

Undressing Cherubino: Reassessing Gender and Sexuality in
Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*

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Abstract

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Although *Le nozze di Figaro* is one of Mozart's most celebrated operas, we have not yet understood one crucial element. On the surface of the drama, the opera seems to be about class disruption: the Count is the head of the household, but it is his servants who run it. This plot is made evident to the audience, and it is the message that most critics draw from the work. However, there may be a second meaning below the surface that is, in fact, more subversive than the overt one. While class structures are questioned in the foreground, another more hidden narrative explores alternate depictions of femininity and sexuality. This covert meaning is arguably embodied in Cherubino. This character is portrayed as an adolescent boy despite the fact that the role calls for a female singer. Cherubino is understood to be male, and functions as one in the drama, but, as I will suggest, may in fact be conceived as female. As a pagegirl raging with sexual love for all the women in the palace, Cherubino may be seen embodying a prototype of femininity that is contrary to the heterosexual norms of the overt narrative. The first chapter of this thesis examines how both Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais' play *Le mariage de Figaro* and Mozart and Da Ponte's operatic adaptation could point towards alternate depictions of women. The following two chapters survey the various ways an alternate gender identity for Cherubino can be expressed through features of the libretto (chapter 2) and the score (chapter 3). Drawing from my experience of performing Cherubino, the fourth and final chapter assesses the findings of the previous two and shows that while elements of the text and music may have characteristics that can be assigned gender attributes, neither can intrinsically embody masculinity or

femininity. With this finding comes the understanding that who and what a character is is marked not by the outlines of libretto and score but by acts of musical performance.

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Introduction

Le nozze di Figaro (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (1790) are among the most celebrated operatic masterpieces of the late eighteenth century.¹ In them, Mozart and his librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, demonstrate masterful story telling. But what may actually distinguish these works from the rest of Mozart's *opera buffe* is not so much how well they tell a story but that there are alternate stories being told. This duality of narrative is most explicit not in any of Mozart and Da Ponte's collaborations but in Mozart's collaboration with Emanuel Schikaneder which yielded his last opera, the singspiel *Die Zauberflöte* (1791). As is well known, the work begins as a rescue opera: the hero Tamino has been entrusted with saving Pamina, the daughter of the Queen of the Night, from the evil Sarastro. By the end of the first act, however, this completely viable plot is negated and displaced by another one. Tamino discovers that the Queen of the Night is the actual villain, that Sarastro is the good guy who rescued Pamina from the Queen, and that the quest to rescue the damsel in distress is really a test of his worthiness, one that occupies the whole of the second act. In *Die Zauberflöte*, the transformation from one to the other storyline is not just spelled out for the members of the audience, they experience it in precisely the same way Tamino does. Just as he is fooled into thinking one thing only to find out that something else is the case, so too is the audience fooled into thinking that the opera they are watching is a rescue opera only to find out that it is an enactment of the rites and rituals of Free Masonry. In no other Mozart opera is the disparity between its narratives made so apparent as it is here.

¹ Mary Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 118.

This kind of dual narrative seems to be played out in Mozart's collaborations with Da Ponte but in more concealed, less apparent ways. Moving backwards from *Zauberflöte*, *Così* seems to unfold on two concurrent narratives, one overt, the other covert. On the surface, the opera might seem to be about the fickleness of women and fidelity in general. World-wise Don Alfonso dares the younger and less experienced men, Guglielmo and Ferrando, to put the fidelity of their fiancées to the test. Pretending to go off to war and then returning disguised as Albanians, they try to woo each other's betrothed and when they eventually succeed effectively prove that "all women are like that." In Daniel Hertz's opinion, Da Ponte portrays the women as "pretty shallow creatures."² Even when the men are sure of their fiancées' fidelity, praising their "noble education," "sublime thoughts," and "unselfishness," Da Ponte disproves these qualities, first, by revealing that the ladies' education is such that they cannot comprehend a few words of Latin, and second, by showing "that their thoughts, like those of most ordinary girls, revolve around getting married as soon as possible."³ It may be on account of these depictions why "the nineteenth century found the opera immoral because it degraded women."⁴ However, another alternative and less overt story can be argued to be unfolding at the same time as this one. In this second story, Mozart and Da Ponte are not interested in defaming Fiordiligi and Dorabella. Nor are they interested in making assumptions about the entire female sex. They are instead exploring the question of what makes a good match and what one is to do when one is mismatched. For it just may be that the couples are mismatched from the outset and that Don Alfonso's little experiment

² Daniel Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, ed. Thomas Bauman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 236.

³ *Ibid.*, 236. Hertz explains that in the libretto, the chambermaid Despina greets the girls with "Salvete amabiles Bonae puellae" (Hail friends, good girls), to which they respond "Parla un linguaggio...che non sappiamo" (She is speaking a language that we do not know).

⁴ Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*, 168.

unwittingly brings about the better pairings. In this alternate storyline, it is not so much that women are unfaithful as it is that their insight into emotional truth moves them to go with the other fellow. “Così fan tutte!”

In a similar fashion, *Don Giovanni* seems to conceal a covert meaning underneath its more explicit one. The libretto is based on the story of Don Juan, “a morality tale that was already more than 150 years old by the time Da Ponte and Mozart fashioned their own version.”⁵ In the opera, the seducer Don Giovanni is portrayed as the classic bad guy: he disrupts everyone in the opera, causing varying degrees of harm, but he is punished in the end through death. Justice is seemingly achieved as the virtuous triumph and the wicked is defeated. As such, it seems that the moral of the story turns on juxtaposing what happens to evildoers (in the end, they get punished) with what happens to those who do good (in the end, they prevail), a moral made explicit in the final words of the opera: “Questo è il fin di chi fa mal. E de’ perfidi la morte alla vita è sempre ugual” (Here is the end of he who has done wrong. The death of the wretch reflects his life).⁶ But it is possible that the opera plays with an alternate morality. Though victimized and wronged by Giovanni, the other characters are hardly epigones of virtue. Edward Dent doubts whether “Donna Anna is really anything more than self-absorbed or aloof.”⁷ Additionally, while accusing Giovanni of rape, Anna has been suspected of being complicit in the seduction and not forced at all.⁸ Although scorned

⁵ Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 2.

⁶ Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Don Giovanni*, trans. Marie-Thérèse Paquin (Montréal: Les Presses de L'Université de Montréal, 1974), 232.

⁷ Edward Dent, *Mozart's Operas: A Critical Study*, 2nd edition ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 158.

⁸ Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 207.; William Mann, *The Operas of Mozart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 468. Here Allanbrook explains that “Anna’s *opera seria* indignation betrays her immediately upon entrance... and so does the ambiguity of her first words to her seducer, ‘Non sperar, se non m’uccidi, / Ch’io ti lasci fuggir mai!’ (Do not hope, unless you kill me, that I will let you go away ever!)” It would be merely insensitive to accuse Donna Anna of real ambivalence toward her enemy in her present fury;

by Giovanni, Elvira is not guiltless either. Irving Singer argues that “her complicity in Don Giovanni’s powers of seduction does little to exempt her from the blame.”⁹ And what about Zerlina? Seemingly, the most naïve of all the characters, she is robbed of her innocence by Giovanni, but she is not really the little lamb she makes herself out to be, having gone willingly into an illicit affair.¹⁰ And the men are just as bad. Ottavio and Masetto fail to defend the women they vow to protect. They, and Leporello too, lack the strength to stand up to Giovanni and do what is right. All of them may be the last standing after the evil Giovanni is dragged down to hell. But none of them are themselves worthy of emulation. Unlike Giovanni, they do not have the strength of character to do what they want, to be who they are. From the first scene onwards, Leporello complains about wanting to be his own boss and when his chance comes he decides to go get drunk and find another master. Elvira so desires to have a meaningful relationship and when her chance comes she decides to go off to a convent. Ottavio and Anna, betrothed now a year and eager to get married, decide to put it off for another year. And Masetto and Zerlina are content just to go have some dinner. In the alternate morality play, the evil Giovanni gets what is coming to him, but the weakness of the characters that remain makes us question what exactly it means to be good.

Whereas the dual narratives of *Zauberflöte* are made explicit and enacted in the first and second acts respectively, the dual narratives of *Così* and *Giovanni* tend to work concurrently, the overt one more or less explicit throughout the action, the covert one coming to fore only at the end of the opera (in *Così* in how it is staged, in *Giovanni* in what the

yet later, when she persists in directing all her ardor toward the pursuit of her seducer rather than toward marriage with her affianced lover, these words will afford a second meaning.” William Mann suggests that Donna Anna’s interaction with Giovanni would be fortunate: “it would be beneficial to [Anna’s] personal growing-up if she had been pleasantly raped by Don Giovanni.”

⁹ Irving Singer, *Mozart and Beethoven: The Concept of Love in their Operas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 83.

¹⁰ Wye Jamison Allanbrook, Mary Hunter and Gretchen A. Wheelock, "Staging Mozart's Women," in *Siren Songs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 47.

characters say they are going to do). Even more covert are the dual narratives of *Le nozze di Figaro*. The opera depicts one crazy day, a *Folle Journée*, in Count Almaviva's palace. Susanna and Figaro, servants to the Count, are soon to be married. However, the Count is interested in pursuing Susanna, much to the chagrin of his wife, the Countess, who conspires with Susanna and Figaro to expose her husband's infidelity. On the surface, the storyline subverts class hierarchies: the Count is supposed to be the head of the household, but it is his servants who actually run the place. While this plotline based on class is abundantly explicit, it may be that a second, even more subversive, one lurks beneath the surface: the exploration of an alternate femininity as embodied in the character of Cherubino.¹¹

The present thesis not only fleshes out this alternate narrative, it also addresses how this character's gender transgression might be seen as representing a message that lies at the core of the opera. Cherubino's role is one *en travesti*, or in disguise: the role is sung by a woman who is understood to be a male. This character, portrayed as an adolescent boy, rages with sexual love for the Countess and many women in the Almaviva castle. He represents perhaps the most notable of all travesti roles. But I believe him to be an entirely different character, and, as I am going to suggest in this thesis, not a "he" at all. As the opera sets a struggle between classes in the foreground, Cherubino floats about mindlessly for most of it, but the covert meaning puts him at the center of the drama. If Cherubino were actually a woman, he would represent a type of woman contrary to the heterosexual norms of the more overt narrative. Throughout this thesis, I maintain that Cherubino should be understood as a

¹¹ Throughout this thesis, I will use "sex" to denote masculine or feminine biological distinctions. "Gender" will denote behaviour while the term "sexuality" will express preference. By advocating for the possibility of Cherubino's femininity I am referring to Cherubino's female gender and how this might be demonstrated in the musical notation and text but also how this is created in performance. Cherubino's character, however, presents what I have suggested is an alternate form of femininity because this character challenges what is expected of femininity. This possible female gender is also accompanied by a sexuality that would be consistent with homosexuality.

woman, and that *Le nozze di Figaro* is intended to convey an alternate conception of femininity, all the while being masked by a less subversive plot.

This thesis will argue for Cherubino's feminine status by examining his place within the travesti tradition, his representation in the action and text of the drama as well as the musical score, and finally, how this can play out in actual performance. This thesis argues for a re-evaluation of the character of Cherubino but in understanding this character differently, we must, in turn, understand the opera in a new light. However, the character of Cherubino is not Mozart's, or even Da Ponte's, design: the figure of the pageboy was conceived by Pierre-Augustin Beaumarchais whose play, *Le mariage de Figaro*, serves as the basis for the opera. Despite the character's origins in the play, this thesis focuses on the operatic manifestation of Cherubino and the alternate conceptions of femininity that might be found in the operatic work. It is, nonetheless, essential to remember that the story of Figaro, and Cherubino's place in it, originate with Beaumarchais, and it is, therefore, difficult to speak to the nature of the character and overall theme of the opera without considering the play in which this character first appears. As a result, the influence I see inherent in Cherubino's character can be attributed to, not only Mozart and Da Ponte, but also Beaumarchais. This thesis will, therefore, argue for the character's alternative gender in both media, play and opera, but will ultimately speak to the operatic character and the revolution that the operatic instantiation embodies.

In the first chapter, I will explore alternate conceptions of femininity in *Le mariage* and *Le nozze*. If Beaumarchais, and subsequently Mozart and Da Ponte, were interested in representing new interpretations of women on stage, then it might be reasoning for why such depictions could have manifested themselves in relation to the character of Cherubino. By mapping out differences in treatment of this character in the play and opera, I will argue that

Le nozze uses the pageboy to deliver the message of alternate femininities. The chapter will end by situating Cherubino in relation to other operatic travesti characters at the same time challenging his place in this tradition altogether. In the second chapter, I will focus exclusively on the play and libretto. As Ralph P. Locke suggests, it is imperative to pay attention to crucial clues in the sung text and stage direction to determine the nature of an operatic character.¹² Indeed, an analysis of the text of both Da Ponte's libretto and Beaumarchais' play shows how distinctive words and dramatic elements might be seen as pointing to Cherubino's feminine status. To pay attention to these elements, I will focus on the text that Cherubino sings/speaks (as well as the text other characters use when they refer to Cherubino) and specific elements of the plot's action that would lead to our understanding of Cherubino's gender and sexuality. In the third chapter, I will shift the focus to the musical score. Following both David Lewin's method of analysis to decode character traits in *Le nozze di Figaro* characters¹³ as well as Charles Ford's method for seeing markers of femininity in the music,¹⁴ I will examine how melodic and harmonic style, rhythm, form, and instrumentation might serve to indicate Cherubino's gender. The fourth and final chapter will address the character of Cherubino in the context of performance to advocate that this medium is the only way a character's gender can actually be constructed and discerned. Regardless of what clues may or may not be inscribed within the score and libretto, it is ultimately a performance of the character that constitutes Cherubino's portrayal. I will compare different performances of *Le nozze* to assess how elements of performance, specifically mannerism, voice, and dress, aid in the creation of a distinct gender. In addition

¹² Ralph P. Locke, "What are these Women Doing in Opera?" in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, eds. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹³ David Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*

to my analysis of specific productions, I will relate the events of my own performance as Cherubino in the University of Ottawa's 2010 production of *Figaro*, for it was only as a result of my own performance that I began to see Cherubino in another light. In speaking of gender and sexuality, my analysis of Cherubino aims to advocate for a gender that is contrary to the one we currently associate with this character. This analysis is not aimed at deconstructing gender or engaging in the discussion of gender identity but rather assesses the various ways an operatic character's gender might be represented in the text of the libretto, musical score, and on stage. Although this thesis treats the representation of Cherubino's gender specifically, it also speaks to the role of musical performance, and the performer in particular, in the constitution of both musical meaning and character construction.

Chapter 1: Cherubino *en travesti*

This chapter examines the extent to which an alternate prototype of femininity resides in both Beaumarchais' *Le mariage de Figaro* and Mozart and Da Ponte's subsequent operatic adaptation *Le nozze di Figaro*. I will argue that both works portray a new type of woman and that this portrayal constitutes a covert narrative of sexual alterity that runs concurrently with the more overt critique of class systems. First, I will outline how the play and opera embody revolutionary representations of women. Then, I will explore how Cherubino might instantiate one such representation which playwright, librettist, and composer alike sought to realize. I will conclude by evaluating his role in the drama, first in relation to the other women, and then against the backdrop of the operatic travesti tradition.

