself all relied on this old rhetoric about scorned women crying rape to ruin the lives of men, to discredit Dr. Ford's allegation.[42]

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[40] Gill, *Gender and the Media,* 142.

[41] Saunders differentiates between "false complaints," in which rape allegations are completely fabricated, and "false accounts," in which an allegation of rape contains falsehoods. False complaints, like the one Anna makes here, are considered rare, even among police and prosecutors. Saunders, "The Truth, the Half-Truth, and Nothing Like the Truth," 1167.

[42] "Updates from the Riveting Testimonies of Christine Blasey Ford and Brett Kavanaugh," *New York Times,* September 27, 2018; James Hohmann, "Daily 202: Trump's Mockery of Christine Blasey Ford Underscores His Scorn for the #MeToo Movement," *Washington Post,* October 3, 2018.

In Grinda's production, Donna Anna's account in "Don Ottavio, son morta!" is not a complete fabrication as it is in Bieito's, but it is an edited version of the truth. Anna tells Ottavio that as soon as Giovanni tried to embrace her in her room, she recognized he was not Ottavio and she tried to get away. As she tells her story, a pair of shadows appears on the wall recalling the shadows we saw in the first scene.[43] But this shadow-play does not replicate the shadow-play we saw in the opera's opening scene. Instead, these shadows act out the story as Anna tells it now. In the first scene, we saw Anna and Giovanni kiss and embrace in shadow for some time before Anna began to resist. She does not tell Ottavio this part, and the relationship between the two shadow-plays emphasizes this difference. Ottavio listens with bated breath while Anna tells her story and he sighs in relief when she tells him that she freed herself from Giovanni before he could do anything besides embrace her. A sympathetic reading of Anna in this production might interpret her editing of the truth as a way of protecting Ottavio and herself from the fallout if it were discovered that Giovanni had achieved some further intimacy than what she reports. But we also saw that once Anna and Giovanni appeared onstage in the first scene her attempts to escape him were accompanied by passionate sighs and caresses. The pleasure that we see Grinda's Anna experience does not excuse what still appears to be an attempted rape. But in the context of a fictional representation of an act of sexual violence, Grinda's choice to depict Anna experiencing illicit pleasure perpetuates the idea that sexual assault is titillating, even when victims say that it is not. And, like Bieito's production, it asks us how we really know that we can believe women when they make accusations of sexual assault.

[43] This promotional photograph from iOpera shows a still from this scene as Donna Anna (Patrizia Ciofi) tells her story to Don Ottavio (Maxim Mironov): https://web.archive.org/web/20200803214324/https:/i1.wp.com/iopera.es/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Don-Giovanni-Montecarlo-2015.jpg?fit=967%2C626.

Trauma

A focus on the women in this opera necessitates a shift in focus from how they advance Don Giovanni's story to the impact the action of the plot has on them as subjects. One of the rape myths that Rosalind Gill points out in news coverage of sexual violence is the idea that rape is just sex, and does not need to be taken seriously as a violent crime.[44] In reality, sexual violence is the type of trauma associated with the highest conditional risk for development of post-traumatic stress disorder.[45] Feminists have advocated for victim-centred approaches to sexual violence informed by trauma. The way that a production of *Don Giovanni* represents the pain of the victims is closely related to how seriously it takes Giovanni's crimes.

Donna Anna: The previous section considered the way that the staging of Anna's recitative when she recounts the story of her attack interacts with discourses about believing the victims of sexual assault. The question there was whether or not Anna is knowingly lying when she recounts the events that triggered the action of the opera. But in real-life cases of sexual violence, evaluating the veracity of victim's stories is rarely this simple. Incidents of sexual violence are traumatic events, and trauma has a powerful effect on memory. Research on trauma and memory has been increasingly visible in recent years, in particular as a way of illuminating some of the problems with the way we investigate and prosecute rape cases.[46] It is not impossible to interpret the faulty report of Grinda's Donna Anna in "Don Ottavio, son morta!" as a result of memory loss associated with trauma. During a traumatic incident, stress hormones have two distinct

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[44] Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 140.
[45] Ronald C. Kessler et al., "Trauma and PTSD in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys," *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 8, no. 5 (2017), section 3.3.
[46] Lori Haskell and Melanie Randall, "How Trauma Effects Memory and Recall," in *The Impact of Trauma on Adult Sexual Assault Victims*, submitted to Research and Statistics Division, Justice Canada (2019), https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/trauma/p4.html. This research paper published on Justice Canada's website summarizes the findings of a great deal of recent research from neuroscientists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and legal scholars.

effects on the way that memory is encoded: while early moments of the traumatic event are super-encoded as "flashbulb" memories, an extended traumatic experience can temporarily impair the hippocampus leading to minimal encoding and fragmentary memories.[47] A charitable interpretation of the disjunction between the scene we see played out at the opera's opening and the one Donna Anna recounts in Grinda's production might view the moment at which she recognizes that the man embracing her is not Ottavio as a vividly encoded memory at the beginning of a traumatic experience, and everything thereafter as fragmentary. Perhaps the details of the ways in which she played along and the length of time spent in his arms are lost to her. This certainly could be an interesting way to represent this storyline in a production of *Don Giovanni* informed by our improved understanding of trauma and memory. For a reading like this to be readily legible to an audience, though, it would take some more work from the staging than we see here.

Sivadier's production stages trauma in "Don Ottavio, son morta!" more successfully. In the first scene of Act 1 in this production, Donna Anna is a fierce adversary to Don Giovanni. She manages to incapacitate Giovanni at one point, holding his arm behind his back in a wrestling lock, from which he is only freed when Leporello joins the fray. She then takes a knife that Leporello was trying to give to Don Giovanni and attacks with it. Giovanni disarms her just before the Commendatore enters. When recounting the attack to Ottavio, she appears more terrified than angry. Eleonora Buratto's vocal performance through "Don Ottavio, son morta!" communicates Donna Anna's sense of panic. She incorporates a wide palette of vocal colours, over-accentuates some consonants, and takes audible, gasping breaths at the musical pauses. The effect is quite different from other interpretations of this scene, which can feel a little stuffy and

[47] Ibid.

false. Whereas most of the Annas in this chapter confidently perform their fury and horror for the audience, this Anna hides her face in her hands and clings to Ottavio for support. As she gets into the details of the attack, she demonstrates on Ottavio what Giovanni did to her, holding her hand over his mouth from behind. She reaches into his pocket and removes his knife, which she clutches as she continues her story. Ottavio has his back to her, and she crosses to him, handling the knife, while she recounts following Giovanni out into the street. When she says she became the assailant rather than the victim, she points the knife at Ottavio's back. When she recalls Giovanni killing her father, she raises the knife over her head to strike. At the last moment, Ottavio turns around to face Anna and she staggers back, dropping the weapon.

Cathy Caruth writes that "trauma is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge…and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time. Not having been fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become…'narrative memory' that is integrated into a completed story of the past."[48] When Donna Anna is called upon to recount the traumatic event of her attempted rape, she is unable to intellectualize it, to narrate it as something that happened in the past. Rather, she relives it vividly, to the point that she loses grip on her present reality. When she wields the knife in this scene, we see her revert to her state of mind in the opening scene with Giovanni. When Ottavio turns and she sees his face, she crashes back into the present and drops the knife. This representation aligns with commonly understood representations of flashbacks associated with post-traumatic stress. Sivadier's production makes Anna much more sympathetic in this scene than is typical. Because her pain and fear are represented in a way that reflects what we know about trauma and the psyche, Sivadier's Anna appears more human to us.

[48] Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 153.

Donna Elvira: When we are introduced to Donna Elvira in the first act of the opera, she has already been hurt by Don Giovanni. We see (or are at least given clues about) what Giovanni does to Anna and to Zerlina, but with Elvira all we know is that she was one of his conquests, she believed he would be faithful to her, and she feels betrayed. She tries to open the eyes of the other characters to Giovanni's true nature even while she remains trapped under his spell. At the opera's conclusion, while Anna and Zerlina prepare to return to their lives and romantic relationships, Elvira resigns herself to a life of isolation in a convent. Her anger and sadness are typically exaggerated and theatrical in performance, and it can be challenging to take her pain seriously when she is portrayed in this way. A particularly good snapshot of a production's opinion of Elvira's suffering is found in her second-act recitative and aria, "In quali eccessi, o Numi…Mi tradì quell'alma ingrata." After having Giovanni and Leporello's deception revealed and Giovanni's guilt in the murder of the Commendatore and assault of Masetto confirmed, Elvira is left alone onstage. She is torn between her desire for vengeance and her abiding love. She muses on the terrible things Giovanni has done but admits she would still forgive him.[49]

Most of the productions here treat this aria as a simple expression of a tragic love. Elvira emotes sadness and anger with a straightforward high-operatic affect. Like most of the approaches to Anna's "Or sai chi l'onore" above, these opera seria snapshots do not typically strive for emotional realism. If there is a problem with this traditional approach, it is in the potential disconnect between audience expectations and operatic performance traditions. In 2014, Mary Hunter noted that many of her students were approaching Mozart's operas looking for role models and were not finding them: "They had expected feminist exemplars and had gotten, basically, warnings."[50] She asks how productions of operas "might make contact with an

[49] The productions by Bieito and Wieler/Morabito do not include "Mi tradì."
[50] Allanbrook, Hunter, and Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," 58.

audience that takes female 'strength' as an article of faith."[51] Feminist consciousness, especially around the issue of sexual violence, has only grown in the opera-going public since Hunter posed this question. There are two examples in the productions here of approaches to staging Donna Elvira's "Mi tradì" that explore different, more contemporary depictions of women and trauma that are worth considering.

Sivadier's production, which has already portrayed Anna's trauma sensitively and seriously, is also noteworthy in its approach to Elvira in this scene. It can be tempting to condemn Elvira for her resistance to disavow Giovanni. She knows his true character better than anyone (besides Leporello) yet she continues to defend and forgive him. A traditional performance of "Mi tradì" as straight tragic romance does little to combat this inclination. But Sivadier emphasizes in his Elvira a sense of confusion and even fear at her own feelings. She shares the stage with the post-coital sleeping bodies of Don Giovanni and her maid. She wakes her maid and interacts with her as she sings, holding the young woman's face in her hands in a pleading gesture. She moves to sit with Giovanni, who does not wake up as she holds his head in her lap. Her actions and body language throughout are loving and angry in equal measure. Her expression of emotional torment never wanes. She runs her hands through her hair and clutches at her scalp looking childlike, lost, disoriented. The sentiment of this aria, when staged in this way, becomes less a great romance and more the fallout of abuse. We do not know exactly what happened between Don Giovanni and Donna Elvira before the events of the opera, but we can assume that he lied to and manipulated her in order to add her to his list of conquests; she calls him a villain and a betrayer when she first appears. From there, we have seen Giovanni and Leporello mock her, gleefully share with her the truth of her relationship with Giovanni (that she

[51] Ibid.

is merely a name on his list), and discredit her to the other characters. Then, in order to trick her into an intimate moment with Leporello, Giovanni professes to love her and threatens to kill himself if she will not give him another chance. Especially in light of Anna's flashback earlier in this production, Elvira's behaviour here can read as another manifestation of trauma. In her landmark text, *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman notes that traumatized people sometimes dissociate the emotions caused by traumatic events from clear memories of the events themselves.[52] Elvira's wide-eyed confusion and terror here feels like proportionate emotional distress for what we have seen Giovanni put her through, but she is struggling to make the connection between that pain and Giovanni himself. Her overtures of forgiveness here read not as the steadfastness of her love, but as a failure to account for Giovanni's ongoing mistreatment.

Zambello's production also emphasizes the damage Giovanni has done to Elvira during "Mi tradì." This time, Elvira's performance itself is fairly typical of stagings of this aria: she plays the tragic heroine, embracing and singing to Giovanni's hat which he has left onstage. While she sings, though, Donna Anna and Zerlina enter and intervene. They gently pry the hat from her arms and comfort Elvira, their concern for her clear on their faces. They remain with her for the duration of her aria, and the three women leave together. This gesture of sympathy and support from Giovanni's other victims also highlights the fact that this is not just a tragic love aria; Elvira is wounded and confused. Anna and Zerlina model how we as spectators might appropriately respond to Elvira's actions: not with judgment but with sympathy, and not focused on her failings but on what Giovanni has put her through. Feminist therapist Laura Brown pointed out in the 1990s that old definitions of trauma considered traumatic events to be those that fell outside the typical boundaries of the human experience. She found that this definition

[52] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 34.

excludes the trauma of sexual assault and domestic violence, because they occur so frequently in women's lives as to appear "normal." She advocated for a feminist analysis that draws attention to "the private, secret, insidious traumas" experienced by women in our society.[53] We know Elvira has been lied to and betrayed by a man she trusted. We know that that man has gone on to mock and denigrate her and to continue to manipulate her feelings for his own gain. She believes that she is in a relationship with Don Giovanni that can still be healed; on stage today, she resembles a victim of intimate partner violence. Zambello's approach to staging "Mi tradì" encourages us not to see Elvira as ridiculous but to feel for her the way Anna and Zerlina do.[54]

Zerlina: Donna Elvira's emotional turmoil is often represented with an element of comedy or absurdity in *Don Giovanni*, while Zerlina typically displays no negative emotional states at all apart from some trepidation about running into Don Giovanni at the beginning of the Act 1 finale. Typically, Zerlina bounces back cheerfully from a couple of near-misses with Don Giovanni—she is rescued by the other characters at the end of "Là ci darem la mano" and again in the Act 1 finale. Zerlina's unflappability in the face of Giovanni's manipulation and attempted assault can be refreshing—she is a woman who refuses to let Giovanni ruin her life—but to an audience thinking about real-world sexual violence it can also appear to shrug off the seriousness of sexual assault as a violent crime. Giovanni tries to force himself on Zerlina and on Anna, but where Anna seems deeply impacted by her experience, Zerlina typically is not.

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[53] Laura S. Brown, "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma," in Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 102.

[54] Sivadier also creates a sense of solidarity and mutual support among the three women. After capturing the man they believed to be Don Giovanni but was in fact Leporello, Anna lies down at the front of the stage in motionless sorrow. While Don Ottavio sings a beautiful and elaborate aria about consoling and avenging her, "Il mio tesoro," Elvira and Zerlina kneel down next to Anna and slowly help her get to her feet. Ottavio's performance of his love pales in comparison to the intimate moment between the three women.