I: *Le mariage de Figaro*

Cherubino is first encountered in Beaumarchais' *Le mariage de Figaro* (1784), the second of a trilogy of plays framed by *Le barbier de Séville* (1775) and *La mère coupable* (1792).¹⁵ Although most of the characters reappear in each play, it is only in *Le mariage* where Chérubin (the French equivalent of Cherubino) plays a prominent role. His character functions as a pageboy and, in addition to his role as a servant, Beaumarchais' *Figaro* clearly portrays other facets of the class system by the titles as well as positions he assigned to his other characters: Count, Countess, chamber-maid, valet. Not only does the playwright depict this hierarchy, he also illustrates its instability. Despite the assumed power of the Count, it is

¹⁵ These dates mark performance dates. *Le barbier* was written in 1773 but not performed until 1775. *Le mariage* was completed in 1778 but was not performed until 1784. *La mère coupable* was written and performed in 1792.

in fact his servants who show that they are in control. The Count is primarily threatened by two servants in particular: Figaro and his bride-to-be Suzanne. Jane Stedman speaks of these roles in *Le mariage* and explains that Beaumarchais contended that “in knowledge and character, the servant was often superior to the master.”¹⁶ Over the course of a day, the servants in *Le mariage* question the authority that governs them as they plan (and succeed) to put an end to the Count’s mistreatment of them, a plotline that did not go unnoticed by authorities. Stedman explains that because of this disturbance of class hierarchies, *Le mariage* was “so iconoclastic a play that even the proverbially dull Louis XVI personally prohibited its presentation.”¹⁷ In a similar vein, Daniel Hertz states that when Louis XVI finally allowed public performances in 1784, *Le mariage* created such a scandal that offended not only conservatives but also almost every faction in the spectrum of French politics.¹⁸ (This was partly due to the play’s reference to specific members of French society.)¹⁹ Because of this challenge to the current class system, Beaumarchais’ *Le mariage* is credited with being a catalyst for the French revolution: indeed, even Napoleon recognized its provocative nature, declaring it “la révolution déjà en action” (the revolution in action).²⁰

Wye Jamison Allanbrook sums up the central theme of the play with a passage from Figaro’s famous speech against social inequities, a political satire that, as she puts it, was

¹⁶ Jane W. Stedman, "Revolutionary Figaro," in *The Opera News Book of Figaro*, ed. Frank Merkling (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1967), 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 130.

¹⁹ Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*, 135; Andrew Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to Le Nozze Di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così Fan Tutte* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 112. Hunter explains that in addition to the overtly political content, *Le mariage* was also scandalous because the minor characters included barely disguised caricatures of current officials. Andrew Steptoe reveals specifically that Beaumarchais’ character of the judge, Don Guzman Brid’Oison, was a caricature of Councillor Gozman, Beaumarchais’ opponent in a notorious lawsuit.

²⁰ Quoted in Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 165.; Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*, 139.

“considered subversive enough to have been forbidden production for seven years after its composition.”²¹

Non, Monsieur le Comte, vous ne l’aurez pas...vous ne l’aurez pas. Parce que vous êtes un grand seigneur, vous vous croyez un grand génie! ... noblesse, fortune, un rang, des places: tout cela rend si fier! qu’avez-vous fait pour tant de biens? vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître, et rien de plus: du reste homme assez ordinaire! (*Le mariage de Figaro*, V, iii.)²²

No, Mister Count, you shall not have her— you will not have her! Just because you are a great lord, you think you are a genius! Nobility, fortune, rank, position—you are so proud of these things. What have you done to deserve so many rewards? You went to the trouble of being born, and nothing more: aside from that, you are just an ordinary man like the rest of us.²³

It is difficult not to hear in this antiestablishment speech the voice of Beaumarchais himself. Indeed, Hertz argues that Figaro was a thin disguise for the playwright.²⁴ And according to Stedman, Beaumarchais’ own pen name, “fils Caron (Caron’s son),” represents a slurred version of “Figaro.”²⁵ But whether this is Beaumarchais speaking through Figaro is beside the point for the speech clearly challenges the authority of the nobility and would seem to account for the play’s icy reception at least amongst the powers that were. But what if its political critique were a cover for another plotline, one which seemed to be indexed in the ways Beaumarchais coped with the initial reception of his play?

According to Hertz, critics charged Beaumarchais with writing a grossly immoral play, a charge which the playwright defended against by arguing that every major character had a moral lesson to teach the public. In response to the accusations, Beaumarchais “protested a little too much about the innocence of the Countess, particularly since he had

²¹Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 73.

²²Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage De Figaro*, ed. Gérard Kahn (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, Oxford University Press, 2002), 438.

²³Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *A Mad Day's Work, Or the Marriage of Figaro*, trans. Brobury Pearce Ellis (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 90.

²⁴Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 109.

²⁵Stedman, *Revolutionary Figaro*, 69.

already mentioned in the same preface his plans for a third play in the cycle, *Le mère coupable* (the guilty mother being the Countess, after she has had a child by Chérubin).²⁶ Hertz observes that in successive versions of *Le mariage*, Beaumarchais toned down some of the more suggestive passages pertaining to the Countess, so that in the final version she is merely ambiguous (in her interactions with the page). Perhaps seeing the scandal that the play elicited, Beaumarchais may have tamed down the sexual content of *Le mariage*. But, as Kristi Brown-Montesano argues, “such changes do not negate what was already in the playwright’s mind: the occasion when the chaste admiration of a thirteen-year-old boy and the sentimental affection of his godmother—still quite young herself—convert into erotic pleasure.”²⁷ While Brown-Montesano clearly sees the pageboy as male (and we can only assume that Hertz subscribes to this traditional understanding as well), the authors suggest that the changes Beaumarchais made point to matters of another kind that have nothing to do with politics. What could these matters be?

Other scholars argue that, as part of the critique of social hierarchy enacted by *Le mariage*, the play embodies new depictions of women. Christie McDonald, for instance, suggests that “Beaumarchais planned to reveal certain other issues as well, some of which seem today the most innovative and revolutionary of all: the ability of servants, mothers, and women in general, for example, to recast the events of their lives through a redistribution of roles within the family constellation.”²⁸ Beaumarchais does this by representing a sexual inequality throughout his trilogy (“a girl must obey her tutor, a wife and servant must obey

²⁶ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 112.

²⁷ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 164.

²⁸ Christie McDonald, “The Anxiety of Change: Reconfiguring Family Relations in Beaumarchais’s Trilogy,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (1994), 59.

the master of the house and only a woman may be punished for an illegitimate child”)²⁹ but works to combat these depictions in the end. In *Le mariage*, it is La Comtesse and Suzanne who illustrate the inequality in their required obedience to the Count, but it is Marceline whose speech in Act 3, Scene 16 voices this inequality most clearly and challenges it as well.

In this moment in the drama, a trial occurs. Figaro owes Marceline (housekeeper to Dr. Bartholo) money and has promised to marry her if he cannot repay the sum. However, in the process of the trial, Marceline is discovered to be Figaro’s mother. Her employer, Bartholo (the doctor and the Countess’ former ward who was first seen in the *Le barbier de Séville*) is also revealed to be his father. The marriage contract between Marceline and Figaro, that the Count has supported to keep Susanna from marrying Figaro, dissolves with this news. The stuttering judge, Don Gusman Brid’oison (enlisted to enforce the agreement), Figaro, Bartholo, Marceline, and the Count discuss the termination of this contract, but Marceline uses her dialogue to address the injustices that men inflict upon women.

BRID’OISON. C’est clair, i-il ne l’épousera pas.

BARTHOLO. Ni moi non plus.

MARCELINE. Ni vous! Et votre fils? vous m’aviez juré...

BARTHOLO. J’étais fou. Si pareils souvenirs engageaient, on serait tenu d’épouser tout le monde.

BRID’OISON. E-et si l’on y regardait de si près, per-ersonne n’épouserait personne.

BARTHOLO. Des fautes si connue! une jeunesse déplorable!

MARCELINE, *s’échauffant par degrés*. Oui, déplorable, et plus qu’on ne croit! je n’entends pas nier mes fautes, ce jour les a trop bien prouvées! mais qu’il est dur de les expier après trente ans d’une vie modeste! j’étais née, moi, pour être sage, et je la suis devenue sitôt qu’on m’a permis d’user de ma raison. Mais dans l’âge des illusions, de l’inexpérience et des besoins, où les séducteur nos assiégent, pendant que la misère nous poignarde, que peut opposer une enfant à tant d’ennemis rassemblés? Tel nous juge ici sévèrement, qui, peut-être, en sa vie a perdu dix infortunées.

FIGARO. Les plus coupables sont les moins généreux; c’est la règle.

MARCELINE, *vivement*. Hommes plus qu’ingrats, qui flétrissez par le mépris les jouets de vos passions, vos victimes! c’est vous qu’il faut punir des erreurs de notre jeunesse; vous et vos magistrats, si vains du droit de nous juger, et qui

²⁹ Ibid., 66.

nous laissent enlever, par leur coupable négligence, tout honnête moyen de subsister. Est-il un seul état pour les malheureuses filles? Elles avaient un droit naturel à toute la parure des femmes: on y laisse former mille ouvriers de l'autre sexe.

FIGARO, *en colère*. Ils font broder jusqu'aux soldats!

MARCELINE, *exaltée*. Dans les rangs mêmes plus élevés, les femmes n'obtiennent de vous qu'une considération dérisoire: leurées de respects apparens, dans un servitude réelle; traitées en mineures pour nos biens, punies en majeures pour nos fautes! ah! sous tous les aspects, votre conduite avec nous fait horreur ou pitié!

FIGARO. Elle a raison!

LE COMTE, *à part*. Que trop raison!

BRID'OISON. Elle a, mon-on Dieu, raison.³⁰

BRID'OISON. It's clear. He [Figaro] won't marry her [Marceline].

BARTHOLO. Nor I either

MARCELINE. Nor you? How about your son? You swore to me—

BARTHOLO. I was mad. If such ancient incidents as this constituted an engagement, a man would be held to marry everybody.

BRID'OISON. And if we were to look too closely into matters of this kind, no one would ever m-m-marry anybody.

BARTHOLO. These indiscretions so openly revealed! My deplorable youth!

MARCELINE, *growing heated by degrees*. Yes, deplorable—more than you think. I don't intend to deny my own faults; they have been shown here all too clearly. But how hard it is to have to atone for them after thirty years of a virtuous life! I was born to be well-behaved, and I became so as soon as I was allowed to follow my own instincts. But at an age when a girl is still full of illusions, inexperienced, and dependent, assailed by seducers and beset with trouble, how can he face such ranks of enemies? The men who judge us severely in these matters may have ruined ten unfortunate girls in their own lives.

FIGARO. The guilty are the least generous; that's the rule.

MARCELINE, *excitedly*. Men are worse than ungrateful when they brand their victims, the toys of their passions, with contempt. It's you who should be punished for the errors of our youth; you and your magistrates who pride themselves on their right to judge us, and who leave us by their own criminal negligence without any honest means of making a living. Is there only one occupation for unfortunate girls? They have a natural right to all the work of making women's clothes; instead, a thousand workers of the opposite sex are trained for it.

FIGARO, *angrily*. They even make the soldiers do embroidery.

MARCELINE. And even in the highest ranks of society, women never receive more than condescending attention from you. We're enticed by a pretence of respect into what is actually servitude; we're treated as children with regard to

³⁰ Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage De Figaro*, 396.

our property and punished as adults for our faults. In all these ways, your treatment of us is either horrible or pitiful.

FIGARO. She's right.

LE COMTE, *aside*. Only too right!

BRID'OISON. Heavens, how right!³¹

Here, Marceline challenges men's treatment of women and while her speech focuses on the inequality between the sexes instead of between social ranks, McDonald argues that the speech is as revolutionary as Figaro's: in Marceline's name, Beaumarchais establishes a new set of values for women.³² However ground-breaking, her speech was received quite differently than Figaro's. McDonald observes that the title character's speech gained celebrity but Marceline's was silenced: starting in 1785, Marceline's speech had been bracketed off in almost all editions and this omission continued well into the twentieth-century.³³ Beaumarchais, however, expressed regret at having to cut this particular passage at the request of the Comédie Française players: it was their opinion that "so severe a passage would cloud the gaiety of the action."³⁴ We must question if it was not the seriousness of the mood but the representation of a woman that spoke out against inequality and challenged gender roles that was so upsetting. Despite succumbing to the wishes of the actors, Brown-Montesano highlights that "in the published version, the playwright was so keen to establish the importance of Marceline's 'candid admission' about her unhappy past that he quoted the entire passage in his preface, urging the readers (and particularly critics) to study it."³⁵ These

³¹ Beaumarchais, *A Mad Day's Work, Or the Marriage of Figaro*, 67.

³² McDonald, *The Anxiety of Change: Reconfiguring Family Relations in Beaumarchais's Trilogy*, 67.

³³ *Ibid.*, 68. McDonald states: "Editions used by directors at the Comédie-Française show that throughout the eighteenth-century, and during the twentieth-century until 1956, Marceline's speech was never performed. In 1953, Jean Meyer invoked the same tradition. Jean Vilar's inclusion of the speech in 1956 at the Théâtre National Populaire marked a turning point, because it has been performed ever since."

³⁴ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 195.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

accounts suggest just how much it was notions of an alternate femininity as of notions that challenged traditional class structure that constituted the revolution embodied in the play.

This emphasis on a new femininity is not confined to *Le mariage* but also permeates the trilogy itself. As McDonald herself notes, *Le barbier* has “action based on changing roles and sexual identity, while in *La mère coupable*, Beaumarchais promotes the centrality of the woman’s story for all moral discourse.³⁶ Beaumarchais’ storylines show that he wanted to depict inequalities of women. In addition to being a social critic, therefore, Beaumarchais may also have been, as Hertz suggests, a feminist, perhaps even one of the first.³⁷ In his view, the playwright “condemns all vile seducers of women, and most especially the Count, who is the worst because of his very great temporal powers.”³⁸ McDonald also underlines Beaumarchais’ attempt to improve the condition of women by “sitting the discussion of marital relations in a context of individual human rights rather than of the priority of father.”³⁹ If Beaumarchais seems eager to provide social commentary through the voice of Figaro, contributing as it were to the overthrow of the aristocracy, as Stedman suggests,⁴⁰ is it not also possible that the playwright gave voice to his ideas through the female characters as well? And just as he envisioned a new social order free of class difference, could he not also have envisioned a new sexual order, complete with a new type of woman? Examining how Mozart and Da Ponte adapted Beaumarchais’ story for operatic purposes suggests that it was the composer and librettist themselves who take the idea to the next level.

³⁶ McDonald, *The Anxiety of Change: Reconfiguring Family Relations in Beaumarchais's Trilogy*, 61.

³⁷ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 112.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

³⁹ Richard Dellamora, "Mozart and the Politics of Intimacy: The Marriage of Figaro in Toronto, Paris and New York," in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, eds. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 256. In praise of McDonald’s *The Anxiety of Change*.

⁴⁰ Stedman, *Revolutionary Figaro*, 69.

II: *Le nozze di Figaro*

It was Mozart's idea to adapt Beaumarchais' play for the opera stage, and when he made the acquaintance of Lorenzo Da Ponte in 1783, that project began in earnest.⁴¹ Although the play was finally allowed performance in Paris in 1784, eight years after Beaumarchais penned it, it was still banned in Vienna when Da Ponte was granted permission to perform the operatic version in 1786.⁴² According to Janos Liebner, Da Ponte persuaded Emperor Joseph II to allow the performance of *Le nozze* by assuring him that the poison fangs of the original had been removed and that only the basic action was left in the libretto.⁴³ The Emperor may have acquiesced precisely because, in the words of one of the first commentators, "what may not be said can yet be sung."⁴⁴ (Hertz suggests that astute readers would have recognized this statement as a paraphrase of Figaro's line from *Le barbier*: "Aujourd'hui, ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chant.")⁴⁵ The commentary suggests that the political content of the play was still quite present in the opera, but Hunter maintains that, despite this original review, *Le nozze* is not in the narrow sense a political opera, "not a work that suggests the 'revolution in action' as Beaumarchais' play had been described."⁴⁶ *Le nozze* lacks this revolutionary quality for one reason: Figaro's speech, which Allanbrook deems so central to the play, is nowhere to be found in the libretto. She writes: "it is a commonplace today to discover that Beaumarchais' sharp social criticism is present in Mozart's opera but closely

⁴¹ Janos Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), 138.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁴ Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*, 138.