In a rarely performed scene from the second act, we get a glimpse of Zerlina after her assault in a context not defined by her relationship with Masetto. Mozart's revision of *Don Giovanni* for its Vienna premiere in 1788 includes a duet between Zerlina and Leporello after the latter has been caught masquerading as his master. In this scene, "Restati qua…Per queste tue manine," Zerlina threatens Leporello with a razor and ties him up. She tells him "you'll see what you get for harming girls," and "this is the way to deal with men."[55] This scene, while usually dismissed as comic relief and cut, offers a more satisfying conclusion to Zerlina's character arc than she gets without it.[56] The Kent and Wieler/Morabito productions are the only ones discussed here to include this scene. Kent's Zerlina binds Leporello with her own stockings and ties her kerchief around his neck (preparing him to be shaved "without any soap").[57] Every time she needs a new bit of fabric she lifts her skirts to root around through the layers of crinoline to produce something new that she can use. I find it thrilling to see Zerlina at this point in the drama using the trappings of her own femininity to overpower Leporello and avenge both Elvira's humiliation and—indirectly—her own abuse.[58]

Bieito's production, with its heightened realism, presents a Zerlina who does not navigate the opera as painlessly as she does in most productions. We first meet Zerlina and Masetto celebrating their upcoming nuptials with a group of their peers. In Bieito's production, the couple and the party are all drinking heavily. When Don Giovanni ushers Masetto away, the groom is belligerent and violent. He shouts at Zerlina and grabs her face roughly in his hand before

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[55] "Vedrai, schiuma de' birbi, qual premio n'ha chi le ragazze ingiuria." "Così, così cogli uomini, così, così si fa."
[56] Julian Rushton, ed., *W. A. Mozart: Don Giovanni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 68. Donna Elvira's aria "Mi tradì" was also added for the Vienna premiere, but unlike the Zerlina/Leporello duet, it is almost always included in productions now.
[57] "Sì mascalzone! Io sbarbare ti vo' senza sapone."
[58] Wieler/Morabito's Zerlina binds Leporello's hands with her wedding veil, but she is watched by Masetto and Don Giovanni the whole time, which somewhat undercuts my ability to enjoy it as a moment of real power for her character.

spitting beer at her on his way offstage. In the recitative before "Là ci darem," right after Masetto's exit, Don Giovanni tells Zerlina she can do better than Masetto. In a period production of this opera, Giovanni's dismissal of Masetto as coarse and oafish refers to his relatively low class. But in this twenty-first century setting and given the context of Masetto's violence toward Zerlina, Giovanni no longer seems to be telling her she deserves someone of higher birth, but that she deserves someone who will not batter her. Giovanni says he cannot bear to see Zerlina's beauty "mistreated" by Masetto. The Italian verb, "strapazzare," is translated in the subtitles of Bieito's production as "abused." So Giovanni is offering Zerlina an alternative to her abuse by Masetto. The seduction in "Là ci darem" loses a lot of its charm in this new context. She is afraid of Masetto's wrath at every step, and she only concedes to and embraces Don Giovanni after he has shown her that he is armed and lets her handle the gun, which she does eagerly. After Elvira breaks up Zerlina and Don Giovanni, Zerlina returns to Masetto to smooth things over in her aria, "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto." Typically, this aria shows the control Zerlina wields over her fiancé, and she easily convinces him to forgive her by facetiously offering to let him beat her. Bieito, though, takes her words literally, and instead of a cheeky manipulation, this aria now accompanies domestic abuse culminating in a sexual assault.

When Zerlina next encounters Don Giovanni in Bieito's production, she is terrified. In the libretto she says she is afraid of what Giovanni will do to Masetto, but it is also clear that in this production she is afraid of what Masetto will do to her. Over the course of the Act 1 finale, Giovanni and Leporello get Zerlina drunk, until she is hardly able to stay on her feet while dancing with Giovanni. He lifts her over his shoulders and carries her offstage as she calls out that she has been betrayed. Zerlina reappears bleeding heavily from the mouth and with bloodstains down the front of her wedding dress. Giovanni pulls off her blonde wig of ringlets to

reveal her short brown hair underneath. In the other productions, Don Giovanni's violence toward Zerlina in this finale is typically heightened when she had been especially interested in him earlier in the opera. In these cases, the violence assures the audience that what happens offstage is nonconsensual, even in cases where Zerlina had been involved in consensual intimacy with Giovanni before this point. But Bieito's Zerlina is already terrified, and so intoxicated she can barely stand. If Giovanni's heightened violence serves the plot here, it is by marking Zerlina physically with the bloodstains and short hair so that the trauma she has endured thus far will not be easily forgotten through the rest of the opera. She never changes out of the bloodied dress. Now, when she returns to Masetto again to comfort him in her second aria, "Vedrai, carino, se sei buonino," we cannot forget what she has just gone through. In Bieito's production, Zerlina's interminable cheerfulness, expressed in her words and her music, begins to look like a coping mechanism. Judith Herman writes that "the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness," but that despite our efforts "atrocities…refuse to be buried."[59] Bieito literally marks Zerlina with her traumatic experience, so we cannot ignore it even as she tries to ignore it herself.

Bieito's production as a whole is saturated with sexual violence. In addition to the scenes I have discussed here, Don Ottavio also forces himself on Donna Anna during her second-act aria. The violence is explicit and rampant and draws attention to itself. Bieito makes *Don Giovanni* a story all about violence, about toxic relationships, and about predatory sexuality. It is the only production on this list that represents Zerlina as experiencing trauma at all. But while it is sympathetic to the women, Bieito's production achieves this sympathy by emphasizing their victimization. Yet as a foil to the other more traditional productions in this survey, Bieito's shows

[59] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

how a director's approach to the sexual violence in this opera can change the story it tells and illuminate other potential meanings in this very familiar work.

In this chapter I have focused on the way feminist sexual politics can inform reception of *Don Giovanni* in performance today. The mainstream popularity of the #MeToo movement has also encouraged some directors and opera companies to respond to the movement and to the politics of sexual violence directly in their approach to this opera. References to #MeToo and other contemporary feminist movements proliferate in promotional materials for productions of *Don Giovanni*, though in my experience the productions themselves often fail to engage with changing thought around sexual violence.[60] But I have come across some directors in recent years who consciously and sensitively engage with the ideas and politics of contemporary feminist movements in their productions. I close this chapter on an optimistic note with a brief look at an English production by a young director who represents a #MeToo rhetoric on her stage.

Laura Attridge's 2018 *Don Giovanni* for the Waterperry Opera Festival in Oxfordshire lays bare the contemporary resonances Attridge and the singers found in the characters and story. Set in the present day, this production highlights a number of the issues I have raised in this chapter: the trauma of sexual violence for Anna; the psychological manipulation by a trusted partner for Elvira; and the relationship between alcohol and consent for Zerlina as a modern

[60] In 2019, Toronto's Opera Atelier advertised their *Don Giovanni* in a *Toronto Star* interview with the artistic director. The article's title pondered whether Don Giovanni was "a #MeToo monster or an honest seducer?" The production itself, though, did not engage with this question about sexual predation through the modern lens the article title suggests; its concerns were limited to eighteenth-century ideas about morality and sexual deviance. John Terauds, "Is Don Giovanni a #MeToo monster or an honest seducer? Opera Atelier weighs in," *Toronto Star*, October 28, 2019.

bride-to-be. In the epilogue after Giovanni's death, Attridge has the full ensemble onstage singing, including the singers who have portrayed Don Giovanni and the Commedatore. The full company step out of character and break the fourth wall to address the audience directly as they sing the celebratory words that evil deeds will never pay, and that evil men will go to hell. Attridge describes the effect she wanted:

> Rather than a triumphant celebration of the defeat of Don Giovanni, layered on top of our realization of the story as a contemporary tale of toxic masculinity and its poisonous effect on all of those around it, this became a strong rallying cry to go away and fight the injustices still going on around us because of this kind of man—real and allegorical. We were saying, "We all know this man, and men like him. Open your eyes, go out and fight, because we have to believe that goodness can win. There's no Commendatore who's going to do it for you." But also, "We're here, and we see him, and we're not giving up."[61]

Attridge's comments about her production illuminate some of the kinds of thinking that can go into crafting representations of sexual violence that are victim-centred and informed by contemporary feminist politics. Increased popular awareness of the prevalence and harm of sexual violence today practically ensures that many audience members and critics will bring these ideas into the theatre with them. *Don Giovanni* presents a number of problems when staged in the midst of our cultural conversations about sexual violence, and they are problems that need our attention. In the 2019/2020 season, *Don Giovanni* was the fourth most performed opera worldwide with 528 performances of 109 different productions.[62] This is an opera that is widely beloved, even by many of its critics, and its continued popularity feels assured. An ethically informed approach to the production and reception of this opera entails facing the issues presented by the opera directly, through the lens of our own Zeitgeist. Throughout this chapter I

[61] Laura Attridge, interview with the author, 18 September 2019.
[62] Statistics from Operabase.com.

have modelled a framework for making ethical judgments about artistic choices made at the level of opera production and performance.

Failing to think through the way sexual violence is represented in this opera is not, now, just an issue of dramatic, aesthetic quality, but of social responsibility. The prevalence of #MeToo language in the way we talk about and promote *Don Giovanni* today indicates that the opera community knows this work is fraught with contemporary resonances about sexual violence. It is important to ask what we hope to achieve by staging *Don Giovanni* now, and how we might best accomplish those goals when we represent this story and its characters onstage. The complexity of the question of morality in *Don Giovanni* is not a detriment to an ethically informed performance; opera practitioners can use this narrative and cast of characters to explore pressing contemporary issues around consent, trauma, and memory with nuance, guided by contemporary scholarship and discourse. I do not wish to see a reduction in the diversity of different approaches and interpretations to this opera. Rather, I hope that opera companies, directors, and their creative teams might approach this opera with a consciousness of the complexity of its relationship with rape myths and other stereotypes around sexual violence.

A common objection to ethical criticism of this and other historical operas is that it is unfair to hold Mozart to the ethical standards of the present. But rather than framing this issue in terms of Mozart's beliefs or ethical orientation, I think we would be wiser to focus on what we want out of this work now. We can respect and appreciate Mozart's legacy while also holding ourselves to the ethical standards of the present. Instead of asking what Mozart and Da Ponte meant for *Don Giovanni to* say, I want to ask instead what we want it to say, and what we can say through it and about it in our contemporary practices of performance and reception.

CHAPTER 5

Rape in/as Warfare

Le ciel ne me laissa qu'un enfant, qu'une fille.…
Un soldat l'enlevait—elle mon dernier bien!
Hedwige, je suis père et j'ai su la défendre.

Heaven left me only one child, one daughter.…
a soldier carried her off, she my last blessing.
Hedwige, I am a father and I knew how to defend her.

–Étienne de Jouy and Hippolyte Bis, *Guillaume Tell*

In 2015, booing and heckling mid-performance at Covent Garden was heard in classical music circles around the world. Never before, pronounced the London critics, had they seen an English audience driven to shout in the theatre the way audiences on the continent do. Typically, we are assured, Londoners have the good manners to wait until the curtain call to voice their malcontent. The offending production was Damiano Michieletto's new staging of Rossini's French grand opera *Guillaume Tell* for the Royal Opera House (ROH). Michieletto updates Schiller's story of Austrian oppression of the Swiss people to a non-specific twentieth-century occupation by a brutal military force. During the open dress rehearsal, the audience erupted into jeers and shouts during the ballet in the third act when a group of soldiers singled out a young woman from the chorus and sexually abused her.

While the size and scope of the critical response to Michieletto's *Tell* was exceptional, the rape scene itself is not. This chapter considers the relationship between war and sexual violence in four *Regietheater* productions of canonic operas including Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell*. The other productions are: Tobias Kratzer's 2019 production of Verdi's *La forza del destino* for Oper Frankfurt, in which the third act takes place during the War in Vietnam; Tilman Knabe's 2007

production of Puccini's *Turandot* for the Aalto Theater Essen, set in a non-specific contemporary authoritarian Asian state; and Calixto Bieito's 2000 production of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* for the Gran Teatre del Liceu, set in a non-specific contemporary police state.[1] All four productions take place under military rule, either amidst combat or occupation, and feature acts of sexual violence supported and condoned by military structures.

Sexual violence has occurred alongside war throughout human history. In 1977, an amendment to the Geneva Conventions explicitly outlawed the rape of victims of armed conflicts, but it was only in the 1990s that, in response to a number of specific conflicts, international governing bodies began to recognize the full scope of wartime sexual violence.[2] In 1993, instances of widespread gang rape and sexual slavery of Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina were classified as crimes against humanity for the first time. Then in 1998, the United Nations ruled that rape could be an element of genocide, after witnessing how during the Rwandan Genocide Tutsi women were systematically raped in an attempt to destroy their ethnic group. Still, only since 2008 has the United Nations adopted language that categorizes rape and sexual violence as war crimes. These landmark decisions have led to gradual acceptance of the idea that sexual violence is not a side-effect or coincidence of war, but a weapon of war employed systematically in military conflicts for purposes up to and including genocide.

The classification of sexual violence as a weapon of war came to wide public attention during the Balkan Conflict, especially as related to the rape camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alexandra Stiglmayer published interviews with survivors of the war, and the resulting 1992 volume *Mass Rape* is still a touchstone feminist perspective on wartime rape. Stiglmayer argues

[1] Knabe's Turandot was remounted in 2015 and 2018.
[2] The Third Geneva Convention "relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War," adopted in 1929, specifies that POWs are to be humanely treated and protected from violence, but acts of sexual violence are not specifically named.

that although popular wisdom has typically excused wartime rape as a natural result of enforced chastity among young soldiers, we might better understand the motivations for these rapes in terms of existing structures of misogyny. She writes:

> [The soldier] rapes because he wants to engage in violence. He rapes because he wants to demonstrate his power. He rapes because he is the victor. He rapes because the woman is the enemy's woman, and he wants to humiliate and annihilate the enemy. He rapes because the woman is herself the enemy whom he wishes to humiliate and annihilate. He rapes because he despises women. He rapes to prove his virility. He rapes because the acquisition of the female body means a piece of territory conquered. He rapes to take out on someone else the humiliation he has suffered in the war. He rapes to work off his fears. He rapes because it's really only some 'fun' with the guys. He rapes because war, a man's business, has awakened his aggressiveness, and he directs it at those who play a subordinate role in the world of war.[3]

Stiglmayer's justifications here touch on issues of objectification, dehumanization, and male dominance common to interpretations of rape that run throughout my dissertation. What becomes especially clear in the wartime context is the way in which rape and the idea of rape are often used as metaphors for other kinds of violence and violation.

A metaphorical understanding of rape is discernible even in the ways wartime rape is legislated. In 2005, Amnesty International's fact sheet about violence against women in armed conflict read that women "experience armed conflicts as sexual objects, as presumed emblems of national and ethnic identity, and as female members of ethnic, racial, religious, or national groups."[4] Indeed, war rape is seen as a tool of genocide when it is carried out "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such."[5] When soldiers rape women in the context of war, the intent is already in a sense metaphorical—the humiliation and abuse of women symbolizes the domination of a land and people. Rhonda

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[3] Alexandra Stiglmayer, "The Rapes in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Mass Rape,* ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 84.
[4] "Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict: A Fact Sheet," *Amnesty International,* 25 August 2015, https://docgo.net/vaw-in-armed-conflict-fact-sheet.
[5] Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations 12 January 1951.

Copelon writes, the fact "that the rape of women is also designed to humiliate the men or destroy 'the enemy' itself reflects the fundamental objectification of women. Women are the target of abuse at the same time as their subjectivity is completely denied."[6] The women who are raped during war are representatives of their ethnic groups and stand-ins for their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Their individual domination is a metaphor for the large-scale domination of their homes and people.

The metaphorical weight of wartime rape has long been a useful tool in the theatre. It is not often feasible to show the larger-scale tactics of warfare on the stage; huge bloody battles typically resist live representation in this way. Wartime rape, though, is interpersonal in its scope while still representing the conflict at large. Theatre historian Jennifer Airey writes of the political resonance of rape narratives on England's Restoration stage: "Acts of rape in political tracts and stage plays…transform the female body into a symbol of the suffering nation, a physical representation of the horrific consequences of Catholic, Cavalier, Whig, Tory, Dutch, or Stuart rule."[7] I will now consider the way representations of rape and war work in these military-dominant productions of *Guillaume Tell*, *La forza del destino*, *Un ballo in maschera*, and *Turandot*. Representing rape on stage in wartime operas can function to challenge and critique the normalization and valourization of warfare on operatic stages. But there are risks and drawbacks to using these kinds of representations as well, which I will explore through analysis of these productions.

[6] Rhonda Copelon, "Surfacing Gender: Reconceptualizing Crimes Against Women in Times of War," in Stiglmayer, *Mass Rape*, 208.
[7] Airey, *The Politics of Rape*, 12.

Tropes of Wartime Rape on the Operatic Stage

Many nineteenth-century operas are set at wartime. British opera critic Hugo Shirley has argued that French grand opera "tended to favour history and its battles for the scenic opportunities they afforded rather than for the lessons they taught."[8] *Regietheater* also loves a wartime setting—both for wartime operas and sometimes operas whose libretti do not mention war at all—but they are typically stark and dystopian modern-day war or occupation settings. This often leads to a perceived mismatch between blatant violence onstage and the beautiful music of a beloved opera. Amplifying and even inventing violence in productions of canonic operas can function as a criticism of opera's tendency to dramatize scenarios of human suffering for the sake of pleasant entertainment. Treating these stories seriously (in the opinion of many critics, too seriously) points out and problematizes opera's predominantly aesthetic preoccupation with stories of war and oppression. Sexual violence is proving to be a popular way for directors to achieve this level of increased seriousness. In many cases, staging sexual violence makes the stakes of a war plot more relevant by placing the focus on the individual human suffering of an innocent. Beyond these practical justifications for staging wartime sexual violence, I have noticed several tropes in the way wartime rape is represented on the contemporary opera stage. Analyzing the way these tropes work in the productions by Michieletto, Bieito, Kratzer, and Knabe will illustrate more specifically the ways in which rape functions in these wartime stories.

Rape as Performance: In Chapter 3 on *Salome*, I argue that the context of performance in the Dance of the Seven Veils complicates the representation of sexual assault because it encourages

[8] Hugo Shirley, "Mariinsky's *Les Troyens*—A Bad Night for Berlioz and Edinburgh," *Spectator*, 6 September 2014.

us to consume Salome's rape as entertainment and for pleasure. Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* and Kratzer's *La forza del destino* both similarly stage sexual assault in the context of a performance.

In the third act of *Guillaume Tell*, the libretto specifies that during a celebration of the anniversary of Austrian rule, the Austrian soldiers force some of the Swiss women to dance for them, and then with them. The ballet movement in the third act typically scores a number of dances performed by the Swiss under duress.[9] This is an act of violence and coercion predicated on sex, and it is also a performance. In Michieletto's production, the undercurrents of sexual coercion are brought to the surface: in place of a dance, the ballet accompanies the sexual assault of one Swiss woman. At the beginning of the ballet movement, Governor Gessler, the Austrian Commander, whispers something to the captain of his guard, who, with the help of a few other soldiers, selects a Swiss woman from the chorus and drags her forward. They offer her a glass of champagne, and when she refuses it and runs, about half a dozen soldiers surround her and force her to drink while they pour more champagne over her head.[10] She runs again, and this time is caught by a soldier sitting at the table who holds her in his lap while others grope her and try to reach up under her dress. Now when she breaks free, it is Rodolphe, the captain of the guard, who catches her and brings her to Gessler. Gessler initially presents a veneer of kindness, touching her shoulder as if to comfort her and moving her wet hair out of her face. He draws his gun and taunts her with it playfully.[11] In the presence of the gun, the terrified woman

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[9] The ballet movement has been subject to significant cuts in this production, including cutting the choral numbers entirely. It is common practice to make cuts to the long dance movements of French grand opera in contemporary performance. Even with the cuts, this orchestral interlude is over five minutes long.

[10] A photograph by Donald Cooper shows the Swiss woman (Jessica Chamberlain) being restrained and groped by a group of Austrian soldiers: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803223152/https:/static01.nyt.com/images/2015/07/19/arts/19TELL1/19TELL1-superJumbo.jpg?quality=90&auto=webp.

[11] A photograph by Tristram Kenton shows Governor Gessler (Nicolas Courjal) exuberantly thrusting his gun into the air in front of the Swiss woman (Jessica Chamberlain): https://web.archive.org/web/20200803223412/https:/i.guim.co.uk/img/static/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2015/6/30/1435657364703/19db15ff-7fdd-4961-b351-e84e59378560-1518x2040.jpeg?width=380&quality=45&auto=format&fit=max&dpr=2&s=1f8358b327c65d7063d016ca9227a514

momentarily stops fighting. Gessler tries to kiss her mouth, and she pushes him away. Furious, he gestures for his men to take her back over to the table. They force her onto the tabletop and strip her, obscuring her from the audience with their bodies. She stands up and wraps the tablecloth around herself, crying and shaking her head no. The men jump and dance around below her, beating their fists on the table in unison. They seize her, pull her to the ground, and pile on top of her, pulling the cloth away. Suddenly Tell appears in the fray as if from nowhere. The soldiers back off and the woman escapes offstage.

This scene feels like a performance because it takes the place of a ballet and is scored by music that functions as dance music in the world of the opera. But Michieletto's production also lays bare a troubling feature of some real wartime rapes: rape as performance. While the woman is assaulted by a group of soldiers, the stage is filled with a much larger chorus comprising the whole company of Gessler's men. Gessler presumably orders this assault when he whispers into Rodolphe's ear at the beginning of the ballet. In the context of this scene, this order may be readily understood as a means for Gessler to raise the morale of his men. During the Balkan conflict, footage from the Serbian rape camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina proliferated. Catherine MacKinnon describes this footage as representing "live pornography," and notes that there is evidence that in addition to filming the rapes, the Serbian forces would invite their fellow officers to come and watch them. One soldier compared this experience to going to a movie theatre.[12] Michieletto's staging of a public sexual assault evokes these kinds of stories from

[12] Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Turning Rape into Pornography: Postmodern Genocide," in Stiglmayer, *Mass Rape*, 78–79.

Bosnia and Herzegovina.[13] For these Austrian soldiers, the audience onstage is important. This assault serves both to entertain the other soldiers and to terrorize and threaten the Swiss chorus. I think this element of the rape scene is a part of what makes it so difficult to watch. We in the opera's audience are made to be spectators of this abuse that is being self-consciously performed for spectators. We find ourselves suddenly and uncomfortably sharing the perspective of the soldiers who are titillated by the abuse.

Tobias Kratzer's 2019 production of Verdi's *La forza del destino* for Oper Frankfurt also stages sexual violence in the context of performance, but with a significant difference in tone. The third act of this opera is set during the eighteenth-century War of Austrian Succession, but Kratzer transposes the action to the Vietnam War. A scene in which the soldiers have a moment of rest and recreation becomes for Kratzer a performance given for the troops by a trio of Playboy Bunnies who are airlifted in, in an allusion to a similar scene in the 1979 film *Apocalypse Now.* In a performance area amidst the transfixed soldiers, the women don rubber masks and play out a short mime scene. Two dancers wearing JFK and Marilyn Monroe masks flirt over a birthday cake until they are interrupted by a dancer in a Nixon mask, who takes the cake from Marilyn and shoves it into JFK's face, who then collapses. The woman who had been wearing the JFK mask trades it in for a rice hat and slinks around the stage menacingly as the

[13] Despite the pan-military uniforms, reviews of this production have frequently identified the setting as the Balkan Conflict. The publicity of the rape camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina led to important and overdue reforms in the way we think about wartime rape, but it has also resulted in a tendency among the general population to think that war rape, and especially systemic rape as a weapon of war, are unique to the Serbian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Reviews that give the opera's setting as the Balkans include: Kat Brown and Hannah Furness, "William Tell Gang Rape Scene Causes Uproar at Royal Opera House," *Telegraph*, 30 June 2015; Michael Church, "Guillaume Tell, Royal Opera House, Review: Gang Rape and Stripping Naked of Female Actor Met with Boos," *Independent*, June 30, 2015; Alexandra Coghlan, "The Gang Rape Was the Least Offensive Thing about Royal Opera's New William Tell," *Spectator*, 29 June 2015; Gavin Dixon, "Review: Guillaume Tell (Royal Opera House, London)," *Limelight Magazine*, 7 July 2015; Fiona Maddocks, "Guillaume Tell Review—Hits the Mark, Despite the Booing," *Guardian*, 5 July 2015; Keris Nine, "Rossini—William Tell (London, 2015)," *OperaJournal*, 16 August 2017; Elaine O'Flynn, "Royal Opera House Tones Down Graphic Scenes that Triggered Booing on First Night of New William Tell Production," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 2015; Mark Valencia, "Guillaume Tell (Royal Opera House)," *WhatsOnStage*, 30 June 2015.

soldiers boo. The dancer in the Marilyn mask takes it off, and hands an oversized strap-on dildo to the dancer in the Nixon mask. As the chorus bursts into a refrain of "Long live the madness of war," the dancer in the Nixon mask grabs the dancer in the rice hat by the hips and simulates raping her while the third dancer stands behind the Nixon dancer with a hand on her shoulder egging her on.[14] The soldiers dance and thrust along with the mock rape as they sing, and burst into laughter and applause as the number concludes.

Like the rape scene in Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell*, this is an instance of rape being used in performance to raise morale. In this case though, it is not a real rape that is performed for the amassed troops, but the idea of rape. Whereas the *Tell* rape appeared to excite and titillate the soldiers because they found the woman being raped sexually desirable, the *Forza* mock rape excites and titillates because the performers are scantily clad women. They do not pretend that the rape they act out is sexy, rather the costumes and props are comic and crass. What this display shares with the *Tell* ballet is a basic assumption that sexual violence is an effective tool of peer bonding for soldiers. Susan Brownmiller, in her landmark 1975 book on rape, suggested that gang rape may even have been one of the earliest forms of male bonding.[15] Though *Tell*'s attempted rape and *Forza*'s rape skit are drastically different in tone, both rely on our recognition that sexual violence, and gang rape in particular, can function to sow solidarity among the perpetrators.[16]

[14] "Viva, viva la pazzia che qui sola ha da regnar!"
[15] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will,* 5.
[16] This element of group sexual assault exists outside of war as well. A recent example from the news is the 2019 case of two men who filmed themselves high fiving after raping a woman in a London nightclub. Samuel Osborne, "Men Who Filmed Themselves Raping Woman in Nightclub then Ran Off High-Fiving Each Other Both Jailed for 7 Years," *Independent,* 22 November 2019.

Musical Alienation: The impact of *Regietheater* productions of canonic operas often depends on a disjunction between an audience's expectation and the production's realization of a scene. Joy Calico has theorized that *Regietheater* operates by creating in its spectators what Bertolt Brecht called the alienation or estrangement effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*).[17] Calico argues that in nonliteral stagings of canonic operas, the experience of estrangement comes from the disruption of expectation, and specifically the "rupture between what is seen and what is heard."[18] The goal of estrangement is not only the disorientation of thwarted expectations, but also the re-cognition that follows. *Regietheater*, like Brecht's epic theatre, bestows agency on its spectators by asking them to rethink what they have previously taken for granted. This kind of spectating can be pleasurable, but it can also be used to forward a socio-political critique.[19] In each of these four wartime productions, the potential political scope of *Regietheater* estrangement can be seen most clearly in the large ensemble scenes.

Kratzer's aforementioned scene in *La forza del destino* is part of a large ensemble set piece in the third act. The soldiers drink and relax in the camp while merchants sell their wares and Playboy Bunnies offer amusement. The musical numbers on the whole are rollicking and cheerful. One of the Bunnies is a singing role—the gypsy girl Preziosilla. In this scene, she wears a stars-and-stripes corset teddy in addition to her Playboy Bunny trimmings, and she represents an unflattering view of American patriotism and militarism.[20] There are two chorus numbers in the third act in which Preziosilla leads the soldiers in a gleeful celebration of war. The first is the

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[17] Joy Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 140–63.
[18] Ibid., 142.
[19] Brecht writes that in epic theatre, "the object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view." It constitutes a "changeover from representation to commentary." Berthold Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 125–26.
[20] A photograph by Monika Rittershaus shows Preziosilla (Judita Nagyová) entertaining the crowd of American soldiers in Vietnam: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803224205/https:/oper-frankfurt.de/media/image/produktionen/galerie/la-forza-del-destino_org_1444.jpg.