⁴⁵ Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Le Barbier De Séville*, ed. Jacques Scherer (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 50.; Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 109. Hertz explains that the reviewer transformed "what is not worth being said" into "what is not allowed to be spoken:" "Was in unseren Zeiten nicht erlaubt ist gesagt zu werden, wird gesungen."

⁴⁶ Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*, 139.

veiled because of the authors' political timidity."⁴⁷ Conversely, Andrew Steptoe argues that "Da Ponte's motive was not political timidity but theatrical pragmatism," explaining that the speech was removed because it was "tangential to the central comedy."⁴⁸ I would suggest that what is "central" to the opera is not the comedy at all and, as such, the arguably diluted representation of social criticism was not an act of timidity on Mozart or Da Ponte's part but an act of revolution just as strong, or even stronger than Beaumarchais's. For the omission of Figaro's speech allows the opera to be taken not as a critique of an entrenched class system, but as a proposal for something more subversive. Without the overt political references, the opera can be about something else entirely. This may be exactly what Da Ponte meant when he noted that their main aim in *Le nozze* was "to present a virtually new kind of play to the stage."⁴⁹

Liebner speaks of the changes made by Mozart and Da Ponte that transformed Beaumarchais' play into, arguably, a far less revolutionary model. He explains that "what Mozart and Da Ponte lost by leaving out the topical political allusions, they made up by placing the dramaturgical emphasis on the social message."⁵⁰ Singer is one author that sees this message as involving sexuality. He believes that *Le nozze* may have been equally subversive by having the action "consist in the democratization of the sensuous."⁵¹ Singer explains that the aristocracy had a sporting attitude towards sex and while that attitude formerly belonged to them alone, it now belonged to the rest of society as well.⁵² (This is seen in *Le nozze* with Figaro and Susanna as they "play the [sexual] game as well as the

⁴⁷ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 74.

⁴⁸ Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to Le Nozze Di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così Fan Tutte*, 113.

⁴⁹ Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage*, 98.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹ Singer, *Mozart and Beethoven: The Concept of Love in their Operas*, 77.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 77.

Count, although their main goal is matrimony and not promiscuity.”⁵³ While Singer’s analysis draws no attention to Cherubino, he nevertheless brings the latent sexuality of *Le nozze* to the fore. Frits Noske, on the other hand, argues that *Le nozze* contains no message: “it does not propagate reform of the social order, let alone a revolution [...] everyone who uses his eyes and ears must admit that Mozart registers the social climate, without taking sides.”⁵⁴ Brigid Brophy critiques Noske’s opinion, confessing in return “that my eyes and ears do not permit me to apprehend ‘Figaro’ except as a work of the Enlightenment and a work that poses a very typical Enlightenment question of social-sexual morality, which it answers by demonstration.”⁵⁵ It seems as if Brophy has honed in on the meaning that I maintain this opera exemplifies, but her vision of sexuality in *Le nozze* is limited to the depiction of *le droit du seigneur* and the right of sexual love of servants. As such, Noske, and Brophy perhaps as well, have closed their eyes to an alternate sexual revolution embodied in *Le nozze*.

Even if Mozart’s opera did not openly challenge social hierarchy as directly as Beaumarchais’ play, that does not mean that his adaptation was not without social critique. In fact, *Le nozze* takes the idea of alternate femininities further. We would assume that because Beaumarchais’ Marceline questioned the role of women, that her operatic equivalent would do just the same. Perhaps we could also assume that her operatic character would do so even more directly if this work is, as I suggest, more strongly representative of alternative femininities. However, in the operatic adaptation, the trial scene (the scene that brings Figaro to court either to pay or marry Marceline) is effectively cut and with that, the allusions made by Marceline. Therefore, the operatic Marcellina does not represent the inequalities between

⁵³ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁴ Frits Noske, "Social Tensions in "Le Nozze Di Figaro"," *Music & Letters* 50, no. 1 (1969), 61.

⁵⁵ Brigid Brophy, "'Figaro' and the Limitations of Music," *Music & Letters* 51, no. 1 (1970), 27.

the sexes as strongly as her counterpart in the play, or even at all. Brown-Montesano points out that Da Ponte reduced this speech “to a relatively short passage of recitative [...] and concentrated instead on Marcellina’s recognition of Figaro as her son.”⁵⁶ After this recitative, Mozart and Da Ponte inserted the aria “Il capro e la capretta” that (at least according to Brown-Montesano) “lacks the truculent force of Marceline’s censure of men’s abuse and hypocrisy, but still communicates the basic message in a style that is consistent with the opera’s light treatment of the character.”⁵⁷

Il capro e la capretta
son sempre in amistà,
l'agnello all'agnelletta
la guerra mai non fa.
Le più feroci belve
per selve e per campagne
lascian le lor compagne
in pace e libertà.
Sol noi povere femmine
che tanto amiam questi uomini,
trattate siam dai perfidi
ognor con crudeltà!

The billy-goat and the she-goat
Are always friends,
The male lamb and the female lamb
Never make war on each other.
The most ferocious wild animal
in the woods and in the country
Leaves their companions
in peace and freedom.
Only we poor women
That love so much these men,
Must deal always with cruelty from the
treacherous ones!⁵⁸

The voicing of inequality that Marceline utters in the play is virtually non-existent in the operatic adaptation. Brown-Montesano points out that Marcellina’s aria has even been dismissed as a formal banality, fulfilling the obligation of eighteenth-century opera to give every significant character at least one aria.⁵⁹ By omitting Marceline’s speech, it would seem that Mozart and Da Ponte abandoned this important theme of femininity and could in turn, make us wonder if *Le nozze* puts into question the roles of the sexes at all. However, instead

⁵⁶ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 197.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁸ Robert Glaubitz, "The Aria Database," Glaubitz, Robert, www.aria-database.com (accessed 07, 11, 2012).

⁵⁹ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 206.

of voicing these ideas through Marcellina, Mozart and Da Ponte, perhaps, chose Cherubino to embody the theme at the core of the work. Both the play and opera challenge norms by developing a travesti role that disrupts gender distinctions and sexual norms. In the absence of overt political commentary, the opera can be regarded to express these new conceptions of femininity, and it is Cherubino who can be understood to be the sole figure at the forefront of this sexual revolution.

III: The travesti tradition

Mozart and Da Ponte's depiction of women in *Le nozze* differs slightly from representations by Beaumarchais, and their treatment of Cherubino is different as well. Both Beaumarchais' setting of this character and Mozart's subsequent treatment, however, could have us believe that Cherubino may have been meant to be female in disguise. In the preface to *Le mariage*, Beaumarchais stipulates that the pageboy Chérubin must be played by a woman, and, as Richard Dellamora acknowledges, Mozart follows Beaumarchais' instruction by having the operatic role sung by a woman, either soprano or mezzo soprano.⁶⁰ While both playwright and composer make the gender of the performer explicit, several commentators insist that the casting decision has little to do with gender. Martial Singher, for instance, argues that "there is a definite reason for Cherubino to be a 'pants role' for a woman [...] a heavy voice of dark character would not make sense."⁶¹ Margaret Reynolds also reminds us that, in the case of travesti characters, the gender of the actor is irrelevant, and one must, therefore, select the body that holds the desired voice. She writes: "In Handel's day there was sexual anarchy on

⁶⁰ Dellamora, *Mozart and the Politics of Intimacy: The Marriage of Figaro in Toronto, Paris and New York*, 261.

⁶¹ Martial Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 152.

stage. Men (or ex-men) played the parts of heroes in high voices. Women, dressed up as men, sang heroes in high voices. Men, dressed up as women, played their consorts with high or low voices. And if you couldn't hire the singer of the sex required, you settled for the voice and didn't worry."⁶² However, one must question how this reasoning would apply to the theatrical version as well as the operatic adaptation: why would the voice matter for Beaumarchais as he would not have known of his plays' operatic spinoff before creating the character of the pageboy? Without the requirement of vocal quality, why would he then cast the role for a woman? For theatre perhaps, it was not a matter of voice but of look. In his notes on characters and dress, Beaumarchais explains his choice in casting Chérubin as a woman: "Ce rôle ne peut être joué, comme il l'a été, que par une jeune et très-jolie femme; nous n'avons point à nos théâtres de très-jeune homme assez formé pour en bien sentir les finesses"⁶³ (The role should be played as it were only by a young and very pretty girl; we have no very young men on our stage sufficiently trained to respond to its subtleties).⁶⁴ Although Beaumarchais himself provides reasons for casting a female in a male role in no way precludes the possibility that the role might have perhaps been conceived by the playwright as a woman from the start. Why else would he specify the beauty of the performer, a seemingly feminine association? Similarly, while he upholds that a boy could not understand the subtleties of the character, one could conclude that the subtleties of the character are not boyish, or masculine, at all.

Understanding Cherubino fully would seem to require assessing his place in the broader travesti tradition. According to Naomi André, the travesti role initially arose in

⁶² Margaret Reynolds, "Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions," in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, eds. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 138.

⁶³ Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage De Figaro*, 269.

⁶⁴ Beaumarchais, *A Mad Day's Work, Or the Marriage of Figaro*, 3.

response to the decline of the castrato. As such, women took over the heroic male characters normally given to castrati.⁶⁵ But when these roles were gradually given over to tenors, the travesti role reduced, as Reynolds suggests, to innocent young boys (Romeo, Enrico, Smeaton, Malcolm, Hansel), gentle and poetic pastorale characters (Pieretto, Siebel, Pippo, Andreloun) childish pages (Isolier, Urbain, Tebaldo, Oscar), or supernatural figures (Puck, the Heavenly Voice in Verdi's *Don Carlos*, the Voice of the Falcon in Strauss' *Die Frau ohne Schatten*).⁶⁶ As a result, "women's voices gradually lost access to their former characterization as men with power."⁶⁷ This loss may be precisely why Catherine Clément sees the travesti role as embodying another example of the undoing of women. For just as she measures that undoing through domestication or death, so too does she take pageboys as manifesting "voices of weakness" even though they might be wearing pants.⁶⁸

But this reading is not without inherent problems. Although Clément brings strong evidence for the undoing of women to the table—most female characters in serious opera are based on one of a small number of stereotypes of womanly behaviour (e.g. passive innocent, death, lost love, misery)—she has failed, as Locke argues, to account for comic opera,⁶⁹ and, in Hunter's view, to take note of especially the role of women in Mozart's operas.⁷⁰ And, while Clément maintains the weakness of female characters, she wrongly attributed this weakness to the pageboy of *Le nozze*. As a result, she has not accounted for the potentially positive effect inherent in either the travesti tradition or Cherubino himself. In other words,

⁶⁵ Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 103.

⁶⁶ Reynolds, *Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions*, 141.

⁶⁷ André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*, 103.

⁶⁸ Catherine Clément, "Through Voices, History," in *Siren Songs: Representation of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 25.

⁶⁹ Locke, *What are these Women Doing in Opera?*, 61.

⁷⁰ Allanbrook, Hunter and Wheelock, *Staging Mozart's Women*, 48.

Clément herself undoes women by failing to ask, as Heather Hadlock does, what it might mean that it is the cross-dressed soprano who “tends to survive the prescribed fate of heroines?”⁷¹ Indeed, Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith answer this question when they see the travesti role as embodying a type of character who challenges the limits normally defining female identity on stage.⁷² They write: “because the voice, in opera, transcends both sex and gender, the woman *en travesti* sings as and looks like, in theory at least, a man, but sounds like—and, we all know, is—a woman.”⁷³ And this step potentially turns Cherubino from a weak-voiced pageboy into something else entirely. It turns him perhaps into an archetype for an alternative femininity.

Scholars and commentators have tended to disregard this possibility, looking instead at Cherubino in relation to Mozartian men. Brophy (following Søren Kirkegaard) describes Cherubino as Don Giovanni in his youth. She notes, however, that he might in fact be a miniature of another Mozartian man, Count Almaviva himself.⁷⁴ These readings are suggestive but they are problematic because Cherubino (as we will see in the next chapter) is so much unlike other men that he might not be a man at all. And trying to make sense of him in relation to other travesti characters is just as problematic. Cherubino is a distinct character when compared to Mozartian women, of course, but he is also distinct in the travesti tradition as well. Currently, Cherubino stands out as one of the most memorable travesti characters, but his value and role in this tradition has not yet been fully recognized and not yet properly understood either. I have already quoted André’s explanation of the travesti tradition as she

⁷¹ Heather Hadlock, “The Career of Cherubino, Or the Trouser Role Grows Up,” in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69.

⁷² Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, eds., *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 5.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁴ Brigid Brophy, *Mozart the Dramatist: The Value of His Operas to Him, to His Age and to Us* (London: Libris, 1988), 105.

attributes its beginning to the decline of the castrato tradition, a decline prompting women to take over the roles written for castrati. However, there is an important distinction to be made between Cherubino and most of the travesti characters preceding him: Cherubino's role was not written for a castrato but was specifically written to be played by a woman. Cherubino is, in fact, one of the first travesti characters to be written for a woman. (The first seems to be Sesto in Handel's *Giulio Cesare* of 1724.⁷⁵ See appendix a.) Of course this is harder to make sense of now. With no castrati available to sing the roles specified for this voice type, these roles are now performed by women and Cherubino simply seems like one among many travesti characters instead of one of the first. When seen in this light, Cherubino is far more unique and provokes the question of whether he belongs in the travesti tradition at all.

Both Beaumarchais and Mozart insisted upon a woman for this iconic figure and one cannot help but ask why a woman would be cast if she was supposed to convey something other than femininity? However, many critics do not explore this line of questioning. Hadlock interprets Beaumarchais' implicit direction as a reason for why Cherubino has no sex at all.⁷⁶ Similarly, Allanbrook makes Cherubino neither male nor female asserting that Cherubino *en travesti* keeps him from being particularized.⁷⁷ Reynolds, however, argues for Cherubino's uniqueness when she suggests that "Cherubino was not one of the old-fashioned, haphazard, largely innocent travesti roles where the voice was what mattered and the body beneath was irrelevant. Far from it [...] this time, perhaps for the first time, this [character] was explicitly about sex."⁷⁸ And not the sex that is expressed by the male pageboy who yearns for the Countess, but one that is, perhaps, entirely lesbian. Reynolds

⁷⁵ Reynolds, *Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions*, 134.

⁷⁶ Hadlock, *The Career of Cherubino, Or the Trouser Role Grows Up*, 70.

⁷⁷ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 96.

⁷⁸ Reynolds, *Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions*, 140.

remarks that whatever the *dramatis personae* might say, “Cherubino is a girl in disguise and the audience is never allowed to forget that.”⁷⁹ When we come to accept this possibility, Cherubino ceases to be an example of a travesti role in which a woman sings the role of a man, but a disguise role where a woman sings the part of a woman who, “governed by the exigencies of the plot, appears dressed in the disguise of a man.”⁸⁰ While Reynolds seems to have the view, as I do, that Cherubino is a woman, her argument involves Cherubino’s presence in performance: he is, as Reynolds states, the last role to “offer the trompe l’oeil of sex and other sex.”⁸¹ As such, it seems as if Reynolds’ analysis focuses on Cherubino’s femininity with regard to the audience’s perception of the character’s gender (I, too, will discuss this aspect in chapter 4). Her analysis, however, may find its footing here as well. If Cherubino can be seen as part of an entirely different tradition than the one to which he currently belongs, then perhaps he was conceived this way too. Currently, we understand that Cherubino was created as a travesti character and so we accept that he is a boy despite the female casting. But the female casting may be a clue to this character’s essence, with his portrayal as a boy acting as a disguise and, therefore, simply a means of concealing the character’s feminine identity. Despite traditional understanding, the reality might be that Cherubino is a woman and has been one all along. With this interpretation, this character takes on a much more prominent role in the opera as it is he, or rather, she that depicts the counter-storyline of the work, that of alternate femininities. Cherubino’s appearance in drag, therefore, has a specific function: if Cherubino is a woman and, therefore, a lesbian, it is understandable why Mozart and Da Ponte would have this meaning be covert, disguised underneath male clothing. However, the function of disguise may also carry with it broader

⁷⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 134.

⁸¹ Ibid., 141.

implications of gender. Along with the purpose of disguise, dressing in drag could also be a way of life for this female character, as a way of stepping outside normative gender roles and depicting a completely new type of woman, not only in her sexuality but in her identity as well. Marjorie Garber speaks of transvestism in general saying that the cross-dressed figure puts the traditional binary constructions of gender into crisis.⁸² Sam Abel, too, speaks of transvestism but confines his analysis to cross-dressing in opera. He maintains that female-to-male cross-dressing always poses a threat: “women dressed as men violate male hegemony by attempting to reject their secondary social role and to assume male power or, more powerfully, to reject the whole concept of binary gender division.”⁸³ We could insinuate that Beaumarchais might have put Cherubino specifically in drag because he wanted the character not only to conceal the meaning of an alternate conception of feminine sexuality but perhaps intentionally, to question and, more specifically, reject the concept of normative gender. By examining Beaumarchais’ play and Mozart’s opera, one can see that both works present illustrations of femininity that counter traditional depictions. This knowledge facilitates the understanding that Cherubino could be a new female archetype, fitting (and most certainly expanding upon) the template of femininity that Beaumarchais, Da Ponte, and Mozart sought to express. With a female pageboy, both works challenge more than class hierarchies but challenge gendered norms and, while the page does not question this explicitly, in the play or opera, Cherubino’s presence on stage is confirmation enough, making *Le nozze* a completely different type of work than a political critique.

⁸² Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁸³ Sam Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), 151.

Chapter 2: Cherubino in the Libretto

In this chapter, I will examine elements of the libretto that provide clues to understanding Cherubino. Following Clément, who focuses exclusively on the words of opera, I will assess the extent to which Cherubino's putative gender can be represented in just the words. I will discuss distinct choices in language in both Beaumarchais' play and Da Ponte's libretto, as well as specific elements of the action, all to explore that possibility that Cherubino's femininity might be embedded in the texts of the dramas themselves. As a literary critic, Clément herself acknowledged that she was going to "commit the sacrilege of listening to the words, reading the libretto, following the twisted, tangled plots," determined to "pay attention to the language, the forgotten part of opera."⁸⁴ In this chapter, I will do just that, but, instead of arguing for the subjugation of women as reflected by the text, which is Clément's primary objective, my analysis aims to show how language itself might suggest a feminine Cherubino. Doing so will suggest that he is far from "undone," but a pioneer in the depiction of an entirely new type of gendered subjectivity. I will begin with the character of Susanna in order to establish a starting point for unequivocal feminine textuality. Then I will proceed to discuss the text of Cherubino's two arias, "Non so più" and "Voi che sapete," as well as the corresponding dialogue in the play. This analysis will then move past the text Cherubino speaks and sings to cover the language other characters use in reference to the pageboy. Finally, I will consider how other dramatic elements, such as this character's depiction in disguise and his connection with specific dramatic objects, favour a feminine reading of the character.

⁸⁴ Catherine Clément, *Opera, Or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 12.

I: A Paradigm for Feminine Textuality

To show how femininity might be textually represented in *Le nozze*, I will focus entirely on Susanna, particularly the text of her aria “Deh vieni non tardar,” and the nature themes surrounding it. This latter point is more than just incidental. According to Charles Ford, women in Enlightenment theory were often “thought to be at one with, to dwell amidst, nature, and, just as this nature had been disenchanted by empirical analysis, so too was femininity deprived of all immanent, or subjective properties.”⁸⁵ He clarifies that the “vulnerability of feminine consciousness [was a result of this] relationship with nature.”⁸⁶ Such a relationship can be found in both the play and opera. At the beginning of Act 5 of *Le mariage*, for instance, Beaumarchais asks for the following setting: “Le théâtre représente une salle de marronniers, dans un parc; deux pavillons, kiosques, ou temples de jardins, sont à droite et à gauche”⁸⁷ (An open space among the chestnut trees, in a park. Two pavilions, summer houses, or garden temples, at right and left).⁸⁸ In the fourth scene of this final act, the Count expects Suzanne to meet him in the garden at night. Suzanne and the Countess, however, have plotted to switch places with each other to expose the Count’s infidelity. Although it has been a plan to confuse the Count throughout the drama, Figaro has been put off course himself as he becomes distrustful of his fiancée, thinking that Suzanne is willingly meeting the Count. As a result, Figaro decides to hide, determined to catch Suzanne with her suitor. The two women enter but know that Figaro is watching, and, when the Countess gets a chill from the night air, Suzanne asks if she is permitted to stay: “Si Madame n’avait pas

⁸⁵ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 137.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸⁷ Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage De Figaro*. All future transcriptions of the play will be from this source, a critical edition of Beaumarchais’ *Le mariage de Figaro*, edited by Gérard Kahn.

⁸⁸ Beaumarchais, *A Mad Day's Work, Or the Marriage of Figaro*. Unless otherwise indicated, all further translations of spoken play will be from this source, Brobury Pearce Ellis’ translation of Beaumarchais’ *Le mariage de Figaro*.

besoin de moi, je prendrais l'air un moment sous ces arbres" (If you do not need me, I'll take the air for a moment under these trees). From Figaro's perspective, Suzanne is trying to get rid of the Countess so that she can meet secretly with the Count. Not only does all this action take place outdoors, it is noteworthy that Suzanne thinks to linger amidst nature even longer. Not surprisingly, it is also in this setting that she will express her (feigned) love for the Count, as well as her (true) love for Figaro. This aspect of the play makes its way into Da Ponte's adaptation: "Io sotto queste piante (se madam il permette), resto a prendere il fresco una mezz'ora" (If Madam permits I shall remain under the pine tress to take some fresh air for half an hour).⁸⁹ In *Le nozze*, however, Susanna's dialogue expands into the aria "Deh vieni." As Ford notes, Susanna's sensuous, feminine integration with the charms of nature is clearly the subject of this aria.⁹⁰ Following Beaumarchais' setting, Da Ponte sets the final act, and this aria, outdoors. Speaking of Da Ponte's Susanna directly, Ford maintains that "the image of the nubile young woman, basking in her own sexuality amidst a beneficent, landscaped and pavilioned nature, is a reworking of the Rococo's central aesthetic obsession into a far more modern conception of the feminine role."⁹¹ This putative association of the feminine with nature is not only seen in the setting of the aria but also in its text.

O come par che all'amoroso foco
L'amenita del loco,
La terra e il ciel risponda.

Come la notte i furti miei risponda

Deh vieni, non tardar, o gioja bella
Vieni ove amore per goder t'appella

Oh, how it seems that to amouros fires
The comfort of the place,
Earth and heaven respond,
[Oh, it seems that earth, heaven, and this
place answer my heart's amouros fire.]
As the night responds to my ruses.

Oh, come, don't be late, my beautiful joy
Come where love calls you to enjoyment

⁸⁹ Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, trans. Marie-Thérèse Paquin (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1983), 200. Unless otherwise indicated, all further translations of the libretto will be from this source.

⁹⁰ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 167.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Finche non splende in ciel notturna face	Until night's torches no longer shine in the sky
Finche l'aria e ancor bruna,	As long as the air is still dark
E il mondo tace.	And the world quiet.
Qui mormora il ruscel, qui scherza l'aura	Here the river murmurs and the light plays
Che col dolce susurro il cor ristaura	That restores the heart with sweet ripples
Qui ridono i fioretti e l'erba e fresca	Here, little flowers laugh and the grass is fresh
Ai piaceri d'amor qui tutto adescia.	Here, everything entices one to love's pleasures
Vieni, ben mio, tra queste piante ascose.	Come, my dear, among these hidden plants.
Vieni, vieni!	Come, come!
Ti vo' la fronte incoronar di rose.	I want to crown you with roses. ⁹²

It is clear that Susanna not only dwells amidst nature for her final aria but also uses this element to evoke her sensuality and desire. As such, the imagery of nature becomes expressive of femininity.

II: “Non so più” and “Voi che sapete”

If the use of natural imagery in association with Susanna is a marker of femininity, then it is suggestive that the use of this textual device also occurs in the words uttered by the pageboy.

Chérubin’s short monologue in Act 1 of *Le mariage*, while it is not set outdoors as is

Suzanne’s dialogue mentioned above, nevertheless makes use of precisely the same images:

Je ne sais plus ce que je suis; mais depuis quelque temps je sens ma poitrine agitée; mon coeur palpite au seul aspect d’une femme; les mots *amour* et *volupté* le font tressaillir et le troublent. Enfin le besoin de dire à quelqu’un *je vous aime*, est devenu pour moi si pressant, que je le dis tout seul, en courant dans le parc, à ta maîtress, à toi, aux arbres, aux nuages, au vent qui les emporte avec mes paroles perdues.

⁹² Naomi Gurt Lind, "The Aria-Database," Glaubitz, Robert, www.aria-database.com (accessed 07, 17, 2012).

I hardly know myself any more. Nowadays I feel a stirring in my chest, and my heart pounds just at the sight of a woman. The words love and delight get me all upset. In short, I need to say “I love you” to someone so much that I say it when I’m alone, walking through the park, to your mistress, to you to the tress, to the clouds and to the wind that carries them off with my lost words. (Act 1, scene 6)

Similar references to nature run through the operatic counterpart, Cherubino’s first aria “Non so più.”

Parlo d'amore vegliando,	I speak of love while awake,
Parlo d'amor sognando,	I speak of love while dreaming,
All'acqua, all'ombra, ai monti,	To the water, the shade, the hills,
Ai fiori, all'erbe, ai fonti,	The flowers, the grass, the fountains,
All'eco, all'aria, ai venti,	The echo, the air, and the winds
Che il suon de'vani accenti	Which carry away with them
Portano via con se.	The sound of my vain words. ⁹³

Again, Cherubino is not outdoors but uses imagery of nature to convey his emotional state.

While both Beaumarchais and Da Ponte’s pageboy references nature, it is clear that Da Ponte develops this idea much further. Beaumarchais’ text refers only to trees, clouds, and wind, but Da Ponte’s libretto develops this idea to the point that the reference takes up nearly the whole stanza. And this stanza is presented twice in the aria. While Beaumarchais referred to nature only subtly, it seems as if Da Ponte wished to be more explicit about this matter, and if nature themes can in fact express femininity, Da Ponte’s Cherubino illustrates this most clearly.

To be sure, there are alternate interpretations of Cherubino’s nature-filled text that could counter the proposed feminine reading. Allanbrook claims that “the pastoral diction and musette of ‘Non so più’ place Cherubino squarely in the Arcadian tradition; as Eros he presides over the couples in the opera—the indigenous deity of pastoral love.”⁹⁴ Although

⁹³ Jane Bishop, "The Aria Database," Glaubitz, Robert, www.aria-database.com (accessed 07, 17, 2012).

⁹⁴ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 96.

Allanbrook does not use this comparison to speculate about Cherubino's gender, her analysis might explain why Cherubino's aria contains pastoral images. Despite this alternative reading, Ford makes it clear that femininity is to be identified with the absolute otherness of nature as opposed to the supposedly human and masculine autonomy of consciousness.⁹⁵

However, the association of femininity with nature extends far past Ford's analysis.

According to Nancy Hartsock, femininity has been linked to nature as far back as ancient Greece. She claims that *The Oresteia*, a trilogy of tragedies written by Greek playwright Aeschylus in 450 BC, associates the female gender with both nature, a force that must be tamed, and sexuality itself, as another facet of femininity to be controlled.⁹⁶

There is no question that overt sexuality, and specifically sexual desire, is what the pageboy is all about. In "Non so più," not only is Cherubino overcome by these new emotions but references desire specifically (*un desio*) and repeats this word four times in the aria.

Non so piu cosa son, cosa faccio,	I don't know any more what I am, what I'm doing,
Or di foco, ora sono di ghiaccio,	Now I'm fire, now I'm ice,
Ogni donna cangiar di colore,	Any woman makes me change color,
Ogni donna mi fa palpitar.	Any woman makes me quiver.
Solo ai nomi d'amor, di diletto,	At just the names of love, of pleasure,
Mi si turba, mi s'altera il petto,	My breast is stirred up and changed,
E a parlare mi sforza d'amore	And a desire I can't explain

⁹⁵ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 136.

⁹⁶ Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983), 192.; Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 12.; McDonald, *The Anxiety of Change: Reconfiguring Family Relations in Beaumarchais's Trilogy*, 77. Sue-Ellen Case notes that many feminist critics and historians have analyzed *The Oresteia* as a text central to the formalisation of misogyny: "Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett characterise the trilogy as the mythical rendering of a patriarchal takeover." McDonald acknowledges that Beaumarchais' *Le barbier*, *Le mariage* and *La mère coupable* represent an Aeschylean trilogy themselves with regard to the theme of feminine inequality that runs throughout the three plays (as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis). Additionally, McDonald speaks of the 1990 performance of *La mère coupable* by the Comédie-Française, the first performance since 1850, where the director remarked at "its ability to bring the great themes of *The Oresteia* to life."

Un desio ch'io non posso spiegar. Forces me to speak of love.⁹⁷

Similarly, sexual desire is the theme of Cherubino's love song to the Countess. It is suggestive to compare Beaumarchais' Chérubin, who speaks of his desire in subtle terms, with Da Ponte's adaptation, in which Cherubino is more explicit.

Mon coursier hors d'haleine,
(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de
peine!)
J'errais de plaine en plaine
Au gré du destrier.

Au gré du destrier,
Sans varlet, n'écuyer;
Là, près d'une fontaine,
(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de
peine!
Songeant à ma marraine,
Sentais mes pleurs couler.

Sentais mes pleurs couler,
Prêt à me désoler;
Je gravais sur un frêne,
(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de
peine!)
Sa letters sans la mienne,

...

J'avais une marraine
Que toujours adorai.

Que toujours adorai;
Je sens que j'en mourrai.

...

(Que mon coeur, mon coeur a de
peine!)

My charger loose on the rein,
(Oh, my heart, my heart full of pain!)
I wandered over the plain
Wherever the steed did stray

Wherever the steed did stray;
My squire was far away.
Where a fountain fell in rain
(Oh, my heart, my heart full of pain!)

My godmother filled my brain;
I found myself in tears.

I found myself in tears,
Desolate all my years.
On a tree I carved amain
(Oh, my heart, my heart full of pain!)

The letters of her name.

...

My godmother all in vain
I always have adored.

I always have adored;
I'll die now on my sword."

...

(Oh, my heart, my heart full of pain!)

⁹⁷ Bishop, *The Aria Database*.

Mourir de cette peine;
Mais n'on m'en consoler

And rather die of pain
Than ever be consoled

However much the French song reflects the character's longing, it is really Da Ponte's operatic adaptation that highlights Cherubino's sexual desire.

<p>Voi, che sapete, che cosa e amor Donne, vedete s'io l'ho nel cor Quello ch'io provo vi ridiro E per me nuove, capir nol so Sento un affetto, pien di desir Ch'ora e diletto ch'ora e martir Gelo e poi sento l'alma avvampar, E in un momento torno a gelar. Ricerco un bene fuori di me, Non so ch'il tiene, non so cos'e. Sospiro e gemo senza voler, Palpito e tremo senza saper Non trovo pace notte ne di, Ma pur mi piace languir cosi.</p>	<p>You who know what love is, Ladies, see if I have it in my heart. I'll tell you what I'm feeling, It's new for me and I understand nothing. I have a feeling, full of desire, Which is by turn delightful and miserable. I freeze and then feel my soul go up in flames, Then in a moment I turn to ice. I'm searching for affection outside of myself, I don't know how to hold it, nor even what it is! I sigh and lament without wanting to, I twitter and tremble without knowing why, I find peace neither night nor day, But still I rather enjoy languishing this way.⁹⁸</p>
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To be sure, Cherubino's second aria "Voi che sapete" is not set outdoors nor does it refer to nature. But the text can be seen as evoking femininity in how it represents desire, which, according to Ford, is arguably characteristic of femininity in Enlightenment theory.⁹⁹ By bringing our attention to Mozart's characterization of female sexuality, Ford reminds us of the duet in *Così fan tutte* (no. 20 "Prenderò quel brunettino") in which "Dorabella's opening words burst forth with the impassioned overflowing of a secret, repressed desire."¹⁰⁰ It is clear that Cherubino's "Non so più" certainly bursts forth with emotion as well, and, although Cherubino's second aria "Voi che sapete" represents a less lively expression, the text evokes both sexuality and sexual desire, both of which, in turn, can be understood as indexing the feminine. Not only is passion certainly evoked in this aria but the text of "Voi

⁹⁸ Gurt Lind, *The Aria-Database*.