Tarantella, "Nella guerra è la follia." This is the scene discussed above, in which Preziosilla and two other women perform a skit in which Nixon rapes a Vietnamese person to the cheers and laughter of the crowd. The second Preziosilla chorus number is "Rataplan," in which the soldiers sing, "your glorious wounds will be rewarded by your triumph.…Victory shines brighter for the courageous soldier."[21] During this chorus, Preziosilla brings a group of Vietnamese POWs forward to sit cowering amidst the American soldiers. She produces a revolver, loads the chamber with a single bullet, and spins the cylinder. Surrounded by the company of soldiers, she selects one of the Vietnamese prisoners, drags him forward, aims, and pulls the trigger but the gun does not fire. Then she passes the gun to another soldier and gestures for him to follow suit. He hesitates, but the other soldiers egg him on and pump their fists in the air. He aims and shoots, and the prisoner falls dead. The most explicit statements of pro-war sentiment in this scene are thus undercut in Kratzer's production by horrible scenes of violence: first a shared rape fantasy, then a brutal execution. Preziosilla weaponizes patriotism when she whips the soldiers into a froth of jingoistic pride and anger. The cheerful strains of folk dances in the Tarantella and the victorious martial motifs in "Rataplan" align with the experiences of the soldiers and of Preziosilla. But for an audience shocked by the presence of these violent depictions, the music here is jarring. The affect of celebration and triumph in these numbers sits uncomfortably with the scenes they depict in Kratzer's production. And this discomfort asks us to think more critically about the patriotic pro-war sentiments that these musical numbers have always advanced.

[21] "Le gloriose ferite col trionfo il destin coronò.…La vittoria più rifulge de' figli al valor!" The text of the scene that includes the "Rataplan" chorus comes from Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager* and was added to *Forza*'s libretto to introduce more comedy to the generally dark opera. Kratzer's production does not benefit from this infusion of comedy. Here, the scene's lightheartedness is reimagined as vicious cruelty.

While the rapes in *Un ballo in maschera* and *Turandot* happen in private, as will be discussed below, both of these productions also feature chorus scenes whose celebratory music is made dark and menacing by the violence of their stagings. Both Bieito's *Ballo* and Knabe's *Turandot* are set in fascist police states. In the Act 1 finale of *Ballo*, King Gustavo is undercover, seeking out the advice of the fortuneteller Madame Arvidson.[22] His identity is revealed and the chorus enters singing "Viva Gustavo," and then a triumphant hymn to the glory of their leader, "O figlio d'Inghilterra." As soon as the full crowd is amassed onstage, they perform a group Sieg Heil to Gustavo. Their ringing cries of "Gloria" become unsettling when accompanied by this mass Nazi salute. Bieito's cynical opinion about this kind of nationalistic fervour for the monarch is clear.

Turandot's second act ends with a similar scene. The foreign prince, Calaf, has successfully answered all of Princess Turandot's riddles, and is now primed to marry her as long as she cannot guess his name by the next morning. The reigning Emperor makes a statement lending his support to Calaf, and the gathered crowd sings praises to the Emperor's wisdom and goodness in "Ai tuoi piedi ci prostriam." In Knabe's staging, the Emperor exits while the chorus is singing, and in his absence, it becomes clear that the crowd is not addressing the Emperor at all, but Calaf. The crowd rushes forward, through barriers set up by the military police, and they lift Calaf up on their shoulders. He leads them in a Sieg Heil salute, and the effect is very similar to that in *Ballo*. Both of these moments of relatively uncritical expressions of musical patriotism for a leader become, in these stagings, fanatical fascist gestures. All three of these chorus scenes, from *Forza*, *Ballo*, and *Turandot*, represent conventional operatic use of the chorus. But Kratzer, Bieito, and Knabe all use their staging to mine a darker message out of these scenes. The

[22] This production uses the Swedish character names from an earlier version of the opera. Gustavo and Madame Arvidson are better known today by the names Riccardo and Ulrica, from the later version set in Boston.

intrusion of gestures and imagery from the real world, like the Nazi salutes, shocks us out of our absorption in the fictional worlds of Verdi and Puccini. These symbols alienate us from the beautiful and triumphant music of these choruses by connecting this music to the historical and contemporary reality of fascism.[23]

The music of the ballet movement in Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* can also be understood in terms of this estrangement effect. But unlike the operas above, *Tell* features elements of this estrangement in the music and libretto, even prior to Michieletto's involvement. This movement in the drama is a serious one for the Swiss people, with whom the audience's sympathies lie; we watch Tell's people being forced to dance for and with the Austrian soldiers. The music does not reflect this element of the scene. Instead, it is light-hearted, folk-inspired dance music. Michieletto's production certainly pushes this disjunction between light-hearted music and troubling stage action much further, but the difference with Michieletto's violence is one of degree and not kind. For his part, Michieletto engages with details not just of *Tell*'s libretto, but of Rossini's music in this ballet interlude in a sensitive and compelling way, even within the affect of estrangement. His approach to staging this scene often seems to imply that the orchestral music of the ballet is music that the characters onstage can hear. It is functional music which Gessler calls for, and to which the Austrian company is relaxing and celebrating at the expense of the Swiss people.

Michieletto capitalizes on the general character but also specific features of Rossini's score to unite his staging and concept with the music. The connection is particularly sophisticated when Gessler interacts with the Swiss woman his men are tormenting (beginning at

[23] In the program notes for *Turandot,* Knabe argues that he already hears fascism in the opera, especially in the crowd scenes. Tilman Knabe, "Ein Gespräch mit dem Produktionsteam," in program for Puccini's *Turandot* (Essen: Aalto-Musiktheater, 2007), 7.

letter C in no. 16, the *Pas de soldats*). The orchestral texture thins, and there are a series of short unison scalar passages of descending sixteenth notes in the strings. The first one (16 mm. after C), an isolated figure in the strings, corresponds with Gessler running his hand along the woman's arm. In the next bar, a high-pitched tremolo figure for the flute and first violin corresponds to the woman shivering. In the next bar, the same descending figure as before accompanies Gessler stroking her arm again. In the next three bars the other strings and woodwinds join in to play the same descending figure three more times, which leads into a new Allegro Vivace section in 3/4. This little waltz begins with an eight-bar theme in the strings and woodwinds that hurtles up an arpeggio to a crashing sforzando at the top, before winding its way back down the scale to repeat. In the introduction to this new section, Gessler draws his gun from his holster behind the woman's back—the musical change corresponds with a change in stakes when Gessler's gun appears. At the sforzando at the top of the first phrase, Gessler suddenly thrusts his gun up in front of the woman's face, and she screams. Gessler pulls the gun back to himself as the melody winds back down to its starting point. On the repeat of the theme, Gessler does the same thing with his other hand, surprising the woman with the gun again on the next sforzando. A different eight-bar theme now repeats, during which time Gessler tries touching the woman all over, as if testing her. Terrified after seeing his weapon, she stands still. Then, the original arpeggiated melody (17 mm. before letter A in the Allegro Vivace) returns twice more. The first time, the sforzando coincides with Gessler suddenly grabbing the woman's face. He holds her tightly and slowly moves in to kiss her lips. There is one final sforzando, and this time the woman, in a desperate attempt to escape, pushes Gessler away just before the accented beat. It is possible that this was simply a small mistake in the execution of the complicated choreography of this scene, but I felt that by pushing Gessler away just before the sforzando, the

Swiss woman was interrupting his next intended move, which likely would have happened cleanly on that downbeat. Do we imagine Gessler is intentionally mapping his movements onto the dance music for fun? He certainly conceives of his torture of this woman as a game; is it also a dance?

Gessler's ability to meaningfully interact with the music in this scene extends to his men in the next portion of the staging. When the soldiers undress the woman and she stands up on the table wrapped in the tablecloth, the waltz concludes and the next section begins, Presto in 2/4. This section returns to the pastoral music from the beginning of the *Pas de soldats*, but faster. At the new tempo, this already rapid-fire melody feels increasingly frenetic. The soldiers standing around the table pound their fists rhythmically with the quarter notes. They dance to the music as they keep time with their fists; in this moment it is especially clear that the characters onstage can hear the music, because they are able to accurately dance and play tabletop percussion on the beat. The dance music in this scene is inappropriate to the action we see, and that is by design. Within the world of the opera, this music is being played for the Austrian soldiers, because to their minds this scene is a celebration and a bit of fun. The music does not narrate the story from our perspective, in fact it stands in opposition to our experience of the mood of this scene. There is one element of the sound of this scene that does align with the experience of the audience and of the Swiss spectators, though. Michieletto has the victimized Swiss woman contribute to the aural dimension of this scene as she grunts with exertion and screams, interrupting the oblivious frivolity of the dance music. By adding something new to the soundscape, the woman's vocalizations decentre music as the only sonic source of meaning in this scene. The uncomfortable juxtaposition of the soldiers' celebration and the Swiss prisoners' terror is

translated into sound as these vocalizations of pain and fear punctuate and disrupt the blithe veneer of the dance music.

Power and Control: Eileen Zurbriggen posits that war and rape are correlated because they are both supported and justified by what she calls the traditional or hegemonic model of masculinity. One of the dimensions of masculinity that she explores in relation to both war and rape is dominance/power/control. She cites a number of studies that have found that men with high levels of power motivation (a chronic concern with impact and control) were more likely to display coercive sexual behaviours, and were also more likely to enter a war and have success as a soldier.[24] Sexual violence and military violence correspond not only in combat zones in which enemy women are raped, but off the battlefield as well. Researchers have established significant correlation between military service and domestic violence perpetration.[25] Both active-duty service members and veterans of the American military have reported perpetrating domestic violence at rates above national averages.[26] This correlation is mediated by the role of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among veterans, but it is worth noting that we see similarly inflated

[24] Eileen L. Zurbriggen, "Rape, War, and the Socialization of Masculinity: Why Our Refusal to Give Up Wars Ensures that Rape Cannot Be Eradicated," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2010): 542, 544.
[25] Resul Cesur and Joseph J. Sabia, "When War Comes Home: The Effect of Combat Service on Domestic Violence," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 98, no. 2 (2016): 209–25.
[26] Data from across twelve studies into prevalence of intimate partner violence among American soldiers found approximately 19% of active duty soldiers reported perpetrating intimate partner violence in the past twelve months. For veterans, different studies placed the prevalence between 15% and 60%. Jennifer M. Gierisch, et al., "Intimate Partner Violence: Prevalence Among U.S. Military Veterans and Active Duty Servicemembers and a Review of Intervention Approaches," Evidence-Based Synthesis Program Center, report prepared for the Department of Veterans Affairs (Durham, NC: Durham Veterans Affairs Healthcare System, 2013). A 2002 study of a sample of 2583 American men aged 18 to 54 concluded that 21% of the intimate partner violence reported in the sample group "would probably not have occurred had these men not been exposed to combat." The combat experience represented in this sample is primarily from Vietnam. Holly G. Prigerson, Paul K. Maciejewski, and Robert A. Rosenheck, "Population Attributable Fractions of Psychiatric Disorders and Behavioural Outcomes Associated with Combat Exposure Among US Men," *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 1 (2002): 59–63.

rates of domestic violence perpetration in domestic police forces.[27] Power motivation is a common and tangible element of the representations of war rapes discussed in this chapter. When Governor Gessler orchestrates the rape of the Swiss woman in Michieletto's *Tell*, it is not just for the pleasure of his men; it is an implicit threat to the other Swiss people who are watching, and a reminder of their powerlessness. While rape is a crime against an individual, the meaning of rape in war is not individualistic. Victims are targeted not as individuals, but symbolically, as members of the classes woman and enemy. In this way, martial rape is an act of terrorism toward the enemy group at large, used to maintain and express control.[28]

Calixto Bieito's production of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* for the Gran Teatre del Liceu in 2000 features the rape of a young man by police in a military state. Though not strictly a war setting, this production is still closely related to the theme insofar as it shows state-sanctioned sexual violence as a tactic to punish civilian disobedience under a military government. It is the only production I have encountered in my research in which a director has interpolated an act of sexual violence committed against a man. But although the victim of the rape is not a woman, his representation in the opera aligns him closely with the female rape victims presented elsewhere in my dissertation. We first see the victim in a large ensemble scene at the home of the witch and fortune teller, Madame Arvidson. In this production, Bieito has set this scene in a brothel and made Madame Arvidson its proprietor. The young man appears to be a sex worker. He is

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[27] Two well-known studies from the 1990s found that the families of police officers in the United States feature domestic violence at four times the rate of the national average. Leanor Boulin Johnson, "On the Front Lines: Police Stress and Family Well-Being. Hearing Before the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families House of Representatives," 102 Congress First Session, May 20 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1991), 32–48; Peter H. Neidig, Harold E. Russell, and Albert F. Seng, "Interspousal Aggression in Law Enforcement Families: A Preliminary Investigation," *Police Studies* 15, no. 1 (1991): 30–38.

[28] Brownmiller writes about rape as a part of a conscious effort to destroy the enemy and mark the men as impotent when they can no longer do their masculine duty to protect "their" women. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 31. For an excellent gloss of Brownmiller's larger argument on war rape, see Anne J. Cahill, *Rethinking Rape* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 18–19.

costumed provocatively in leather pants and a shiny silver shirt unbuttoned and hanging off his shoulders. Throughout this scene he is used quite literally as a set piece; various characters physically move him around the stage and caress his body. At the end of this scene, he gets on his knees in front of King Gustavo and steals Gustavo's wallet under the pretense of offering to perform fellatio.