⁹⁹ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 130.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

che sapete” itself makes such desire explicit: “Sento un affetto, pien di desir” (I have a feeling, full of desire).¹⁰¹

Ford points to other Mozart women express themselves similarly. The sisters in *Così*, for instance, always concentrate on their own sexual fantasies,¹⁰² and in “Soave sia il vento” specifically, we “are thrown into a musical world, not so much of loss and of parting—the beginning of emptiness— but of a dwelling amidst the consummate plenitude of feminine desire.”¹⁰³ And Elvira from *Giovanni* is another such example of the “lovesick woman, who, abandoned by the strong arm of male reason either lapse into the morbid contemplation of death or enter a convent.”¹⁰⁴ Although Cherubino is not abandoned by any man, nor is tempted with the relief of death, he is, like these women, clearly complacent in his suffering: “Non trovo pace notte ne di, ma pur mi piace languir così” (I find peace neither night nor day, but still I rather enjoy languishing this way).¹⁰⁵ And really who is more love sick in *Figaro* than Cherubino?

III: Textual References to Cherubino

Putative markers of femininity are not confined to just the lines Cherubino speaks and sings. They can also be found in the words the other characters use when they refer to him. This section will chronologically address the instances in the drama where the words of the libretto, or text of the original play, potentially highlight Cherubino’s femininity. After “Non so più,” the Count enters Susanna’s bedroom and Cherubino is forced to hide. The Count expresses his intentions to Susanna, and we assume that the hidden Cherubino is the only one

¹⁰¹ Gurt Lind, *The Aria-Database*.

¹⁰² Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 148.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ Gurt Lind, *The Aria-Database*.

who hears these advances. Then Basilio, the music master (and general gossip), enters, and the Count is forced into hiding as well, not wanting to be caught with his servant. Basilio tells Susanna that he has found the love note Cherubino has written for the Countess, and, although the Count is clearly more interested in his servant than his wife, he becomes enraged with this news. He reveals himself from his hiding place and demands that Cherubino be driven away. This leads to the next number of the opera in which Susanna, the Count, and Basilio sing the trio “Cosa sento” while Susanna tries to keep Cherubino hidden. Lewin refers to Susanna’s exclamation “Che ruina!” (what ruin) and suggests that this statement of shock is also a pun for “Cherubino.” This word play follows Basilio’s first lines of the trio and Lewin proposes that this dialogue provides clues for understanding the drama. He maintains that Basilio must know that Cherubino is presently hiding somewhere in the room because Basilio’s first utterance in “Cosa sento” echoes the musical motive that Cherubino has just sung in “Non so più” (see example 1).¹⁰⁶



Example 1: Cherubino’s opening melody in “Non so più” (transposed) and Basilio’s opening melody in the No. 7 trio, “Cosa sento.”

This musical appropriation is Basilio’s way of showing that he has been spying on the others the whole time, from the minute Cherubino began his aria. How else could he mimic Cherubino’s tune? As Susanna recognizes the stolen theme, she, therefore, becomes aware that Basilio knows Cherubino was in her room, and must still be. It also lets her know that

¹⁰⁶ Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text*, 28.

Basilio is aware of the advances the Count had made toward her just one scene earlier. Once Basilio sings the stolen melody, Susanna responds with shock, or as Lewin explains, “the punning text [,] “Che ruina!” = “Cherubino!”¹⁰⁷ Lewin’s take on this word play itself takes place within a larger matter: Lewin advocates for using musical structure as a clue for the stage direction (a method I will adopt in the next chapter). He asserts that the recognition of this musical motive might be useful for the actress playing Susanna as the motive prompts her response as well as brings with it answers to the unfolding of the drama. However, for the purpose of this thesis and this chapter in particular, Lewin’s analysis might answer a question more complex than how Basilio’s melodic reference explains the string of events. It may instead speak to the matter of an alternate gender for Cherubino. If the “Che ruina!” remark made by Susanna should stand as a pun or marker of any dramatic element, it might be able to help decode Cherubino’s gender as the pun could point to a *female* page, “Cherubina,” (“a” at the end of the name denotes the feminine gender in Italian). Within this number (and preceding recitative) alone, other exclamations made by Susanna are used that do not carry with them the significance of the association to Cherubino’s name or female gender: “Oh! me meschina” (Oh! poor me!), “O Dei” (Oh! gods!), “Ohimè!” (Alas!), “Oh cielo!” (Oh heaven!) twice, “Ah! crude stele!” (Ah! cruel fate), “Ah no!” (Ah no!). The “che ruina” exclamation may, therefore, have been strategically inserted to serve a more important purpose, to hint at the femininity that is at the core of Cherubino’s character.

As the scene continues, the Count discovers Cherubino and realizes that his advances on Susanna have been offered in the presence of the pageboy. This dramatic detail is also found in Beaumarchais’ *Figaro* (Act 1, scene 9). At this point in the play, the Count has decided to send Chérubin to war, but the Countess remarks: “Hélas, il est si jeune!” (Oh, but

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 29.

he's so young) to which the Count replies "Pas tant que vous le croyez" (Not so young as you think). The Countess' statement conforms to the already widely held belief that Chérubin is a young male. The Count, however, seems to allude to the fact that Chérubin is not as young as the Countess, or everyone else, thinks. This statement could begin to highlight an ambiguity in the character of Chérubin. In the libretto, Da Ponte treats this scene similarly, but it is not the word choice but rather the word ordering that brings that ambiguity to the fore.

CHERUBINO. Perdono, mio signor!
 CONTE. Nol meritate.
 SUSANNA. Egli è ancora fanciullo.
 CONTE. Men di quell che tu credi.
 CHERUBINO. È ver mancai

CHERUBINO. Forgive me, noble lord!
 COUNT. You do not deserve it.
 SUSANNA. He is still a child.
 COUNT. Less so than you think.
 CHERUBINO. It is true, I failed.

In the opera, when the Count has ordered Cherubino off to war, it is Susanna who exclaims "Egli è ancora fanciullo" (he is still a child) as the Countess is not yet present in the drama of the libretto. In response to Susanna's comment (or let's say affirmation of Cherubino's masculinity), the Count remarks "Men di quel che tu credi" (Less than you think). Cherubino in turn confirms this ruling as he states "È ver mancai" (It is true, I failed). The dialogue here makes it seem like Cherubino is responding to a previous statement. A few lines earlier, Cherubino has asked to be pardoned to which the Count replies "Nol meritate" (You do not deserve it). Cherubino's text seems to be responding to this ruling: "It is true," he states "I failed." However, in examining the ordering of text, this statement made by Cherubino's does not follow the Count's ruling but Susanna's plea "Egli è ancora

fanciullo” and the Count’s second statement “Men di quel che tu credi.” As such, we should perhaps interpret Cherubino’s text as a clue, as an ascent to the Count’s realization that Cherubino is less of boy than one would think. This text does not necessarily confirm Cherubino’s femininity but merely plays up an ambiguity inherent in the character. The Count’s comment could be taken in reference to Cherubino’s age or in reference to his gender in which case, if Cherubino is not a boy, he could be a woman.

References to Cherubino’s femininity can also be seen in the words that Figaro uses to describe the page. In the play, after the Count orders Chérubin to take a position as officer in the army Figaro bids him farewell through a short monologue.

Tu ne roderas plus tout le jour au quartier des femmes: plus d’échaudés, de goûtés à la crème; plus de main chaude ou de colin-maillard. De bons soldats, morbleu! bazanés, mal vêtus; un gran fusil bien lourd; tourne à droite, tourne à gauche; en avant, marche à gloire; et ne vas pas broncher en chemin, à moins qu’un bon coup de feu ...

You see, you won’t roam around all day in the ladies’ quarters any more; no more pastries, no more cream puffs; no more games of hot-hand blindman’s bluff. Those good soldiers, damn it! Sunburned, all in rags, a big heavy gun; right face! left face! advance! March straight to glory, and never stumble on the way—unless a heavy burst of fire—

In the opera, Figaro’s farewell to Cherubino becomes the aria “Non più andrai” that closes the first act.

Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso, Notte e giorno d'intorno girando, Delle belle turbando il riposo, Narcisetto, Adoncino d'amor. Non piu avrai questi bei penacchini, Quel cappello leggiere e galante, Quella chioma, quell'aria brillante, Quel vermiglio donnesco color! Fra guerrieri, poffar Bacco! Gran mustacchi, stretto sacco, Schioppo in spalla, sciabla al fianco, Collo dritto, muso franco, Un gran casco, o un gran turbante,	You won't go any more, amorous butterfly Fluttering around inside night and day, Disturbing the sleep of beauties, A little Narcissus and Adonis of love. You won't have those fine feathers any more That light and jaunty hat, That hair, that shining aspect, That womanish red color [in your face]! Among soldiers, by Bacchus! A huge moustache, a little knapsack, Gun on your back, sword at your side, Your neck straight, your nose exposed, A big helmet, or a big turban,
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Molto onor, poco contante.	A lot of honour, very little pay.
Ed in vece del fandango	And in place of the dance
Una marcia per il fango.	A march through the mud.
Per montagne, per valloni,	Over mountains, through valleys,
Con le nevi, e i solioni,	With snow, and heat-stroke,
Al concerto di tromboni,	To the music of trumpets,
Di bombarde, di cannoni,	Of bombard, and of cannons,
Che le palle in tutti i tuoni,	Which, at every boom,
All'orecchio fan fischiar.	Will make bullets whistle past your ear.
Cherubino, alla vittoria!	Cherubino, go to victory!
Alla gloria militar!	To military glory! ¹⁰⁸

Throughout the aria, Figaro attributes what can be taken as normative masculine characteristics to Cherubino: he speaks of a great moustache, a gun, big helmet in addition to comparisons that are made to such male gods, such as Narcissus and Adonis. While this aria speaks of Cherubino's place in the military, the aria hints at a possible femininity as well. Reynolds, for instance, takes note of "Figaro's reference to Cherubino's (feminine) interest in dress and flirtation."¹⁰⁹ Specifically, and most astonishingly, Figaro notes Cherubino's facial colour, describing it as particularly feminine: "Quel vermiglio donnesco color" (That womanish red color).

Feminine references continue into the second act. Cherubino enters the Countess' bedroom and he is prompted by Susanna to sing the song for the Countess that he introduced earlier in the day. As he prepares to perform "Voi che sapete," Susanna remarks "guardate, egli ha due braccia di rossor sulla." Most frequently, this phrase is translated so as to suggest that Cherubino is blushing. However, the direct translation says nothing of a reaction from embarrassment but instead suggests that "he has two embers of blush on the face."¹¹⁰ There is much for the page to be nervous about as he prepares to sing his song for his beloved Countess, but what is the explanation for the blush? It might be that this text itself represents

¹⁰⁸ Bishop, *The Aria Database*.

¹⁰⁹ Reynolds, *Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions*, 141.

¹¹⁰ Da Ponte, *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, 84.

an Italian idiomatic expression for blushing, but it may also be another reference to the “*Quel vermiglio donnesco color*” (womanish red color) that Figaro noted in his aria and, therefore, may stand as another representation of femininity. While Beaumarchais’ play says nothing of blush, Suzanne and the Countess remark instead upon an equally feminine feature: Chérubin’s long eyelashes.¹¹¹

In one scene before “*Voi che sapete*,” the Countess, Figaro, and Susanna had been conspiring against the Count. Wishing to expose his lies, they created a scheme in which Susanna will send a note to the Count telling him to meet in the garden. However, they plan to have Cherubino dress as a woman and go in Susanna’s place. After Cherubino’s “*Voi che sapete*,” the women have the task of dressing Cherubino in women’s clothing, and throughout this scene they continually refer to Cherubino in a feminine light. As they prepare to dress him, Susanna remarks “*andra benissimo; siam d’ugule statura*” (It will fit very well; we are of the same stature). While it is expected that a boy would not be the same size as a grown man and perhaps more closely resemble the stature of a woman, perhaps this is yet another statement where Da Ponte has hinted at Cherubino’s femininity. While this particular comment is unique to the libretto, an equally feminine statement is seen in Beaumarchais’ play. As Suzanne and the Countess dress Chérubin, Suzanne states that Chérubin is so lovely as a girl that she is jealous: “*Comme il est joli en fille! J’en suis jalouse, moi!*”

In the operatic version, this playful dressing scene continues through Susanna’s aria “*Venite inginocchiatevi*.” Throughout this number, Susanna orders Cherubino to behave like a woman all the while remarking at his new feminine appearance. At the close of the aria, she says: “*Se l’amano le femmine, han certo il lor perche*” (if the ladies love him, they certainly have good reasons), a remark which is not to be found in Beaumarchais’ *Le*

¹¹¹ Beaumarchais, *Le Mariage De Figaro*, 319. Act II, scene 4.

mariage.¹¹² Brown-Montesano notes that “it is possible that Susanna’s whispered comment acts as a subtle hint about the Countess’ attraction to the page,” but she adds “more likely, however, is that Mozart and Da Ponte wanted to underscore Cherubino’s undeniable erotic appeal without incriminating the Countess.”¹¹³ We must remember that at this point in the action, Cherubino is dressed as a woman and the lust Susanna and the Countess seem to have for him is not because of his boyishness or even masculinity but because he is dressed in drag. This added line, therefore, intensifies Cherubino’s sexual appeal but also insinuates a lesbian attraction between the women. After Susanna’s aria, similar comments ensue. The Countess asks Susanna to roll up Cherubino’s sleeves so that the garment fits him more easily. Susanna then remarks that Cherubino’s arm is whiter than her own: “qualche ragazza” she adds, (somewhat girlish). In *Le mariage*, the allusion to femininity is quite explicit when Suzanne says: “C’est comme une femme!” (it’s like a woman!)

The Countess and Cherubino are then left alone and share an intimate moment before the Count is heard knocking at the door. In the recitative that precedes No. 13 of the opera, the Countess has Cherubino hide in the closet and tries to stall the Count. The Count demands to know why he is locked out, stating that it is not usual for the Countess to lock herself in her own room. She replies “È ver; ma io...io stava qui mettendo...” (It is true; but I...I was trying on...). After further prompting by the Count (Come on, you were trying on...), the Countess replies “Certe robe,” (yes, some clothes). It is the break in dialogue in the Countess’ explanation that is suggestive. It seems as if the pause in dialogue would make more sense after “I was...” The Countess would pause at this point in the phrase as she would be struggling to finish this statement in a believable manner. Because of the placement of the

¹¹² Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage*, 115.

¹¹³ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 182.

pauses, it seems as if she were sure of the statement “I was trying on” and paused to figure out an appropriate lie to finish this sentence. What would her interaction with Cherubino have her “trying on” except a lesbian fantasy perhaps? This might be reading too much into it, but the character of the Countess illustrates this possibility throughout the entire opera. As Ford points out, the Countess is trapped in her social standing and in her obedience to the Count.¹¹⁴ If in those things, then why not in her sexuality as well? She is so imprisoned that when the Count calls her by name for the first time in the opera (in No. 15, just a few scenes later), she dismisses him and the presence of her old self altogether.

CONTE. Rosina!

CONTESSA. Crudel, più quella non sono. Ma il misero oggetto del vostro abbandono che avete diletto di far disperar.

COUNT. Rosina!

COUNTESS. Cruel, no more am I your Rosina, but the poor thing of your abandon which you take pleasure in scorning.

A similar dialogue is seen in *Le mariage*.

LE COMTE. Rosine!

LA COMTESS. Je ne la suis plus cette Rosine que vous avez tant poursuivie! je suis la pauvre comtesse Almaviva, la triste femme délaissée, que vous n’aimez plus. (Act II, scene 19)

COUNT. Rosine!

COUNTESS. I am no longer the Rosine you sought so ardently. I am the poor Countess Almaviva, the sad neglected wife you no longer love.

The Countess is clearly trapped, if not lost altogether. It is also not unreasonable to think that she’s not getting what she wants from the Count. But it is her relationship with the women of the drama, Cherubino included, that helps her reclaim a portion of the old self that we saw in *Le barbier*. And it might, therefore, be this homosexual relationship with Cherubino that

¹¹⁴ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 151.

actually frees the character. The Countess' putative bi-sexuality might not only explain the dialogue in reference to her actions with Cherubino, it might also explain her interaction over the course of the drama with her servant, Susanna. Brown-Montesano has taken that relationship as a special case. She explains that "social rank is usually the trump card in opera buffa when all other virtues are more or less equal, but the heroines of *Le nozze di Figaro* pose a special case" as their relationship seems to be rooted in friendship.¹¹⁵ While Brown-Montesano and others, such as Allanbrook, attribute this friendship to the women's shared anguish over their mistreatment by the Count, I wonder if this alone would sustain such a friendship. Could it not be argued instead that this relationship, from the perspective of the Countess, might be based on a sexual element as well? Why else would this "friendship" cross classes? In any event, Ford's depiction of the Countess as a trapped woman is accurate and could point to a possible lesbian experimentation with Cherubino. In addition, we could interpret her confusion throughout the closet scene in a similar way. After Cherubino is safely hidden, the Countess unlocks her door and lets her husband in. When a noise comes from the closet, she tries to convince the Count that it is Susanna who is locked in the closet, but her confusion is verbalized during her dialogue with the Count.

CONTE. E donde viene che siete sì turbata?

CONTESSA. Per la mia cameriera?

CONTE. Io non so nulla; ma trubata senz'altro

COUNT. But how come you are so confused?

CONTESSA. [Confused] because of my maid?

COUNT. I don't know; but really confused.

The Countess is in fact confused, as this dialogue suggests, and it might be the confusion regarding her own sexuality that is what troubles her the most.

¹¹⁵ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 153.

With respect to the closet scene, Blackmer and Smith discuss this element of the drama and Cherubino's role in it. Without speaking to the issue of the Countess' sexuality directly, they question "what is the bigger threat to the Count; a male or a female Cherubino?"¹¹⁶ While Blackmer and Smith do not answer their own question, a female lover may in fact be worse than a male suitor. After all, we know that the Count is quite afraid of scandal. While he is still locked out of the Countess' room, he states "un scandalo, un disordine, schiviam per carità" (A scandal or a disorder must be avoided at any cost). In the recitative that follows, he calls upon his servants to break down the door but quickly changes his mind and decides to do it himself: "E vero, io sbaglio, posso senza rumor, senza scandalo alcun di nostra andar is stesso a preder l'occorrente" (It is true, I am making a mistake; I can without noise, without making any scandal fetch myself what I need). The Count is clearly afraid of being disgraced and if the Countess is in fact exploring her sexuality, a lesbian one at that, a male page in the closet may be the lesser of two evils. With the Count's fear of disgrace, one can acknowledge that there would certainly be enough reasons for the Countess to suppress these, perhaps lesbian, feelings. But perhaps she does not acknowledge her behaviour as scandalous at all. When the Countess finally confesses that Cherubino is in the closet, she describes her interaction with the page as "innocent."¹¹⁷ If it was an affair with a man, she might acknowledge this intimacy as "wrong," but with a woman, these interactions seem harmless.

IV: Objects

¹¹⁶ Blackmer and Smith, *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, 11.

¹¹⁷ Da Ponte, *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, 107.

Not only do elements of the text suggest Cherubino's possible femininity but dramatic elements, specifically the character's connection to dramatic objects, prove to do the same. Throughout both the play and opera, Cherubino interacts with two objects in particular, the Countess' ribbon and her pin. The Countess' ribbon appears in the same scene as Cherubino's first entrance, and it is arguably this object that sends him into the emotional fury that precipitates "Non so più:" "Oh caro, o bello, o fortunato nastro! Io non tel rendrò che colla vita!" (Oh! Dear, oh! Lovely, oh! Lucky ribbon! I shall not give it back to you except with my life!). Cherubino keeps this ribbon until his next scene where it takes a place of prominence as well. In the Act II dressing scene, while Susanna undresses Cherubino, the Countess attends to his sleeves and sees her ribbon tied around his arm. The Countess remarks at the blood that stains it and tasks Susanna to find a new ribbon to bandage the cut on Cherubino's arm. When the Countess orders Susanna to bring a fresh ribbon, Cherubino reveals the pleasure it brings him as he begins to allude to its quasi-healing power before he is overcome with emotion once again. "Ah! più presto m'avria quello quartio [...] allor che un nastro...legò la chiama...over toccò la pelle d'oggetto..." (Ah! That one would have cured me faster [...] whilst a ribbon...tied the hair...or else touched the skin of a person ...) Jean Starobinski speaks of the ribbon specifically and notes the feminine fetishism of this particular object. Cherubino wears it around his arm to seal his wound, and Starobinski maintains that this represents Cherubino's desire to have indirect contact with the body of the Countess. This fetishism is also seen on the part of the Countess herself. Starobinski notes that the Countess understands Cherubino's precious contact with her ribbon and even hopes it will be repeated. He explains "if not, why would she bother [...] to retake possession of the ribbon by exchanging it for another?"¹¹⁸ By retaking possession, the Countess reveals that

¹¹⁸ Jean Starobinski, *Enchantment: The Seductress in Opera*, trans. Jon Delogu (New York: Columbia

she wishes to keep the bloodstained ribbon and, in the case of *Le mariage*, wear it. In Act 3, while Suzanne and the Countess conceive of a new plot to fool the Count, they write the letter “Chanson nouvelle, sur l’air” which informs him of the secret rendezvous later that evening. The Countess gives Suzanne a pin from her dress to seal the letter, but, in doing so, Chérubin’s bloodstained ribbon from Act II falls out of the top of her dress. Starobinski says that in Da Ponte’s libretto, we do not see the ribbon again but both Beaumarchais’ Comtess, as well as Mozart/Da Ponte’s Countess, depicts an “erotic ritual” in the exchange of not only the object of the ribbon but Cherubino’s blood as well.¹¹⁹

We must also wonder if this blood can be, in addition to a depiction of erotic pleasure between the Countess and Cherubino, a direct representation of Cherubino’s femininity through its allusion to menstruation. While there is other mention of the word “blood” in *Le mariage*, with the Count’s expression “Il m’a tourné le sang” (it made my blood boil), there is no other direct depiction of blood in *Le nozze* or *Le mariage*. Throughout the other Mozart/Da Ponte operas, the only other sign of blood is in *Don Giovanni* with the Commendatore’s death. Other than this instance, where the cause of the blood is clear and called for by the drama, there is no other mention of blood. Because of its irrelevance to the plot, I cannot help but question if the reference of blood in *Le mariage* and *Le nozze* can insinuate Cherubino’s femininity.

The second object that permeates the dialogue is the aforementioned pin from the Countess’ dress. Starobinski notes that “all the female characters of the libretto will, one after another, touch the original pin.”¹²⁰ Not only are the female characters connected in this

University Press, 2008), 65.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 65.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 66.; Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 211. Brown-Montesano also acknowledges the femininity of the pin itself.

way but Starobinski explains that the pin is also a female object in itself, a feminine representation of a sword. The pin first appears with the Countess and Susanna, taking prominence in letter duet “Sull’aria” that matches its dramatic equivalent. Barbarina is the next female to be in contact with the pin: when she is tasked by the Count to return the pin to Susanna (an explicit instruction in the letter), it becomes the object of her aria “L’ho perduta.” Although it is not clearly written into the drama, we could assume that Marcellina touches it as well. In fact, Starobinski’s link between the pin and the female characters hinges on the fact that Marcellina, the last woman in the drama, comes in contact with the pin as well. (We can assume that this contact occurs after Barbarina’s as Marcellina enters immediately after “L’ho perduta.”) Problematic in Starobinski’s analysis is that the pin is not confined to touching only female characters. The Count touches it himself. This detail is unforgettable because Figaro’s dialogue reveals that the Count pricks himself with it. However, all the while, the Count notes this object’s femininity: “Eh già, si sa, solita, usanza, le donne ficcan gli aghi in ogni loco” (Ah! everyone knows that women have such a habit to put pins everywhere). Cherubino is, as far as we know, exempt from touching the pin and perhaps, therefore, exempt from the female association that I want to attribute to him. However, Cherubino could have certainly been in contact with the pin, although in ways not made explicit by the text. He may in fact be the first one who comes in contact with it.

We find out in the letter scene that the pin is part of the Countess’ dress and we know, from Cherubino’s first entrance, how he has a penchant for stealing the Countess’ articles of clothing. It is not difficult to assume that he could have easily been in contact with the pin even before the pin is made explicit in the drama of the Act III “Sull’aria” duet. In *Le mariage*, Chérubin’s awareness of pins is highlighted by his dialogue with Suzanne immediately after his first entrance in Act I: “Mais que tu es heureuse! à tous momens la

voir, lui parler, l'habiller le matin, et la déshabiller le soir, épingle à épingle" (But you are so lucky! You see her all the time, and you speak to her; you dress her in the morning, and you undress her at night, pin by pin). If Cherubino got his hands on her ribbon than perhaps he was able to come in contact with the pin as well. This potential contact not only associates this character with the feminine object of the pin but it could also explain the origin of his cut and the resulting blood. While Cherubino bleeds in both the play and the opera, he has two different explanations for the source. In *Le nozze*, he states: "Quel sangue....Io non so come, poco pria sdruciolando...sopra (in) un sasso...la pelle io mi sgraffiai e la piaga col nastro io mi fasciai" (This blood... I know not how, little before sliding...on a stone...I scratched the skin and bound the wound with this ribbon). *Le mariage* depicts a different excuse for Cherubino's blood: "Ce matin, comptant partir, j'arrangeais la gourmette de mon cheval; il a donné de la tête, et la bossette m'a effleuré le bras" (When I was getting ready to leave this morning and I was fastening the chain on my horse's bit, he tossed his head and the rowel scraped the skin off my arm). It is questionable why the presence of blood would be part of the drama of both the play and the opera but the explanation for its presence would differ. Perhaps this does not matter if both excuses are really irrelevant: if the blood's purpose is to represent Cherubino's femininity through the insinuation of menstruation, then it does not really matter how "he" claims it got there.

V: Action

Just as Cherubino's connection to dramatic objects may have hinted at his femininity, other elements of the drama may as well imply this character's feminine gender. A suggestive aspect of Cherubino's action, both in *Le mariage* and *Le nozze*, involves how much time he spends hiding. In his very first recitative (and dialogue), he tells of how he has already been

in trouble. We later find out, in the No. 7 trio (and the respective moment in the play, Act 1, scene 9), that Cherubino was visiting Barbarina and was discovered hiding underneath the tablecloth by the Count. All of this is recounted to Susanna, and only moments later is he in hiding again, first in an armchair when the Count comes to Susanna's door, then behind the chair when Basilio's approach forces the Count into the same armchair. Cherubino is soon discovered and this prompts the Count to enlist Cherubino in the army. Several scenes later, Cherubino is in the company of the Countess instead of Susanna but is once again forced to hide when the Count knocks at the door. This constant hiding can be attributed to the character's mischievousness (he is no doubt in trouble for most of the drama). But I would like to suggest that this hiding serves as a physical metaphor of what Cherubino might actually be hiding, his feminine identity. For if Cherubino is indeed a female, always having to hide from others throughout the drama parallels him having to hide his gender and, therefore, this dramatic recurrence might speak volumes about his nature.

Cherubino is also presented as hiding in another even more suggestive way. In two instances, in both the play and the opera, Cherubino is dressed as a girl. The first instance occurs as Susanna and the Countess dress Cherubino in women's clothing so that he can be disguised as Susanna and attend a rendezvous with the Count in her place. This dressing scene occupies a large portion of the dramatic action, accounting for the entire aria "Venite inginocchiatevi" which Susanna sings while dressing Cherubino. But this act of disguising does not have an integral role in the drama: Cherubino never ends up using the disguise because Susanna and the Countess later conceive of an alternate plan that does not require

Cherubino's involvement.¹²¹ (The dressing scene's dramatic needlessness is shown by its omission from the recent production of which I was a part at the University of Ottawa. For the sake of time perhaps, Susanna's aria and, therefore, the entire dressing scene itself was cut.) As a result, I cannot help but question this scene's relevance: if it is not central to the plot, what is the purpose of dressing Cherubino as a woman if not to reveal his underlying gender? Both Blackmer and Smith note that this woman-dressed-as-man-dressed-as-woman leads to this crucial question: "is dressing Cherubino as a woman merely another layer of disguise, or is it the revelation of what we have *really* known all along?"¹²²

In addition to this dressing scene, Cherubino is disguised yet again as a girl. In the recitative that precedes No. 19, "Dove sono," Cherubino tells Barbarina that the Count thinks he has gone to Seville and expresses his fear of being caught. Barbarina suggests dressing him up as a girl to hide from the Count, and, at his next entrance, Cherubino appears with the chorus of maidens to sing for the Countess. This is seen in Beaumarchais' *Figaro* as well when Fanchette (Barbarina's counterpart in the play) enters with the disguised Chérubin and the other maidens. In both the opera and the play, the action of dressing Cherubino in women's clothing for the second time is hidden from the audience's view. In *Le nozze* however, we see an interchange between Barbarina and Cherubino prior to his disguise. Here, even before Barbarina has the idea to dress up Cherubino, she hints at Cherubino's femininity: "Andiam, andiam, bel paggio, in casa mia tutte ritoverai le più belle ragazze del castello, di tutte sarai certo più bello" (Let us go in my house, lovely page, you will find there the most beautiful girls of the castle. You will surely be the most beautiful of all). Of

¹²¹ Spike Hughes, *Famous Mozart Operas: An Analytical Guide for the Opera-Goer and Armchair Listener* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 68. Hughes explains that this original plan is dropped and now the Countess will change places with Susanna instead.

¹²² Blackmer and Smith, *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, 11.

course, Barbarina is in love with Cherubino, we will soon see that: in both the play and opera, she begs the Count to let her marry the page. But if Barbarina finds Cherubino the most beautiful, why does she suggest that he is the “most beautiful of all the girls?” A joke perhaps, but it may also serve as another marker for Cherubino’s femininity.

In *Le nozze*, this is the first time we have heard from Barbarina, although she has been mentioned throughout the entire opera. Her counterpart, Fanchette, has had slightly more of a presence throughout the play but neither are main figures in the drama. Their purpose in this scene is simply to dress Cherubino so that he may hide from the Count, a plausible explanation for this disguise. But this second disguise should remind us of Cherubino’s first disguise and its lack of relevance in the drama. The original plan to dress Cherubino to fool the Count is, of course, dropped and becomes inconsequential to the action whereas this present disguise seems to have some need. However, instead of questioning the role of this disguise, we should be questioning the role of Barbarina. Now seeing Barbarina in this action for the first time, one cannot help but wonder why she was not the one tasked with being disguised as Susanna to confuse the Count in the original plan. It seems like this would make more sense than disguising the page and, this way, there would not be a need to dress up Cherubino in the first place. But perhaps that’s exactly the point. If his dressing has been inconsequential to the unfolding of the plot, we should regard this aspect of the drama as essential for another reason, that is, for uncovering Cherubino’s female gender.