The next act begins with a long orchestral interlude introducing the new setting: a dark field at the outskirts of town where the gallows are located. Amelia describes this as the place "where crime and death are joined together."[29] The young man from the brothel runs onstage, pursued by four police officers. They catch him, beat him, and strip him naked. One of the officers pulls his pants down and rapes the man while the others hold him down. Anckarström, who in this production is the King's military captain, enters and watches from upstage.[30] After the rape, another of the officers fishes the man's belt from his clothes and strangles him with it. The officers retrieve the stolen wallet from the dead man's pants and deliver it to Anckarström as they leave the stage. Raping and murdering this man is an act of warning for other potential dissidents. When women are raped and then murdered in war, Claudia Card argues that they act as "throwaway or sacrificial victim[s]…used to send a message to others."[31] Although Anckarström appears to be the only witness to the rape, the officers leave the naked body in the field. The message that this is what happens to criminals who disrespect the King will presumably still be transmitted when the body is found. The rape and murder may also communicate a threat to Madame Arvidson, the young man's employer, who was in some tension with Gustavo in the previous scene. Finally, this scene shows the audience further evidence of

[29] "Ecco l'orrido campo ove s'accoppia al delitto la morte!"
[30] Anckarström becomes Renato in the later version.
[31] Claudia Card, "Rape as a Weapon of War," in *Criticism and Compassion: The Ethics and Politics of Claudia Card*, ed. Robin S. Dillon (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2018), 15.

what Bieito thinks about the fanatical devotion paid to King Gustavo in the opera. The previous scene ended with a company Sieg Heil for Gustavo, and the next thing we see is brutal sexual violence and murder enacted by the police on the orders of a military commander as punishment for petty theft of the King's property. Here, sexual violence is a tool of the military state to punish crimes committed against the King and to keep potential dissidents in line.

The rape serves Bieito's telling of the story in a few ways: it demonstrates the power of Anckarström's forces and the attitude toward crime under his leadership; it sets the scene in a way that shows us that Amelia is right to be afraid of this place; and it prepares us for Anckarström's violence in a later scene with Amelia, his wife. The scene also portrays rape as primarily a means of asserting dominance and power. Susan Brownmiller uses the prevalence of rape within all-male prisons to support her argument that rape is not a crime of passion but of violence. Prison rape, she argues, is "an acting out of power roles within an all-male authoritarian environment in which the younger, weaker inmate…is forced to play the role that in the outside world is assigned to women." [32] Brownmiller's argument here appears overly reductive in light of contemporary conversations about the imprisonment of transgender women in men's prisons, who we now know suffer sexual violence at much higher rates. Yet Brownmiller's view of prison rape as primarily about violence and control rather than primarily about sex is widely held, and is at work in the portrayal of the rape of this sex worker in Bieito's *Ballo*.[33] In this production, rape is a tool used to maintain the power dynamic in this exclusively male political structure. Bieito suggests that sexual violence exists alongside and intermingled with political violence. The ease with which his soldiers transition from rape to murder and

[32] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 285.
[33] Cahill problematizes Brownmiller's claim that rape is not a sexual act in *Rethinking Rape*, though she also fails to consider sexual violence against trans people.

Anckarström's utter lack of surprise suggest that the military system of Gustavo's Sweden does not meaningfully distinguish sexual violence from other means of population control and punishment.

Dehumanization of the Other: Sexual violence is an act of dehumanization. Ann Cahill defines rape as "an act that destroys (if only temporarily) the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood of a woman."[34] The dehumanization and objectification inherent to sexual violence is reinforced in wartime settings as women are commonly perceived as representations of an enemy nation or race. Brownmiller describes the bodies of raped women during war as "ceremonial battlefields" on which conflicts between men are played out in miniature.[35] The rape-as-war metaphor here portrays women as symbols more than people. We have seen already that the victims of rape and attempted rape in *Ballo* and *Tell* are both unnamed and non-singing supernumeraries who are introduced to the story for the purpose of being raped as symbols of the ravages of war. In *Forza* and *Turandot*, the dehumanization of rape is allied with dehumanization on racial or political grounds. Sexual violence acts as a natural ally to racism when the goal is dehumanization of the other.

The rape skit in *Forza* is an example of how using rape as a metaphor for war can be tied up with dehumanizing narratives about rape victims. What begins as a bawdy burlesque crashes into a stunning display of sexualized racial animosity. The *Forza* rape skit depicts Nixon taking over from JFK—who is portrayed as flamboyant and feminine—and dominating the Vietnamese enemy. When the woman in the Nixon mask mimes raping the woman in the rice hat, an unmasked Preziosilla stands at Nixon's shoulder, offering support. The rape is transparently

[34] Cahill, *Rethinking Rape*, 13.
[35] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 31.

symbolic. The woman who is raped represents the whole nation of Vietnam, or maybe the Vietnam War. The rapist is Nixon, America's final Vietnam president, being supported by Preziosilla dressed in the American flag. Although the three dancers who perform this skit are all women, gender nonetheless weighs heavily on this representation. Inger Skjelsbæk has argued that war rape must be understood in terms of the masculinization of the perpetrator and the feminization of the victim. She writes, "the ways in which masculinization and feminization polarize other identities are intimately linked to the overall conflict structure, and it is this mechanism which can make rape a powerful weapon of war."[36] While the rape fantasy represented here is an allegorical one, it is an unnamed, non-singing female character in a sexy costume who takes on the role of the Vietnamese enemy. Her already objectified body, which had moments before been titillating the amassed soldiers, easily transitions from a sexual object meant to draw the men's lust to a despised object of an enemy alien meant to draw the men's hatred. To heighten the gendered dynamics of *Forza*'s mock rape, the dancer in the Nixon mask wears a comically oversized phallus, and struts around the stage flexing her muscles. Nixon's supreme, symbolic masculinity is further accentuated in contrast with the effeminate and ineffectual portrayal of JFK. The idea of rape is leveraged as an appropriate vehicle to express a hatred of the Vietnamese other by mapping racialized identity onto femininity.

Turandot does not feature the same racialized dehumanization that is at work in the *Forza* rape skit, but in Knabe's production Calaf dehumanizes and ultimately rapes Turandot in order to achieve his political goals. Knabe's *Turandot* is set in an east-Asian totalitarian state, whose

[36] Inger Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape: Studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 140.

aging dictator is near death.[37] Calaf, exiled from a foreign kingdom, wins Turandot's hand and thereby a seat of political power. Knabe states clearly in the program that Calaf's desire for Turandot is about the power of her position, and not love. Perhaps Calaf is attracted to Turandot, perhaps not, but "one thing is certain: she is important to him because she serves his needs.…Calaf is not a fool and languishing lover, on the contrary, he is a clever, highly strategic politician."[38] In the final act of *Turandot*, after Calaf has answered the riddles and Turandot has failed to guess his name, Knabe sets the final scene in a small bedroom in the centre of the stage. Everything until this point has taken place out in the open, under constant surveillance of guards and the populace. Now, Turandot and Calaf are alone.[39] In the libretto, Calaf kisses Turandot despite her violent protestations. She pleads, "do not profane me," "no one will ever possess me," and "stranger, do not touch me."[40] In Knabe's staging, Calaf throws Turandot down on the bed, kneels between her legs, and rapes her. Whereas the stage directions in the libretto specify that Turandot is transfigured by the stolen kiss, Knabe's Turandot is broken and resigned through the opera's conclusion. This production cuts the portion of the ending when Turandot sings about her awakening to love, so she sings only a few short lines after the rape, including "I am ashamed."[41] As the chorus sings a climactic reprisal of the melody of Calaf's aria "Nessun dorma," Calaf walks away from Turandot carrying a baby doll smeared with what looks like

[37] The opera's program contains an image of a mass event in North Korea, and several reviews of the production cite North Korea as the setting. However, members of the creative team also mention Mussolini, the German Democratic Republic, the Third Reich, and Fidel Castro as influences.
[38] Tilman Knabe, "Ein Gespräch mit dem Produktionsteam," 9. "Vielleicht findet Kalaf Turandot attraktiv, vielleicht nicht. Sicher ist: Sie ist wichtig für ihn, weil sie das verkörpert, was er braucht.…Kalaf fist kein Dummkopf und schmachtender Liebhaber, ganz im Gegenteil: Er ist ein raffinierter, hochstrategischer Politiker."
[39] A photograph by Saad Hamza shows Calaf (Michael Wade Lee) pinning Turandot (Katrin Kapplusch) against the bedroom wall: https://web.archive.org/web/20200803224449/https:/www.theater-essen.de/content-images/size720/image720/d027fe95d548f668655951dc4e4f48c6/1936/turandot_wa14_15_dsc2701_hamza_saad.jpg
[40] "Non profanarmi!," "mai nessun m'avrà!," "Non mi toccar, straniero!"
[41] "Onta su me!"

blood and afterbirth.[42] He holds the child up triumphantly over his head on one side of the stage as the climactic music swells.

Both Knabe and the musical director Stefan Soltesz refer to Turandot as a vehicle for power in Calaf's eyes.[43] She is a trophy to be won. After the kiss, or in this case rape, Turandot tells Calaf that he has won his victory and that now he can leave. She does not understand that the rape itself is not the prize, it is simply politically expedient. It binds Turandot to Calaf and assures he will reign as Emperor in her father's place, and the resultant child ensures the continuing power of his political dynasty. Knabe's *Turandot* is not necessarily set at wartime, but the tension between Calaf and Turandot is a political one. Calaf wants to conquer Turandot, and he does that not just by outsmarting her, but by impregnating her. During the war in the Balkans, the aggressors "used rape not only as a tool of war, but also to implement a policy of impregnation in order to further the destruction of one people and the proliferation of another—a policy of genocide by forced impregnation."[44] Turandot is a vehicle for power for Calaf, and she is also a vessel for his politically legitimate heirs. Calaf does not treat Turandot like a person with autonomy. To him, she is only her bloodline and her fertile body. Turandot's dehumanization is especially jarring because she is not only a named character, unlike the other rape victims in this chapter, but the opera's eponymous character. Her immense power and agency from the opera's start is stripped away after Calaf answers her riddles. In the opera's final scene, after the rape, Calaf and Turandot pose in their wedding clothes as if for a portrait, before

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[42] A photograph by Jörg Landesberg shows Turandot (Iréne Theorin) in her wedding dress surrounded by the bloody apparitions of the previous suitors she has had executed while Calaf (Dario Volonté) holds their baby: https://web.archive.org/web/20120720204925/http:/www.koeln.de/files/images/turandot_600.jpg.

[43] Tilman Knabe and Stefan Soltesz, "Ein Gespräch mit dem Produktionsteam," 7, 11. Knabe: "Liebe ist immer nur ein Vehikel für etwas. Wenn Liebe gesagt wird, ist immer Überleben oder Politik und Macht gemeint." Soltesz: "Sie sind nur Vehikel, damit Kalaf an die Macht kommen kann."

[44] Siobhán K. Fisher, "Occupation of the Womb: Forced Impregnation as Genocide," *Duke Law Journal* 46, no. 1 (1996): 92.

Calaf walks away with the baby to celebrate his victory. Turandot stands motionless in her white dress like a photograph of herself reduced to a single purpose—providing legitimacy to Calaf's reign.

Extra-Textual Sexual Violence and Reception

A popular approach to criticizing *Regietheater* productions is to focus on particular visual elements deemed to be inappropriate or scandalous while paying little if any attention to the dramatic context of those elements. This kind of criticism characterizes the press around Bieito's *Un ballo in maschera* when it was remounted at the English National Opera in 2002.[45] Most of the reviews of the London production begin with a list of the shocking spectacles contained in the performance. On these lists, rape appears in the company of chorus members sitting on toilets, men dressed in drag, satanic imagery, and a supernumerary with dwarfism.[46] These reviews draw false equivalence between the graphic simulated rape and murder of a young man and these other allegedly scandalous depictions. The regular inclusion on these lists of men in drag and a person of short stature smacks of homophobia and ableism. Beyond these troublesome lists, two reviews characterize the rape scene as "buggery," and a third refers to it as "a spot of sodomy."[47] In these latter reviews, the moral panic that the critics are performing

[45] All ENO productions are translated into English in performance, so the opera is largely referred to as "A Masked Ball" in the London press.
[46] Aneglique Chrisafis, "Toilet Humour Opera Down the Pan," *Guardian,* March 9, 2002; Andrew Clements, "A Masked Ball: Coliseum, London," *Guardian*, February 22, 2002; Peter Conrad, "Psychic Purgatory," *NewStatesman*, March 11, 2002; James Delingpole, "Bums on Loo Seats," *Independent*, February 24, 2002; H. E. Elsom, "Giusepe Verdi: *A Masked Ball*," *ConcertoNet.com*, February 21, 2002; Nick Kimberley, "A Flash in the Pan," *Guardian*, Februaary 24, 2002; David Lister, "Verdi's Adults-Only Opera is Barely Flushed with Success," *Independent*, March 8, 2002; "Rape, Satan and Lavatory Scene Fails to Shock Opera-Goers," *Irish Times*, February 21, 2002; Nigel Reynolds, "Sex, Opera and a Chorus of Disapproval," *Telegraph*, 20 February 2002; Matt Slater, "Revamped Opera Fails to Shock," *BBC News Online*, February 22, 2002. Three reviewers on this list make the joke that the *really* shocking part of this production is that the chorus members on the toilets do not flush or wash their hands.
[47] Elsom, "Giusepe Verdi"; Kimberley, "A Flash in the Pan"; and Conrad, "Psychic Purgatory."

somewhat satirically is not so much over the rape itself, but over its homosexual nature. Equating the rape in *Ballo* with homosexual sex in this way both marginalizes male rape victims and implicitly supports the idea that sex workers are asking to be raped. This thinly veiled disgust about homosexuality feels especially out of place in the context of this opera in particular. The real Gustav III of Sweden, on whom the opera's Gustavo is based, was rumoured to have had multiple homosexual relationships, and musicologists Ralph Hexter and David Richards have both explored queer subtexts in the libretto and in Verdi's setting of the music.[48] Bieito has raised a similar issue about the nature of the negative audience response to the production, saying that what really shocks him "is the way people are outraged by the toilet humour yet applaud an aria in which a man brutally beats his wife."[49]