Cherubino’s disguise might, as Blackmer and Smith suggest, reveal the gender that we should have attributed to this character all along. Why else would Cherubino not look to be in disguise or out of place? Could this be why the Countess does not even recognize him when he is presented to her in the chorus number? Examining her words at this moment is suggestive: in the recitative before No. 22, she exclaims “E chi è, narratemi, quell’amabil

fanciulla ch'ha l'aria si modesta?"(Who is this pretty girl who has such a modest look?) A similar expression is seen to take place in *Le mariage* as she remarks "Quelle est cette aimable enfant qui a l'air si modeste?" (Who is this nice child who looks so shy?). Cherubino is not just disguised as but passes for a woman. As unessential as Cherubino's continual undressing and redressing may be for the drama, its inclusion is certainly more than suggestive. Even though Cherubino might be wearing different clothing throughout the drama, the body inhabiting the character is always that of a woman. And this body is in turn highlighted by, as Reynolds points out, the constant dressing and undressing of the page in full view of the audience.¹²³ Speaking of Cherubino's first instance of disguise, Hughes notes that when the Countess finally divulges that it is Cherubino in the closet, "she makes things worse by saying that the page is only half dressed,"¹²⁴ a confession echoed in *Le mariage*. This would mean that instead of simply dressing Cherubino in women's clothing on top of his male outfit, he has been undressed first and this undressing reveals the feminine body that lies underneath. Amidst all the confusion in the drama, the body may be the one true thing. Underneath the disguise of a woman dressed as a man dressed as a woman, the depiction of the body assures no further level of disguise underneath the feminine body of Cherubino.

¹²³ Reynolds, *Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions*, 140.

¹²⁴ Hughes, *Famous Mozart Operas: An Analytical Guide for the Opera-Goer and Armchair Listener*,

Chapter 3: Cherubino in the Score

In this chapter, I will discuss the extent to which Mozart's music creates character. It is a commonly held view that music is the primary component for creating dramatic meaning in opera.¹²⁵ Speaking to *Le nozze* in particular, Joseph Kerman claims that "music does not merely decorate what playwright or librettist had designed: [it] creates a drama that they never suspected."¹²⁶ This drama goes beyond what the words of the libretto can say. As Kerman puts it, Mozart "performed miracles of characterization with his characters; specifically the Count, Susanna, and Cherubino."¹²⁷ Here, Kerman suggests that the music Mozart composed to depict Cherubino embodies his very character. Liebner concurs when he says that each *Le nozze* character is an individual whose personality is not only delineated in the music, but also that the musical features associated with each character are both psychologically suitable and remain constant throughout the opera.¹²⁸ This power to create character has broader implications regarding social meaning and, in the case of this thesis, gender.

One of the ways music creates drama is through rhythmic gesture. Allanbrook, for example, advocates that meaning is inherent in such gestures, arguing that they carry social implications. For instance, Figaro and Susanna's opening duet "Cinque... dieci" unfolds in the rhythmic style of the gavotte (for Figaro) and the bourrée (for Susanna). Allanbrook

¹²⁵ Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text*; Daniel N. Leeson, "Mozart's *Le Nozze Di Figaro*: A Hidden Dramatic Detail," *Eighteenth Century Music* 1, no. 2 (2004): 301-304. David Lewin speaks about the *Le nozze di Figaro* and discusses hearing the character in the actual music and the text and deriving stage direction and insight into the character based on the structure of the score. A similar stance is taken by Daniel Lesson whose examination of the score, more particularly the sharing of musical themes, shows that *Le nozze*'s music can create a dramatic detail.

¹²⁶ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 108.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹²⁸ Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage*, 101.

explains that “the dance gestures which animate the first appearances of Susanna and Figaro on the stage are fully in keeping with the social status of the couple.”¹²⁹ While Allanbrook points to social implications regarding the positions of characters in the social strata, Ford moves this line of thinking into the domain of gender representation. His analysis of Mozart/Da Ponte operas, for instance, suggests that the composer associated certain musical characteristics with feminine and masculine characters. Although Ford does not specifically address the pageboy of *Le nozze*, I will use his musical markers for femininity to trace possible parallels in Cherubino’s music. Doing so might provide clues for understanding how Mozart conceived this character.

We know with some certainty that Mozart himself recognizes the power of music to delineate character. In a letter to his father (September 26, 1781), Mozart explains how the music he composed for Osmin’s aria “Solche hergelaufne Laffen” from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* depicts him.

Mon très cher père!

Vienna, September 26, 1781 (excerpt)

I have sent you only the beginning and the end of the aria, I think it will prove to be very effective—for Osmin’s anger will be rendered comical by the use of Turkish Music.— The passage ‘Drum beim Barte des Propheten’ is, to be sure, in the same tempo, but with quick notes—and as his anger increases more and more, the allegro assai—which comes just when one thinks the aria is over—will produce an excellent Effect because it is in a different tempo and in a different key. A person who gets in such a violent rage transgresses every order, moderation, and limit; he no longer knows himself.— In the same way the Music must no longer know itself.¹³⁰

According to Siegmund Levarie, Mozart testifies here to the belief that music creates character. Levarie suggests that with Mozart, “characters of persons and moods of situations are thoroughly absorbed and reflected by the music alone without extraneous impressionistic

¹²⁹ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 76.

¹³⁰ Robert Spaethling, *Mozart's Letters, Mozart's Life: Selected Letters* (New York: W.W Norton & Co., 2000), 285.

or expressionistic aids [...] music is never merely an illustration or translations of given characters but always a direct creation.”¹³¹ If this is in fact the case, analysis of the music associated with Cherubino may reveal details of his character in the same way that Osmin’s rage is dramatized in his aria. In this chapter, I will explore how Mozart’s music, specifically melodic style, harmony, form, rhythm, and instrumentation, might be heard as marking Cherubino’s femininity.

I: Melodic Style

In his analysis of operatic femininity, Ford distinguishes between potential melodic markers for femininity. In particular, I will focus on lyricism, chromaticism, and melodic contour to illustrate that feminine melodic properties are depicted in Cherubino’s two arias. Since gender studies have become a facet of music scholarship, lyricism has been a prime musical feature equated with femininity.¹³² Ford’s analysis discusses lyricism pertaining specifically to Mozart operas. He attributes lyricism to femininity by recognizing this melodic facet in the music of female characters such as *Don Giovanni*’s Elvira and *Le nozze*’s Contessa where he notes specifically the “lyrical beauty of Elvira’s yearnings” in the finale and “the lyrical expression of sexual dependency” exemplified by the Contessa in “Porgi Amor.”¹³³

While Ford does not define his interpretation of lyricism, he seems to see this quality in

¹³¹ Siegmund Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 262.; Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 102. Kerman, however, describes Levarie’s analysis as “exhaustively wrongheaded” as it glorifies every musical detail. Kerman maintains that it is the central drama that binds the details and is therefore more worthy of discussion. Despite this shortcoming, as outlined by Kerman, I will rely on Levarie’s analysis as I discuss individual musical details in depth.

¹³² Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 68. McClary explains the femininity of lyricism in her analysis of masculine and feminine themes in sonata form. She explains the first theme as the masculine theme, “whose character is usually somewhat aggressive [...] frequently described as having thrust.” She then explains that “midway through the exposition of the movement, it encounters another them, the so-called feminine them, usually a more lyrical tune.”

¹³³ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 122, 150

Elvira's arched melody and the Countess' languishing vocal line that is supported by legato cantabile orchestra. Of Cherubino's two arias, his second, "Voi che sapete" is clearly the more lyrical. While the arias of all the other characters in *Le nozze* are understood to be sung manifestations of speech, Cherubino's "Voi che sapete" is an actual operatic song, a canzone that Cherubino has composed and which he performs for the Countess. Its status as an operatic song is marked by the pizzicato string figuration, a veritable orchestral representation of Susanna plucking her guitar while Cherubino sings over top (example 2).



Example 2: "Voi che sapete," violin 1 and 2, mm. 1-2.¹³⁴

In opposition to the orchestration that acts as purely accompanimental, Cherubino's melody becomes marked as lyrical. Cherubino's first aria, however, may be just as lyrical. In his "Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias," Singher seems to insist upon this quality in Cherubino's "Non so più" as well. Of course, with its fast tempo and quick rhythms, this aria is a classic example of a patter song. But there are moments of lyricism in the last section when the patter seems to have given way to an adagio (example 3).

¹³⁴ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Le Nozze Di Figaro* (Leipzig: C.F Peters; 1941c). Unless otherwise indicated, scans will be from this edition of *Le nozze di Figaro* orchestral score.

Adagio

Und mag mich nie - mand hö - ren, und mag mich nie - mand hö - ren,
 E se non ho chi m'o - da, e se non ho chi m'o - da,

Example 3: “Non so più,” mm. 91-95.

Even with the return to the original tempo at mm. 96, the use of fermatas and the absence of quick rhythmic motives in the accompanying voices suggest a slower tempo before the final two measures of outburst (example 4).

Tempo I

hö - ren, red ich von Lieb mit mir, mit mir, red ich von Lieb mit mir.
 m'o - da, par - lo d'a - mor con me, con me, par - lo d'a - mor con me.

Example 4: “Non so più,” mm. 95-100.

Despite the hurriedness of the rest of the aria, it may, in fact, be lyrical and, therefore, feminine. Singher states that despite the *Allegro vivace* marking, “Non so più” is not a mad rush. While he does not use the word lyrical per se, Singher seems to argue for this quality

throughout the aria by stressing an unhurried tempo throughout and insisting that, while Cherubino sings in short spurts, it is “*not staccato*.”¹³⁵ (Singher also urges the performer to, specifically, “sing legato with long dotted quarter notes” at several instances.¹³⁶)

Furthermore, Tibor Kozma reminds us that in the accompaniment, “a flowing, waving legato orchestral fabric appears in place of the precise, pulsating crispness of the previous number,” Susanna and Marcellina’s “*Via resti servita*.”¹³⁷ This sprightly number might, as Kozma suggests, act as a foil that makes Cherubino’s following aria sound more lyrical. I suggest that this distinct ordering makes “*Non so più*” stand out as a lyrical moment, its hurriedness notwithstanding.

Another element of melody that might mark gender is chromaticism. In her analysis of *Carmen*, for instance, Susan McClary attributes this musical characteristic to femininity. She describes the chromatic excesses of Carmen’s music, stating that this musical feature is “carefully defined throughout the opera as “the feminine,” revealing her as a “master” of seductive rhetoric.¹³⁸ Ford makes the equation by associating chromaticism with the irrational anxiety of hysteria. He recounts that hysteria, in the Enlightenment sense of the word, meant that women’s sensibilities are overcome by hot animal vapours, rising spontaneously from the womb.¹³⁹ Ford equates this musical feature with Mozartian women in particular by demonstrating hysteria in characters such as Elvira where a chromatic bass scale (along with several other features including dissonant orchestral dynamic accents)

¹³⁵ Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students*, 153.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹³⁷ Tibor Kozma, “The Clarinet in Figaro,” in *The Opera News Book of Figaro*, ed. Frank Merkling (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1967), 62.

¹³⁸ McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, 58.

¹³⁹ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 153.

expresses irrational anxiety,¹⁴⁰ or the trio in *Così*, where, despite Alfonso's musical participation, a chromatic cluster conveys the "unfathomable, since 'natural' insistent, unpredictable mysteries of feminine desire."¹⁴¹ (See example 5 and 6.)

neu-er Jam - - - mer ah - net
che mi sem - - - bra di mo-

Example 5: Don Giovanni, Act II sextetto, mm. 10-12. Chromatic bass scale underneath Elvira's music.¹⁴²

sanft schau - kle die
tran - quil - la - sia -

sanft schau - kle die
tran - quil - la - sia -

sanft schau - kle die
tran - quil - la - sia -

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 153.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴² Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni* (Leipzig: C. F Peters; 1941b).

Example 6: *Così fan tutte*, “Soave sia il vento,” mm. 14-15.¹⁴³ Ford explains the chromatic cluster: The previous motive “is interrupted by an exceptionally dissonant chord comprising A# diminished seventh, with its pitch of resolution—B— and two auxiliaries—D# and F#.

Chromaticism in Cherubino’s music is first seen in the “Non so più” melody

(example 7).

Hör ich Wor-te der Lie-be nur nen-nen, fühl in Glut ich die Wan-gen-ent-bren-nen,
So - - lo ai no - mi d'a-mor-di di - let - to, mi si tur-ba, mi s'al - te-ra il pet - to

Example 7: “Non so più,” mm. 16-21.

This feature is not restricted to the vocal line but also appears in the accompanimental figuration thereby reinforcing a sense of instability (example 8).

Hör ich Wor-te der Lie-be nur nen-nen, fühl in Glut ich die Wan-gen-ent-bren-nen, a
So - - lo ai no - mi d'a-mor-di di - let - to, mi si tur-ba, mi s'al - te-ra il pet - to

Example 8: “Non so più,” mm. 16-21. Note violin 2 and viola in the second and third voices as well as the cello and bass in bottom two voices).

Further examples of chromaticisms are seen to pervade the rest of the aria in both the melody and figuration (example 9 and 10).

¹⁴³ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Così Fan Tutte* (Leipzig: C. F Peters; 1941a).

Example 9: “Non so più,” mm. 26-28. Note chromaticisms in Cherubino’s melody as well as bottom two voices.

Example 10: “Non so più,” mm. 96-97. Note Cherubino’s line as well as upper voice (violin 1).

Chromaticisms are also present in the main melody of “Voi che sapete” and its accompaniment. Levarie reminds us that “the chromatic idea, once introduced, pervades the rest of the movement.”¹⁴⁴ (Example 11-13.)

Example 11: “Voi che sapete,” mm. 13-16.

¹⁴⁴ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 83.

Example 12: “Voi che sapete,” mm. 45-48. Note chromaticism in the bottom two voices as well as the viola, the third voice shown in the scan.

Example 13: “Voi che sapete,” mm. 55-58.

Without referring to issues of gender, Levarie explains that chromaticism was the symbolic expression of intensified feeling that was well known to all eighteenth century composers,¹⁴⁵ suggesting that Mozart was aware of this connotation of chromaticism and employed this feature consciously. It is curious why Mozart chose chromaticism to depict Cherubino if, as Levarie suggests, he knew the “intensified feeling” this musical feature represents. While Levarie’s analysis does not point towards the femininity of chromaticism, relating instead the feelings they represent, Ford discusses the expression of emotion as

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 83.

distinctly feminine. He highlights the feminine tendency “to be drawn by the natural force of desire,” “the vulnerability of feminine consciousness...via the mediation of sympathetic feelings,” and the impassioned, overflowing of desire¹⁴⁶ and how this is seen in the music of various Mozart women, Dorabella, Elvira, and La Contessa to name a few. Ford’s analysis of chromaticisms has not only revealed their presence in the music of female characters but Levarie’s analysis has equated chromaticism with emotion, a feature that Ford has characterized as feminine as well.

Apart from lyricism and chromaticism, the melodic contour of Cherubino’s music may also be a marker of femininity. Ford discusses this melodic aspect in the music of feminine characters such as Elvira and speaks of the presence of leaps in particular. He discusses her aria “Mi tradì quell’alma ingrata,” drawing our attention to the syncopated leaps up a seventh (example 14).¹⁴⁷



Example 14: “Mi tradì quell’alma ingrata,” mm. 44-45.¹⁴⁸

Ford suggests that these leaps represent an involuntary movement, attributing this to femininity because of its unpredictability.¹⁴⁹ This unpredictability, he links with hysteria as well as instability, all characteristically feminine features. In reference to “Non so più,” Levarie takes note of the leaps that occur throughout. He asserts that, of the melodic facets of Cherubino’s aria, the “skips are the most striking as they are without any competition, all

¹⁴⁶ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Mozart, *Don Giovanni*.

¹⁴⁹ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 154.

other tones having progressed by step.”¹⁵⁰ The melody, in its most basic form, represents a sequence: the five descending notes on “Non so più cosa son” are repeated one step higher at “or di foco, ora so-.” However, the sequence is interrupted, first, by an interval of a sixth (see bracket) then, the second utterance of the melodic fragment is punctuated with an interval of an octave (example 15).