Viewers who equate staged depictions of rape with nonviolent spectacles perceived to be in poor taste fail to recognize the different stakes at play. When Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* opened in London in 2015, many reviewers still launched the familiar *Regie* criticisms—that Michieletto's staging had nothing to do with the music and trampled all over Rossini's intentions—but there was also a refreshingly nuanced discussion about the stakes of staging sexual violence in opera. Opera singer Catharine Rogers made two public blog posts sharing her correspondence with the ROH artistic director at the time, Kasper Holten, detailing her qualms about the production after attending the dress rehearsal, which was open to industry professionals and friends of the company. The dress rehearsal featured a different version of the ballet scene than the one I saw and analyzed above. In the first version of the scene, the Swiss woman's

[48] Ralph Hexter, "Masked Balls," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, no. 1/2 (2002): 93–108; David A. J. Richards, *Tragic Manhood and Democracy: Verdi's Voice and the Power of Musical Art* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).
[49] Calixto Bieito quoted in Reynolds, "Sex, Opera and a Chorus of Disapproval." In the third-act aria to which Bieito refers, Anckarström brutalizes Amelia and holds a gun to her head.

naked body was exposed in full to the audience and the stage action included some more graphic allusions to rape. I was unable to view any footage of this performance, but Rogers mentions a moment in which Gessler shoves his gun between the Swiss woman's legs, which was not included in the later version. Rogers submitted a customer service form on the ROH website, writing that she was in "tears of shock" during the ballet scene, which she found to be "the worst kind of gratuitous." She advises that "at the very least…the performance should come with a strong warning, as I have many friends I would love to take to the opera, who have been the victims of sexual violence, I would never forgive myself if I subjected them to what I saw on Friday."[50] Kasper Holten responded to Rogers directly in an email, which she reproduced on her blog. He also wrote an open letter addressing Rogers and others who were upset, which was published on Norman Lebrecht's popular classical music blog, Slipped Disc. Holten defends the production for representing "the reality of warfare," but he also apologizes "for [the ROH] not issuing a strong and clear enough warning."[51] He reflects that audience members "should be able to make an informed choice about what they want to see or not, and if an audience member does not want to be exposed to sexual violence, it should be their choice."[52]

Rogers focuses her argument on the risks that representations of rape pose to survivors of sexual violence. In her blog post, she cites an article reporting that approximately one in two women in Britain have been physically or sexually assaulted.[53] In his first response to Rogers's letter, Holten writes that given the opera's topic of war and oppression, "it is important that we

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[50] Catharine Rogers, "Shock Factor," blog post on *Opera Div*, June 30, 2015, https://operacat.tumblr.com/post/122857938113/shock-factor.
[51] Kasper Holten, "Exclusive: An Open Letter from Kasper Holten on William Tell," *Slipped Disc*, July 1, 2015, https://slippedisc.com/2015/07/exclusive-an-open-letter-from-kasper-holten-on-william-tell.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Jonathan Owen, "The Violence Epidemic: Half of Women in Britain Admit They Have Been Physically or Sexually Assaulted According to Shocking New Figures," *Independent*, March 5, 2014. The statistics in the article come from the Violence Against Women report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.

do not only allow [Rossini's] opera to become harmless entertainment today."[54] Holten seems to be using language of harm in a figurative way here—he wants audiences to be made uncomfortable so that they will think critically about this opera's politics. But Rogers is calling attention to real psychological and physiological harm when she talks about her fear for survivors of sexual assault who will attend this production. The phenomenon Rogers is referring to is a kind of retraumatization in which post-traumatic stress reactions can be triggered or exacerbated by stressors that are not necessarily traumatic in and of themselves. These stressors can include reminders of the original traumatic experience, in this example a staged representation of a sexual assault. Potential symptoms are wide-ranging, including "posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, depressive symptoms, physical complaints, grief reactions, and/or general anxiety."[55] Holten writes in his Slipped Disc letter that although the scene was meant to be upsetting, he had "no intention to disturb people in the way Catharine describes."[56]

Rogers's and Holten's different uses of language about harm in relation to viewing a representation of sexual violence amounts to a misunderstanding about the stakes at play. Holten seems initially reluctant to issue a specific warning about the sexual violence in *Tell* because he believes that the scene should be shocking and should make audience members uncomfortable, in service of the director's gritty commentary on the reality of war and war crimes. But Rogers is not advocating for herself in her discomfort, but for sexual violence survivors who may be living with PTSD. Her position essentially echoes a foundational idea of modern psychiatry, that

[54] Kasper Holten, letter quoted in Rogers, "Shock Factor."
[55] Anna F. Leshner, Carrie M. Kelly, Kerri E. Schutz, and David W. Foy, "Retraumatization," in *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide,* ed. Charles R. Figley (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012).
[56] Holten, "Exclusive: An Open Letter."

"trauma is qualitatively different from stress and results in lasting biological change."[57] When Rogers asks Holten to warn audiences about the explicit display of sexual violence in this production which is not typically an element of this opera, she is not worried about discomfort, rather, she is trying to make space for survivors of sexual violence to make an informed decision about their capacity to engage with this production in a way that does not threaten their psychological and physiological wellbeing.

Rogers's exchange with Holten highlights the risks of putting sexual violence onstage, especially in an opera that does not typically feature it. But there are reasons to stage sexual violence that directors and producers must weigh against these risks. Holten's defence of Michieletto's staging hinges on the critical commentary about war that the production engages in. Essentially, he argues that it is important to include rape in this production because it is set in the midst of a war, and we know that during wartime women of the enemy group are frequently raped. The implication is that because rape exists in war in real life, it is necessarily appropriate to include scenes of rape in representations of war onstage. But I think there is something more sophisticated at work in Michieletto's representation as well. Yes, the sexual assault serves the sense of realism in Michieletto's approach to the setting and functions in the plot to illustrate how bad the Austrian occupation is. But the ballet scene can also be read as a critique of *Guillaume Tell* the opera and other war operas in general, which all too often glorify and romanticize war and the military. Typical stagings of the *Tell* ballet feature a corps of dancers who perform a charming folk-inspired dance number, extraneous to the plot, in which the men happen to wear military costumes and the women, peasant attire. By highlighting the darkness that is already in this story about resistance under a brutal oppressor, Michieletto challenges our

[57] Bessel A. van der Kolk and Jose Saporta, "The Biological Response to Psychic Trauma: Mechanisms and Treatment of Intrusion and Numbing," *Anxiety Research* 4 (1991): 199.

tendency to see this opera as something primarily optimistic. His staging of the ballet holds an unflattering mirror up to the audience. It seems to ask, why are you so shocked to see a prisoner of war being abused, when you came to an opera about a violent and unjust military occupation? We so often attend the opera to evaluate the voices and the orchestra and to revel in the lush, expensive design, even while we watch depictions of women suffering and dying onstage. Michieletto's ballet foregrounds the spectacle of suffering and makes it impossible to ignore.

Rogers is ultimately unswayed by Holten's particular defence of the rape scene in *Tell*. To Holten's point that it is important to highlight violence against women in war zones, she writes, "but it feels like I am having it highlighted AT me all the time, often in a way that serves just to make me feel more vulnerable."[58] Rogers is pointing out here that the potential harm caused by exposure to depictions of sexual violence does not end with trauma survivors. There are the familiar fears that exposure to violent imagery desensitizes spectators to real-world violence, but what Rogers is getting at here is something more akin to hyper-sensitization. New understandings about what constitutes rape have made the prevalence of sexual violence in our culture increasingly visible in recent years. That visibility is positive insofar as it encourages changes in the ways we think about and legislate sexual violence, which has long been normalized or ignored in our culture. But for women who are socialized under the threat of sexual violence, this visibility may not always feel so progressive. Cahill argues that "the threat of rape is a formative moment in the construction of the distinctly feminine body, such that even bodies of women who have not been raped are likely to carry themselves in such a way as to express the truths and values of a rape culture."[59] While the inclusion of rape in this *Guillaume*

[58] Catharine Rogers, "A Follow-Up," blog post on *Opera Div*, July 1, 2015, https://operacat.tumblr.com/post/122933791828/a-follow-up.
[59] Cahill, *Rethinking Rape*, 143.

Tell acts as a critique of nationalist and misogynistic oppression, it does so by reinforcing gender roles ascribed by rape culture: the soldiers have all the power and there is nothing the Swiss woman can do to stop them. And within this representation of yet another nameless woman being senselessly abused there is the pornographic potential of the exposed body of the dancer, writhing with exertion and wet with prop champagne. Here is the tension present in so many of the opera productions in this chapter and in my dissertation at large: staging sexual violence can capitalize on the popularity of beloved operas to deliver scathing cultural and political critiques of misogyny and rape culture, but it also risks desensitizing audiences to sexual violence through over exposure, reinforcing harmful stereotypes, and retraumatizing assault survivors in the theatre. An ethical approach to representing sexual assault on the opera stage involves the careful balancing of these risks and benefits. This equation will look different based on not only the contemporary cultural moment, but the context of the opera in question. Let us ask, does the sexual violence in these productions come from a reading of the opera itself, or is it imposed from without? And in either case, what critical work is being done by the representation?

Excavating Sexual Violence from the Canon

Critics of *Regietheater* are quick to dismiss productions that interpolate acts of violence or sexual content into familiar works with claims about the authorial intent of the composer (and, less often, the librettist). Reviews of Michieletto's *Tell*, for instance, frequently characterize the scene of abuse as "unprompted either by music or libretto,"[60] and argue that it was in "blatant contradiction to the spirit of the music,"[61] or similarly, that Michieletto is determined to

[60] Coghlan, "The Gang Rape Was the Least Offensive Thing."
[61] Rupert Christiansen, "Guillaume Tell, Royal Opera House, Review: 'Lame and Pretentious,'" *Telegraph,* 30 June 2015.

"privilege concept over music."[62] In general, I do not find arguments about authorial intent particularly useful for judging the efficacy or quality of *Regietheater* concepts. However, it can be particularly powerful and compelling when a director uses the tools of production and staging to illuminate or uncover elements of a familiar work that are often disregarded. *Guillaume Tell* and *Turandot* both thematize sexual violence already—albeit obliquely. Michieletto and Knabe are not so much inventing rape stories within these familiar classics, but rather calling attention to the rape stories that were always there.

In the third-act ballet in *Guillaume Tell*, the Austrian soldiers force the Swiss women to dance for them and with them. But even outside of this scene, *Tell*'s libretto alludes to other acts of sexual violence. Early in the opera's first act, the shepherd Leuthold explains that he killed one of the Austrian soldiers because that soldier had attempted to abduct his daughter. Given the context of a military occupation, this alone may be readily interpreted as intent to rape, but there is even more clarity in the libretto's source material. In Schiller's play it is not Leuthold but Baumgarten who kills an Austrian soldier, and it is in defence of his wife, not his daughter. Baumgarten explains that he did what any man would do: "I exercised my rights upon a man who would befoul my honor and my wife's."[63] In the credits for a commercial DVD of Michieletto's ROH *Tell*, the woman that is raped in the ballet scene is called "Leuthold's daughter," so the inclusion of the rape scene is linked directly to the exiting allusion to sexual violence in the first act of the opera. Michieletto capitalizes on this undercurrent of sexual violence in a number of ways throughout his production in addition to the attempted gang rape in the ballet. The opera's opening scene typically depicts the bucolic bliss of the Swiss people who are happy at work while a fisherman sings a love song. Michieletto's production opens grimly:

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[62] Valencia, "Guillaume Tell."
[63] Friedrich Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell,* trans. William F. Mainland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 3.

the fisherman is intoxicated and staggers through the assembled company as he sings, stopping at one point to roughly grope the breasts of a woman in the chorus. She resists and he leaves her alone, but there is little response from anyone else onstage. From the opera's first scene, we see that sexualized violence is not unusual here, and that the Swiss women do not occupy a social position of much respect, even in their own community. Later on, Mathilde, an Austrian woman in a relationship with one of the Swiss men, is threatened and harassed by both her lover and Governor Gessler. Michieletto avoids making sexual and gendered violence exclusively the problem of the enemy Austrians and shows that it is also pervasive within the ranks of the Swiss themselves. This is an interesting perspective for a wartime story. Michieletto's production offers some resistance to *Tell*'s romantic narrative of the heroic Swiss people overcoming their oppression.[64] The heroes are not themselves immune from oppressive behaviour along gender lines.

The inclusion of representations of sexual violence serves the story Michieletto is telling about the harsh realities of war. He engages with the idea of sexual violence in a relatively sophisticated way by depicting smaller pervasive forms of gendered violence in addition to the shocking rape scene in the third act. But although I think the presence of the gang rape in the ballet may be justified by both the plot of the opera and the rest of the production, there may have been gratuitous elements to the specific staging of the scene as it was performed in the dress rehearsal. Holten reported that some small changes were made to the scene in light of the comments made by Catharine Rogers and others. He characterizes the changes as "tweaks" and insists that the scene "has not changed in its essence. It is the same duration and makes the same

[64] This production is explicitly critical of the heroic narrative of William Tell the legendary figure. One of the other defining features of this production is the presence of an actor representing an idealized comic-book image of Tell, who highlights the contrast between the real Tell and the legend, between the reality of war and the fantasy.

point that we find valid for the theatrical context."[65] If we take Holten at his word, then Michieletto deemed the full nudity of the dancer and some of the more explicit gestures—such as Gessler simulating rape with his gun—to be nonessential to the drama. The choice to do without these elements is not only more sensitive to the risks of representing sexual violence on stage, but it also streamlines the staging of the ballet so that every action is necessary and in service of Michieletto's vision. With so little visible nudity and no simulation of sexual penetration onstage, this scene captures the fear and the humiliation that the soldiers achieve through this sexual violence, while side-stepping at least some of the pornographic potential of putting rape onstage.

Turandot similarly features both allusions to sexual violence and acts that can be interpreted as sexually violent. Turandot's resistance to being married stems directly from fear of ending up like her ancestor, Princess Lo-u-Ling, who was "dragged by a man like you, stranger, into the dreadful night where her sweet voice was silenced."[66] Typically, this has been read as meaning that Lo-u-Ling was raped as well as murdered by the usurper.[67] Later, when Calaf wants to kiss Turandot, she resists, saying, "the agony of my ancestor will not be repeated."[68] The language of Turandot's protestations makes it clear that she perceives any kind of intimate contact with Calaf to be a dire threat to her safety, in light of what happened to Lo-u-Ling. Calaf talks about his desire for Turandot almost exclusively in terms of winning or conquering her. "Nessun dorma" famously ends with his threefold repetition of "vincerò!" Turandot's reaction to Calaf successfully answering her riddles indicates that she had been confident the riddles were

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[65] Kasper Holten, "Small Adjustments Made to Production of *Guillaume Tell*," Royal Opera House News, 5 July 2015.
[66] "Trascinata da un uomo, come te, come te, straniero, là nella notte atroce, dove si spense la sua fresca voce!"
[67] The synopsis in the program for Knabe's *Turandot* reads, "she wants to escape the fate of her ancestor Lo-u-Ling, who was raped and murdered." "Sie möchte dem Schicksal ihrer Ahnin Lo-u-Ling entgehen, die vergewaltigt und ermordet wurde." "Handlung" in program for *Turandot,* 2.
[68] "Dell'ava lo strazio non si rinnoverà!"

unanswerable—her way of ensuring she would not be forced into an unwanted marriage without having to explicitly refuse. Calaf and Turandot's kiss in the third act of the opera is already an act of sexual violence. It is an intimate romantic act that Turandot actively resists, and it is clear from the text that Turandot understands this act as being commensurate with Lo-u-Ling's rape and murder. A production that treats this scene and the rest of the dénouement like a romance in which Turandot is radically transformed by Calaf's affections normalizes the idea that women sometimes need to be forced into intimacy, that it is ultimately for their own good, and that they will be grateful in the end.

The brutal rape in Knabe's *Turandot* is supported by more than the character of the libretto. While Michieletto's *Tell* plays off the cheery dance music of the ballet to contrast the brutal stage action, Knabe's rape scene in *Turandot* is actually well supported by Alfano's music.[69] Roger Parker describes the musical realization of this scene as "brief and violent to the point of brutality.…*Tristan*-like dissonance piles on dissonance and then releases onto a sequence of rhythmically irregular, triple forte bangs on the drum, bassoons, and trombones. If this is a representation of sex, then the act is a barbaric, messy business, overwhelmingly concerned with power."[70] Knabe seems to hear this sequence of rhythmically irregular strikes at the moment of the kiss (7–8 mm. before rehearsal 39) in essentially the same way that Parker does: in his production, these percussive strikes align with the sharp thrusts of Calaf's hips as he rapes Turandot. There is a long pause notated in the score at this moment, in which Knabe's Calaf stands, refastens his pants, and leaves Turandot lying motionless on the bed. The violence of this musical moment made more sense to me when I watched Knabe's staging than it ever had

[69] The music for this scene was composed by Franco Alfano after Puccini's death.
[70] Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 98.

before. Parker's reading of the music of this scene, from its violence to its equation of sex and power, comes to life on Knabe's stage.

I see two primary currents that run through these four wartime opera productions featuring rape. First, rape is a metaphor for war: rape represents the domination and destruction of one group by another. Second, rape is an element of realism: because rape is common in real-world warfare, the inclusion of rape in operas about war makes them more realistic. Regarding the first of these currents, rape can certainly be an effective metaphor for war, but the widespread use of rape as a way of representing other horrors is troubling. In Airey's book about the politics of rape on the Restoration stage, she warns about the potential dangers of transforming rape into "an artistic and allegorical symbol," noting that these representations "transform that very real pain into social and political metaphors."[71] Similarly, Lisa Fitzpatrick notices that contemporary theatre often stages rape in wartime as "a metaphor or as an allegory for forms of oppression other than gendered oppression."[72] These theatrical uses of rape imagery, like the operatic uses throughout this chapter, depend on rape's status as a kind of master trope for the violation of women by the patriarchy, but also of oppressed groups more generally. Literary theorist Sabine Sielke argues that such broad deployment of rape as a trope works to "diffuse the meaning of rape."[73] Using rape to stand in for other harms centers a privileged position from which rape *can* be primarily a metaphor. The allegorical rapes in these productions demonstrate the baseness of the soldiers and lay plain the horrors of military occupation. But for some in the audience,

[71] Airey, *The Politics of Rape*, 26.
[72] Fitzpatrick, *Rape on the Contemporary Stage*, 138.
[73] Sabine Sielke, *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790–1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 183.

especially those who have been or fear they may be sexually assaulted, this rape is not shocking as a symbol of another terrible thing, but as a terrible thing in and of itself. It is hard to see rape as standing for something else when the spectre of rape as rape is dominant in one's life. Catharine Rogers is getting at this problem when she writes that as a woman, she feels she is having the horrors of rape highlighted *at* her all the time.

The second current is well articulated in Kasper Holten's logic above, when he implies that the existence of rape in real-world warfare is justification enough to include rape scenes in operas set at wartime. Holten appears to be refuting Catharine Rogers's accusation that the rape was gratuitous by framing gratuitousness as a question of realism—it cannot be gratuitous if it reflects reality. The distinction between useful and gratuitous representations of sexual violence will not be consistent between different critics and spectators, but the fact of the existence of sexual violence at wartime does not itself settle the matter. I have argued throughout this dissertation that there are situations in which the inclusion of sexual violence not explicitly called for in an opera's score can be ethically productive by prompting critical analysis of the opera or using an oft-performed opera as a way of advancing pertinent cultural conversations. But even from a position of accepting that adding violence to a work can be done ethically, the often sensationalized violence of the *Regietheater* aesthetic can feel like a bridge too far. There is undeniably a character of one-upmanship regarding the shock value of some of these productions; there are directors and producers that thrive on the controversy generated by outrageously lurid renditions of beloved operas. Sometimes these displays occur within an aesthetic of realism, as in Michieletto's *Tell*, but this is not always the case. In the performance of *Guillaume Tell* that I saw, after the changes had been made to the dress rehearsal version, the action onstage during the ballet was not, to my mind, gratuitous. I find Michieletto's and

Holten's readings of the opera's inherent sexual violence generally convincing. The production levels a devastating critique of the deeply misogynistic imperialist project of armies in occupied territories around the world. While not a particularly original concept for a contemporary take on a wartime opera, this production offers a strong political critique in the midst of a still legible interpretation of the familiar story.

All four productions in this chapter feature elements of rape as a metaphor and rape as realism in their depictions of sexual violence, but I am only convinced that the sexual violence is justified in two of them. The rapes in Bieito's *Un ballo in maschera* and Kratzer's *La forza del destino* both serve to criticize elements of modern warfare and soldiering, but I suspect that these directors could have accomplished their goals without recourse to such brutally explicit (*Ballo*) and perversely comic (*Forza*) scenes of sexual violence. Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* and Knabe's *Turandot* are different cases, in large part because both *Tell* and *Turandot* contain underlying themes of sexual violence already. These operas support the directorial addition of the rape scenes, and the productions by Michieletto and Knabe offer compelling examinations of both the operas themselves and the non-critical way in which directors and audiences often interact with them.

I said above that directors and producers must balance the risks of harm from depicting rape onstage with the potential benefits of dramatizing social commentary. But in operas like *Guillaume Tell* and especially *Turandot*, which contain sexual violence just below the surface, there can be potential harms in ignoring the tacit allusions to rape as well. There is a risk that a sexual violence survivor may experience retraumatization from witnessing Turandot's rape in Knabe's production, but even in the absence of an explicit rape in a traditional production this scene thematizes sexual violence and reinforces harmful cultural ideas about consent. The rape in

Knabe's *Turandot* is shocking, but the rape does more than just shock. By incorporating an explicit rape, Knabe calls attention to and criticizes the virulent misogyny that is already foundational in this opera's text. To continue to perform an opera like *Turandot* in an ethical way demands that we engage with the dark and messy realities of the story it tells. In the house program for *Turandot*, Knabe describes the opera as a male fantasy in which three men (Puccini and librettists Adami and Simoni) "brutally destroy the only women in the opera: one [Liù] kills herself and the other [Turandot] is abused. To put it cynically: Long live the patriarchy."[74] There is a rebellious character to this kind of *Regietheater* that I find vital and exciting in the opera world; *Turandot* is an opera about sexual violence and the destruction of a powerful woman, and in his production Tilman Knabe refuses to pretend that it is not.

[74] "Die Männerphantasie, welche der Komponist und seine Autoren in dem Stück verwirklichen, ist schon starker Tobak. Da sind drei Machos am Werk, die die einzigen Frauen in der Oper auf brutalste Weise vernichten: Die eine bringt sich um und die andere wird missbraucht. Zynisch formuliert: Es lebe das Patriarchat." Knabe, "Ein Gespräch," in program for *Turandot,* 11.

CONCLUSION

Ethical Criticism in Practice

The preceding production analyses belie definitive judgments about the ethical, political, and aesthetic value of putting sexual violence onstage in operas of the canon. Staging the sexual violence in an opera like *Don Giovanni* can, in the best cases, allow for nuanced commentary on the subject in our present cultural context. And even adding sexual violence to operas that do not typically feature it can open up space for new understandings of familiar stories and characters, as in *Salome*, and mount powerful critiques of the normalization of the invisible sexual violence of operas like *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Guillaume Tell*, and *Turandot.* But the risks of staging sexual violence are ever present. It is crucial that opera producers and directors carefully think through exactly what is to be seen and heard in these representations. Throughout this dissertation I have modelled the use of a feminist ethical framework to conduct this type of analysis.

Depictions of sexual violence are powerful. They can shock an audience into a more critical and engaged form of spectatorship, which can be valuable in these old familiar works that too often pass by without social or political commentary. This feature of staged sexual violence has made it a perennial favourite in the *Regietheater* toolkit. *Regietheater*'s economy of shock often serves to direct an audience's critical faculties at the operatic text in a new way. Bieito's *Entführung*, Knabe's *Turandot*, and Michieletto's *Tell* all use staged representations of rape to call attention to existing sexual violence simmering just beneath the surface of these stories. Susan McClary writes that *Regietheater* gives audience members an "arch way of relating to our shared cultural legacy, reveling in the guilty pleasures of favorite arias while maintaining ironic

distance."[1] *Regietheater* can allow us to critique the operas we love and the culture they come from even while we consume them.

But putting sexual violence onstage is always risky, both practically for an opera company that depends on some degree of public funding, and psychologically for audiences made up of both assault survivors and those who are disturbed by social injustice and the perpetuation of rape myths. In the balancing act between the usefulness of the critique and the risk to the audience, I believe the choice to stage sexual violence should be informed by these high stakes. We should ask: Does staging sexual violence illuminate problematic elements of the work in question? Does it push its audiences to recognize the ways in which their own spectatorship can be exploitative of the suffering of others? Is it sensitive to the highly charged political nature of discourse around sexual assault in the contemporary moment? There are lessons to be gleaned from some of the examples in this dissertation about how to balance the risks and benefits of representing sexual violence in opera today. Michieletto's *Tell* and Egoyan's *Salome* both underwent alterations to make their depictions of sexual violence less explicit under public pressure and ended up with versions of their rape scenes that still accomplished what they were intended to, but with greater sensitivity and a focus on mitigating harm. I would like to see this kind of editing happening at every step of the staging process—not with the goal of reducing onstage sexual violence per se, but so that every choice about the particular depiction is made intentionally in the service of an ethically informed production concept.

[1] McClary, *The Passions of Peter Sellars*, 3.

New Directions: Intimacy Choreography

While the focus of this dissertation has been the representational issues of putting sexual violence onstage, the presence of sexual violence can be felt at every level of contemporary operatic discourse and practice. The opera industry itself is a minefield of harassment and abuse, and the ethical stakes of staging sexual violence do not end with the consequences for audiences watching these productions. Directors work through the bodies of their singer-actors to craft these representations, and there are risks associated with onstage depictions of intimacy and violence. In the course of my research, I conducted an interview with a soprano who told me about a negative experience they had had performing *Don Giovanni* for a university production. I asked them about how specifically the director had choreographed the scene that had made them uncomfortable:

> It was definitely more improvisational.…There were three of us who had to do a little dance around Don Giovanni. But [the director] didn't really tell us who should do what, it was not specific. And so it was a little scary and overwhelming, and you never knew if you were going too far or not far enough…and there was very little way to know if the Giovanni was okay with it.…There are so many examples of icky things that happened to me or to colleagues or friends in these shows.…So no, it was not well planned.[2]

This is a troublingly familiar story, and it highlights the fact that representational problems around sexual violence and intimacy are not mutually exclusive of problems with sexual misconduct in the opera industry. Recent years have seen the slow but exciting adoption of a new approach to staging sexual contact including sexual violence that is attuned to both the aesthetic and representational issues, and the safety and wellbeing of the singers.

In 2016, Tonia Sina, Siobhan Richardson, and Alicia Rodis founded Intimacy Director's International, based in part on Sina's 2006 Master's thesis.[3] Intimacy directors, also called

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[2] Juanita Marchand Knight, interview with the author, 30 April 2020.
[3] Tonia Sina Campanella, "Intimate Encounters; Staging Intimacy and Sensuality," (Master's thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2006).

intimacy choreographers or coordinators, advocate treating onstage intimacy with the same kind of care and control deemed necessary for onstage violence. Like fight direction, intimacy direction aims to keep actors safe, physically and emotionally. Intimacy directors choreograph scenes of intimacy or sexual violence precisely, so that the representation communicates what it needs to and the actors involved know exactly what to expect. They also take responsibility for the actors' emotional safety, serving as advocates for them when required. There are a number of practical obstacles to the large-scale implementation of the principles of intimacy choreography and the hiring of more intimacy directors, including budgetary concerns and the typically very short rehearsal periods for opera compared with straight theatre. But still, some opera companies are beginning to bring in intimacy directors to work on productions featuring scenes of intimate contact felt to be especially risky or delicate.

Intimacy choreography asks some of the same questions of directors and performers that I have asked in my research. For instance, the first of five pillars of safe intimacy in rehearsal and performance, assembled by Intimacy Director's International, is "context": "All parties must be aware of how the scene of intimacy meets the needs of the story and must also understand the story within the intimacy itself. This not only creates a sense of safety, but also eliminates the unexpected and ensures that the intimacy is always in service of the story."[4] Ideally, adherence to this directive would ensure that conversations like the ones that led to the toning down of the rape scenes in Atom Egoyan's *Salome* and Damiano Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* happen in the rehearsal room before a new production becomes public. The connection between ethical onstage

[4] Tonia Sina, Siobhan Richardson, and Alicia Rodis, "Pillars of Safe Intimacy: Rehearsal and Performance Practice," Intimacy Directors International, teamidi.org, https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/924101_1620d7333f6a4809a2765257e750e255.pdf.

representation of sexual violence in opera and approaches to the act of staging that prioritize safety and consent for the singers is an area for future inquiry.

"We Have No Moral Obligations to 'Great' Art"

This statement, which was the title of Tamara Bernstein's response to Atom Egoyan's defence of his *Salome* in the *National Post* in 2002, expresses an opinion not universally accepted in the operatic community. Expressions of our debts and responsibilities to great artworks and their creators abound in criticism of *Regietheater* especially. Norman Lebrecht's blog Slipped Disc frequently shares articles or announcements about productions of *Regietheater*, and the comment sections provide an interesting cross section of the kinds of language used to disparage these directors.[5] Commenters frequently refer to *Regietheater* in terms of abuse and assault committed by the director against either the operas in question or against their (dead) composers. There is an undeniable moral dimension to a lot of this language; various commenters refer to *Regie* productions as acts of desecration or blasphemy. Some criticism of *Regietheater* goes further still, using the language of sexual violence as a metaphor for what a director does to an opera by imposing a new dramatic context. A 2019 review of Tobias Kratzer's production of *La forza del destino* accuses Kratzer and his ilk of raping the legacy of nineteenth-century operatic geniuses.[6] This particularly egregious example comes from a self-identified "politically incorrect" news website, but a more general characterization of *Regietheater* as akin to abuse of the composer is pervasive.

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[5] One particularly relevant post and lively comment section can be found here: "A Composer and a Violinist are Appalled by Bayreuth's Ring," *Slipped Disc*, August 14, 2017, https://slippedisc.com/2017/08/a-composer-and-a-violinist-are-appalled-by-bayreuths-ring.

[6] Wolfgang Hübner, "Frankfurt: Verdi-Oper hoch subventioniert als primitiver Agitprop," *PI News*, February 2019. "Denn sie können nur deshalb nach Belieben das Erbe der Genies des künstlerisch ruhmreichen 19. Jahrhunderts vergewaltigen und verhässlichen, weil das völlig abgestumpfte Publikum längst jede Zumutung brav schluckt, um erschreckend konformistisch seine Weltoffenheit und Progressivität unter Beweis zu stellen."

My arguments throughout this study have privileged the wellbeing of audience members and the social body over the legacy of canonic operas and their creators. Conceiving of canonic artworks and their long-dead creators as living things in need of our care shifts our attention away from the responsibility we owe to the living people who interact with these artworks today. I am concerned that foregrounding a moral obligation to canonic operas themselves often necessitates an ethical disservice to the people we expect to attend these operas, especially when those people belong to equity-seeking groups that are not typically represented fairly or at all in these operas as written. Even in the absence of sexual assault survivors, the harm perpetrated by a careless representation of sexual violence persists; the unchecked spreading of flawed rhetoric around sexual violence hurts us all. In the introduction to his book *Loving Music Till It Hurts*, William Cheng urges us to "love music, and love people. If ever in doubt—or if forced to choose—choose people."[7] My focus in this project has been on the women, the feminists, and especially the survivors of sexual violence that make up contemporary opera audiences, but my ethically grounded approach to thinking about operatic representation extends to depictions of and rhetoric around gender, race, sexuality, and disability more broadly. In continuing this work, I aim to bring critical race theory, queer theory, and disability studies to bear on contemporary practices of operatic production and reception.

[7] William Cheng, *Loving Music Till It Hurts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

APPENDIX 1: OPERA PLOT SYNOPSES

***Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782)**
W. A. Mozart, libretto by Gottlieb Stephanie

The nobleman Belmonte has come to Turkey to rescue his betrothed, Konstanze, her servant Blonde, and his servant Pedrillo (Blonde's lover) who have been kidnapped by pirates and sold to Pasha Selim. The Pasha has fallen in love with Konstanze, but she has remained faithful to Belmonte. Blonde has been given as a slave to Osmin, the seraglio's overseer. With Pedrillo's help, Belmonte infiltrates the palace by pretending to be an architect. The two pairs of lovers are reunited, but Osmin and Selim capture them before they can escape. It is revealed that Belmonte's father and Selim are enemies, and Selim decides to spare the lovers' lives to prove that he is a better man than his rival. Osmin is enraged by Selim's decision, and a chorus of Janissaries sings a hymn of praise to their master's mercy.

***Salome* (1905)**
Richard Strauss, libretto by Oscar Wilde (German translation by Hedwig Lachmann)

Herod, the Tetrarch of Judea in the first century CE, has taken the prophet Jochanaan (John the Baptist) prisoner in the palace cistern and has ordered that no one is to have contact with him. His stepdaughter Salome is desired by all the men of the palace, and when she decides she wants to see Jochanaan she easily manipulates Narraboth, the Captain of the Guard, to bring him to her. Salome is overcome with desire for Jochanaan, who refuses to look at her. She pleads with him for a kiss, which causes Narraboth to kill himself in anguish. Jochanaan is returned to the cistern and Herod invites Salome to dinner. When she refuses, he asks her to dance for him and offers to

reward her with anything she desires. Salome makes him swear he will honour her request and then performs the Dance of the Seven Veils by slowly removing seven veils from her body and finally lying naked at Herod's feet. At the dance's conclusion, Salome demands the head of Jochanaan on a silver charger. Herod reluctantly agrees, and when the executioner delivers Jochanaan's head to Salome she kisses it ecstatically. Upon witnessing this, Herod orders his soldiers to kill Salome, and they crush her beneath their shields.

***Don Giovanni* (1787)**

W. A. Mozart, libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte

The Spanish libertine Don Giovanni is interrupted in the midst of trying to force Donna Anna to have sex with him while in disguise. Her father, the Commendatore, challenges Giovanni to a duel and Giovanni kills him. Donna Anna and her betrothed, Don Ottavio, seek revenge. Donna Elvira arrives in pursuit of Giovanni who recently abandoned her. Leporello, Giovanni's servant, tells Elvira the extent of Giovanni's licentiousness—his conquests number over two thousand. Donna Anna discovers that it is Giovanni who attacked her and killed her father, so she and Ottavio join forces with Donna Elvira to expose Giovanni's crimes. The trio interferes with Giovanni's attempts to seduce the young bride Zerlina. Don Giovanni escapes their grasp by swapping clothes with Leporello, but his gloating is interrupted when a statue of the dead Commendatore threatens him. Giovanni invites the statue to dinner. When the statue arrives at Giovanni's home, it gives him a chance to repent for his sins. Giovanni refuses and the statue drags him into hell. The other characters appear ready to exact revenge on Giovanni only to find he is already gone. They rejoice and prepare to go about their lives.

***Guillaume Tell* (1829)**

Gioachino Rossini, libretto by Étienne de Jouy and Hippolyte Bis

In Austrian-occupied Switzerland in the thirteenth century, William Tell is organizing a Swiss revolt against the Austrians. Meanwhile, Arnold, the son of a respected Swiss elder, is in love with Mathilde, an Austrian princess. Leuthold, a Swiss shepherd, has killed one of the Austrian soldiers in defence of his daughter, and this act triggers renewed animosity between the Swiss and the Austrians. Tell helps Leuthold escape, and Arnold's father is arrested for assisting the fugitives. The capture and later execution of his father sets Arnold on a path of revenge against the Austrians. The Austrians hold a celebration to mark the hundredth anniversary of their rule in Switzerland and glorify Governor Gessler. During the festivities, the soldiers identify Tell as the man who helped Leuthold escape. Gessler challenges Tell to shoot an arrow through an apple balanced on Tell's son's head or they will both be executed. When Tell succeeds, Mathilde intervenes to protect the boy and Gessler takes Tell away to be executed anyway. Tell escapes and kills Gessler with a single arrow. Meanwhile, Arnold arms the Swiss rebels and captures Altdorf, the Austrian seat of power in Switzerland. Mathilde vows to join the Swiss in their continuing struggle for freedom.

***La forza del destino* (1862)**

Giuseppe Verdi, libretto by Francesco Maria Piave

Donna Leonora is in love with Don Alvaro but her father, the Marquis of Calatrava, does not approve of the match due to Alvaro's foreign birth. As the lovers are preparing to run away together, the Marquis confronts Alvaro. Alvaro surrenders and drops his pistol, but the weapon goes off and kills the Marquis who dies cursing his daughter. The lovers flee and become

separated. A year later, Leonora enters a monastery and vows to spend her life in hermitage in a cave in the mountains. Meanwhile, Leonora's brother, Don Carlo, has vowed to kill Don Alvaro to avenge his father's death. He has disguised himself as a student to enlist in the Spanish army. Don Alvaro, also in disguise, has joined the army as well. Carlo and Alvaro become friends, but Carlo eventually discovers Alvaro's identity. The two begin to duel, but Alvaro flees to enter a monastery. Carlo tracks Alvaro to the monastery and the two duel again. This time, Alvaro stabs Carlo. Alvaro enters Leonora's cave in search of someone to perform last rites for Carlo and the lovers recognize one another. Leonora kneels over her brother, and he stabs her as he dies. Having now inadvertently caused the deaths of the entire Calatrava family, Alvaro jumps to his death in a nearby ravine.

N.B. A revised ending, in which Alvaro does not die and is redeemed by God in the final scene, is performed more frequently, but the Oper Frankfurt production discussed in Chapter 5 uses the original ending.

***Un ballo in maschera* (1859)**

Giuseppe Verdi, libretto by Antonio Somma

King Gustavo of Sweden is in love with Amelia, the wife of Count Anckarström, his trusted friend and advisor. Gustavo goes in disguise to visit the fortune teller Madame Arvidson because she has been accused of witchcraft. While there, Gustavo overhears Amelia confessing her love for him. When Amelia leaves, the disguised Gustavo asks to have his fortune told, and Madame Arvidson tells him that the next man who shakes his hand will kill him. Anckarström enters and, unaware of the prophesy, shakes Gustavo's hand. Gustavo seeks out Amelia later that night and the two declare their mutual love. Anckarström leans of this meeting and surmises that Amelia

and Gustavo are having an affair. He resolves to kill Gustavo and allies himself with two conspirators who already want to kill the king. Anckarström stabs Gustavo at a masked ball. As Gustavo dies, he pardons the conspirators and tells Anckarstöm that Amelia never broke her wedding vows.

***Turandot* (1926)**

Giacomo Puccini (completed by Franco Alfano), libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni

In Ancient China, Princess Turandot is the sole heir to the aging emperor. She will only marry the suitor that can correctly answer three riddles, and all unsuccessful suitors are executed. Timur, the exiled former king of Tartary, is reunited with his long-lost son outside the imperial palace. The prince of Tartary sees Turandot and falls in love with her. Against the advice of his father, their servant Liù, and the imperial ministers, the prince strikes the gong that announces he wishes to answer Turandot's riddles. At sunrise, a crowd gathers for the ceremony, and the prince correctly answers the three riddles. In agony, Turandot attempts to free herself from her obligation to the foreign prince, but the emperor refuses. The prince offers that if she can guess his name by the following dawn he will die. Turandot orders Timur and Liù to reveal the prince's name, but Liù claims she alone knows the name and then kills herself to protect the prince. The prince seizes Turandot and kisses her against her will. The kiss awakens Turandot's love and the prince tells her his name is Calaf. Turandot decides not to use this knowledge to execute Calaf and instead proclaims his name is "love."

APPENDIX 2: *Salome* Productions 2008–2018 Featuring Sexual Abuse of Salome

Year	Company	Director(s)	Childlike physicality	Explicit Freud allusion	Salome takes revenge	Implied childhood sexual abuse	Does not receive decapitated head	Herod rapes Salome in the present
2008	Royal Opera House	David McVicar	X			X		
2009	Deutsche Oper am Rhein	Tatjana Gürbaca			X	X		
2009	La Monnaie & Gran Teatre del Liceu	Guy Joosten			X	X		
2010	Theater Ulm	Mathias Kaiser	X			X		?
2010	Palau de les Arts	Francisco Negrin				X	X	X
2011	Kiel Opera	Silvana Schröder				X		X
2013	Royal Swedish Opera	Sofia Jupither						?
2015	Landestheater Detmold	Kay Metzger						X
2015	Santa Fe Opera	Daniel Slater		X		X		
2015	Theater Bonn	Alexandra Szemerédy & Magdolna Parditka	X	X	?	X	X	
2018	Salzburg Festival	Romeo Castellucci				X	X	
2018	Aalto Theater Essen	Mariame Clément	X		X	X		X
2018	Staatenhaus Köln-Deutz	Ted Huffman			X	X	X	

APPENDIX 3: *Don Giovanni* Productions Online by Streaming Service

	Company	Director(s)	Year	Anna and Giovanni	Deception of Elvira	"Là ci darem"
Medici TV	Salzburg Festival	Michael Hampe	1987	Unclear	Comic	Minimal resistance
	Glyndebourne	Jonathan Kent	2010	Attempted rape	Comic	Playful resistance
	Monte Carlo Opera	Jean-Louis Grinda	2015	Unclear	Comic	Real resistance
	Festival d'Aix-en-Provence	Jean-François Sivadier	2017	Attempted rape	Comic	Playful resistance
Alexander Street	Gran Teatre del Liceu	Calixto Bieito	2002	Consensual affair	Serious	Minimal resistance
	Teatro Real Madrid	Lluis Pasqual	2005	Attempted rape	Comic	Real resistance
	De Nederlandse Opera	Jossi Wieler & Sergio Morabito	2006	Attempted rape	Comic	Playful resistance
	Royal Opera House	Francesca Zambello	2009	Attempted rape	Comic	Real resistance
Met on Demand	Metropolitan Opera	Herbert Graf	1978	Attempted rape	Comic	Real resistance
	Metropolitan Opera*	Franco Zeffirelli	1990	Attempted rape	Comic	Real resistance
	Metropolitan Opera*	Stephen Lawless/ Franco Zeffirelli	2000	Attempted rape	Comic	Real resistance
	Metropolitan Opera	Michael Grandage	2011	Attempted rape	Comic	Playful resistance
	Metropolitan Opera	Michael Grandage	2016	Attempted rape	Comic	Real resistance

*N.B. James Levine conducts the 1990 and 2000 Met production.

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