Cherubino

Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin, was ich tu - e, bald in Frost, bald in Glut, oh-ne Ru - he!
Non sò più co-sa son, co-sa fac-cio, or di fo-co, o-ra so-no di ghiac-cio,

Example 15: “Non so più,” mm. 1-5.

With step-wise motion prevalent throughout most of the aria, the expansiveness of these leaps becomes extremely marked and, as a result, become a prominent feature of the aria. Levarie adds that, against the striking skips of the vocal line, the orchestra reacts with accents.¹⁵¹ Like the contrasting stepwise motion to which the skips are opposed, the accents contribute to highlighting the distinctiveness of the leaps (example 16).

Cherubino

Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin, was ich tu - e, bald in Frost, bald in Glut, oh-ne Ru - he!
Non sò più co-sa son, co-sa fac-cio, or di fo-co, o-ra so-no di ghiac-cio,

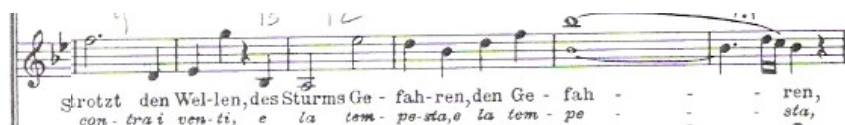
p *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

Example 16: “Non so più,” mm. 1-5.

¹⁵⁰ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 51.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

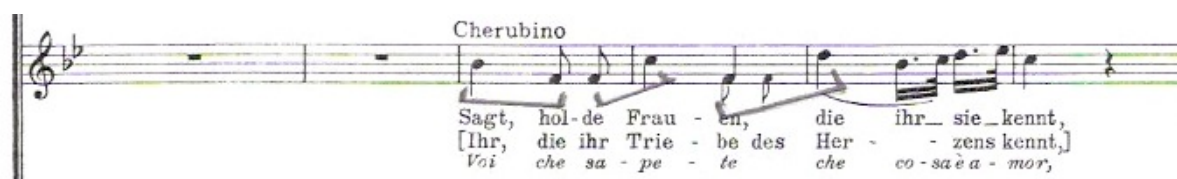
Elvira and Cherubino are not the only women whose arias contain distinctive leaps. Fiordiligi, with her famous aria “Come scoglio,” represents perhaps the most extreme case of leaps. Specifically, Ford remarks that Fiordiligi has difficulty finding her authentic voice range” (example 17)¹⁵² and uses this to confirm her unpredictability, instability, and therefore, femininity.



Example 17: “Come scoglio,” mm. 9-14.¹⁵³

With dramatic leaps that are unparalleled to perhaps any other operatic character, this melodic setting may represent the instability that Ford, and Mozart perhaps, sees as a typical representation of the fickleness of women to which Cherubino is no exception: he is just another woman in love, after all.

The inconsistency of leaps is represented throughout “Voi che sapete” as well. Cherubino’s melody begins with an interval of a fourth that progressively increases to a fifth, then a sixth (example 18).



Example 18: “Voi che sapete,” mm. 9-12.

¹⁵² Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 161.

¹⁵³ Mozart, *Così Fan Tutte*.

In “Non so più,” the leaps become prominent in opposition to the contrasting stepwise motion of the rest of the phrase. In the case of “Voi che sapete,” the leaps contrast the chromatic passage that follows (example 19).



Example 19: Voi che sapete, mm. 13-16.

Levarie explains that the “sudden [...] chromatic passing tones filling in the path to the climax are the first tones not belonging to the tonality of the arietta.”¹⁵⁴ I maintain that this is yet another compositional tool of marking the leaps, as if to intensify their importance. Not only are the leaps distinct from the narrow melodic contour that follows, but it is also the feminine chromaticism that highlights this difference. These melodic features illustrate that Cherubino’s music might be entirely feminine. To further support this claim, some English reviews from the early nineteenth century revealed that Cherubino’s “Voi che sapete” was routinely sung by Susanna. Furthermore, Henry Bishop’s 1819 version gave that aria to the Countess.¹⁵⁵ This transferal seems only possible between characters of the same gender. What other opera aria could cross gender so easily, unless it wasn’t crossing gender at all? I could not imagine “Batti, batti” sung by Massetto, “Der Hölle Rache” sung by Monostatos or “Porgi Amor” sung by the Count – but “Voi che” is feminine enough to seem fitting for any Mozart woman.

II: Harmonic Style

¹⁵⁴ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 83.

¹⁵⁵ Hunter, *Mozart's Operas: A Companion*, 138.

Just as certain aspects of melody might serve as a marker for femininity in Cherubino's music, so too might harmonic elements point in that direction. In gendered studies of music, harmony has been a feature considered to evoke gender as specific tonalities take on masculine or feminine properties.¹⁵⁶ This research has remained largely confined to absolute music in general, and sonata form in particular, but has been applied to opera as well. Gretchen Wheelock, for instance, argues that minor mode itself might serve to mark femininity in Mozartian operas.¹⁵⁷ But the association of mode with gender might be part of a larger practice of ascribing specific attributes to keys themselves. According to John Platoff, Mozart began conceiving his operas from *Idomeneo* onwards with key relationships in mind, and that this "high level of tonal planning" or network between tonic keys and separate numbers of an opera, contributes significantly to structure and meaning.¹⁵⁸ However, many scholars dispute these claims. James Webster, for instance, attributes them "the Romantic belief in unity as the ultimate criterion of aesthetic value."¹⁵⁹ Platoff summarizes this thinking: "If unity is closely linked with greatness, then Mozart's operas, being great, must be unified."¹⁶⁰ In this chapter, the whole question of tonal planning is largely moot. I do not wish to speculate, as Platoff does, about the key relationship between numbers of the opera. Nor do I wish to focus, as Webster does, on debunking the myth of musical unity in *Le nozze*. I will instead confine my analysis to those harmonic features that

¹⁵⁶ McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, 68. McClary's research of gendered themes explains that the theme that establishes the tonic key is a masculine theme, setting the affective tone for the movement: "it is in essence the protagonist." This theme is primary in opposition to the second, feminine theme that is presented in a new key, incompatible with the first.

¹⁵⁷ Gretchen A. Wheelock, "Schwarze Gredel and the Engendered Minor Mode in Mozart's Operas," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹⁵⁸ John Platoff, "Myths and Realities about Tonal Planning in Mozart's Operas," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8, no. 1 (1996), 3.

¹⁵⁹ James Webster, "Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no. 2 (1990): 197-218.

¹⁶⁰ Platoff, *Myths and Realities about Tonal Planning in Mozart's Operas*, 4.

are relevant to Cherubino. Through the analysis of “Non so più,” as well as specific harmonies in the character’s recitatives, I will show that certain aspects of Mozart’s harmonic style might point towards Cherubino’s femininity.

In addition to the supposed relationships between the keys, and to the overall tonic, individual keys have been considered to have meaning as well, and Hertz, for instance, advocates for such meaning. He asserts that eighteenth-century sensibilities allowed that a key could take on a quite specific personality, or, depending on how it was used, it could remain neutral.¹⁶¹ Platoff explains that “Mozart and other composers chose keys by relying on the conventional association of particular keys with certain character-types, affects or dramatic situations: D major for a noble character or martial sentiments, for instance, or G major for peasant simplicity.”¹⁶² If it were true that certain keys are identified with certain emotions, situations or character-types, couldn’t the same obtain in the case of gender?

Cherubino’s “Non so più” is in the key of E-flat, the first number to appear in that key in *Le nozze*. This aria acts as the flat 2 (or Neopolitan), or as Webster remarks, the *a fortiori* or ‘remote key’ to the D major overture.¹⁶³ (See appendix b.) The key of E-flat encompasses a large part of the discussion on *Le nozze*’s tonality. Hertz suggests that E-flat is a prime key in the second act of the opera, a compositional choice that is not without significance. When choosing the tonality of the opera as a whole, the keynote of the opera as it were, there were not many choices available. “Only three keys commonly accommodated trumpets and drums in the 1780s: C, D, and E flat.”¹⁶⁴ Mozart, as we know, chose D for this opera. Since Mozart supposedly wanted a noisy end with trumpets and drums to the opera’s

¹⁶¹ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 140.

¹⁶² Platoff, *Myths and Realities about Tonal Planning in Mozart's Operas*, 3-15., 9.

¹⁶³ Webster, *Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity*, 210.

¹⁶⁴ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 140.

medial finale as well (the Act II finale), “his choice was narrowed down to C or E-flat—the keynote would not do, for obvious reasons.”¹⁶⁵ Mozart finally decided on E-flat not only to end Act 2, but also to begin it. Other authors focus on this key as well, and, as Platoff remarks, Act II specifically, because of its beginning and ending in E-flat¹⁶⁶ but few discuss its connection to Cherubino. Platoff is one of the few to discuss this key in relation to a character instead of its prominence in Act II in his focus on the Countess’ “Porgi Amor.” He states “it seems more reasonable to conclude that Mozart chose E-flat for “Porgi amor” for reasons intrinsic to that number, rather than because it was the same key as that to be used in the Act II finale.”¹⁶⁷ Here Platoff insinuates that the choice to use E-flat was not about fulfilling larger-scale tonal relationships with other parts of the opera, but suggests an important quality in the key of E-flat itself, regardless of its connection to the larger tonal scheme. Hertz describes the particular features of E-flat in *Le nozze*: “E -flat major was broad enough to embrace the strepitosissimo¹⁶⁸ racket that ends the finale of Act 2 but when used to project a tender mood and colored by delicate shading from the clarinets and other winds, it assumed [...] plaintive softness.”¹⁶⁹ Without speaking of femininity per se, Hertz seems to suggest the possible feminine characteristics of this key. We would easily say that Hertz’s description of plaintive softness fits accurately with “Porgi Amor” but it may be reflective of Cherubino’s aria as well. “Non so più” is not as tender as the Countess’ “Porgi Amor” but not as raucous as the Act II finale. As such, E-flat in the case of “Non so più” may represent the tender side of the key, especially since the use of delicate clarinets and

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹⁶⁶ Tim Carter, *W.A. Mozart: 'Le Nozze Di Figaro.'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).; Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, "Dismembering Mozart," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2, no. 2 (1990): 187-195.; Webster, *Mozart's Operas and the Myth of Musical Unity*, 197-218.

¹⁶⁷ Platoff, *Myths and Realities about Tonal Planning in Mozart's Operas*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Frederick J. Horwood, *The Basis of Music* (Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson, 1944), 46. Strepitoso = boisterous.

¹⁶⁹ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 140.

woodwinds that Hertz deems essential to the feminine side of the key are features present in “Non so più.” (Instrumentation, and the clarinet in particular, will be discussed in detail in the instrumentation section that closes this chapter.) All the while, we should not forget the relationship between the characters that share this all-important key. Because most of the commentaries regarding the importance of E-flat deal either with its relationship to the tonic of the opera (and to the other numbers as well) and/or its prominence in the second act, we have lost sight of a relationship of a different kind, between the characters that share it, the Countess and Cherubino. This key is shared between the Countess and Cherubino, but it was very nearly attributed to another *Le nozze* woman as well. Hertz has shown that Mozart originally sketched Susanna’s garden aria (“Deh vieni”) in the key of E-flat to a text that began “Non tardar amato bene vieni vola al seno mio” (example 20).¹⁷⁰



Example 20: Sketch for early version of No. 27, Susanna’s garden aria, mm. 1-6.

The music of the Countess and Susanna has been deemed by Ford to be the most typically feminine.¹⁷¹ Since Cherubino shares the E-flat key with these two women, this could be another clue that could be interpreted as a sign of Cherubino’s femininity.

The key of E-flat is not only used to depict female characters in *Le nozze* but in the other Da Ponte operas as well. Other than the sextet in Act II of *Don Giovanni*, Elvira’s music is the only one to use the key of E-flat with two of her arias “Ah chi mi dice mai” and “Mi tradi quell’alma in grata.” In *Così fan tutte*, the key of E-flat, although present in the no.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 151.

¹⁷¹ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 150, 167.

6 quintet and no. 21 duet and chorus, is again reserved for a female character as Dorabella's "Smani implacabili" is the only E-flat aria throughout. Whereas the tonalities of *Giovanni* and *Così* represent female characters through the use of the E-flat, *Le nozze* does not follow this trend without question. In addition to Cherubino and the Countess' respective arias, Figaro's "Aprite un po quegli occhi" is also in the key of E-flat. Perhaps this occurrence might serve as a counterfactual to the assumption that E-flat serves as a marker for femininity and therefore Cherubino's femininity as well. But it might, however, intensify this supposition. As discussed earlier, Figaro's incendiary speech in Beaumarchais' *Le mariage* is omitted in the operatic version. Mozart's Figaro is instead given the aria "Aprite un po quegli occhi" and, instead of his critique of the Count, he turns his anger to Susanna and women in general.

Tutto è disposto:	Everything is set:
L'ora dovrebbe esser vicina;	the hour should be near;
Io sento gente...è dessa!	I can hear people... it is her!
Non è alcun;	It's nobody;
Buia è la notte...	The night is dark...
Ed io comincio omai a fare	and I am just beginning to practice
Il scimunito mestiere di marito...	the stupid work of being a husband...
Ingrata!	You ungrateful!
Nel memento della mia cerimonia	While remembering my ceremony
Ei godeva leggendo:	he was enjoying in reading:
E nel vederlo io rideva	And while I was seeing it I was laughing
Di me senza saperlo.	at me without knowing it.
Oh Susanna! Susanna!	Oh, Susanna! Susanna!
Quanta pena mi costi!	What a great suffering you cost me!
Con quell'ingenua faccia,	With your ingenuous face,
Con quegli occhi innocenti,	with your innocent eyes,
Chi creduto l'avria? Ah!	who would imagine it? Ah,
Che il fidarse a donna, è ognor follia.	that it's foul to trust in a woman.
Aprite un po' quegli occhi,	Open your eyes,
Uomini incauti e sciocchi,	you incautious and stupid men
Guardate queste femmine,	Look at these women
Guardate cosa son!	Look what they are!
Queste chiamate dee	These you call goddesses
Dagli ingannati sensi,	with deceived senses,

<p>A cui tributa incensi La debole ragion. Son streghe che incantano Per farci penar, Sirene che cantano Per farci affogar, Civette che allettano Per trarci le piume, Comete che brillano Per toglierci il lume. Son rose spinose Son volpi vezzose; Son orse benigne, Colombe maligne, Maestre d'inganni, Amiche d'affanni, Che fingono, mentono, Amore non senton, Non senton pietà, No, no, no, no no! Il resto no dico, Già ognuno lo sa.</p>	<p>to whom the weak reason tributes incenses. They are witches who enchant only to make us pain, Sirens who sing to draw us, Owls who attract to take out our feathers Comets who shine to take our light away, they're thorny roses they're charming foxes they're benign bears, malign doves, masters in cheating friends of worries who pretend, lie, don't feel any love, don't feel any pity, no, no, no, no, no! I don't tell all the rest, anybody knows that.</p>
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Although it may look like it, Figaro is not the enemy. It is during this moment alone where he is no longer the beloved husband or confidante but instead, argues for a characterization of women like those that, all along, the women of *Le nozze* might have been trying to refute. I have suggested that Figaro's aria, in its departure from Beaumarchais' original speech, might point to the reading of the opera as not about class disturbances but about gendered ones instead. This aria could, therefore, show that the central theme may not only be about Cherubino but women in general and the other roles and prejudices they seek to combat. If the opera, in fact, seeks to contest traditional depictions of women (one of which Figaro claims in this aria), his E-flat tonality can be a representation of this theme and, as such, this tonality may prove that E-flat is (at least in this opera) a key that points to women.

I will now illustrate how Cherubino's harmony depicts femininity by representing gender associations that exist with regard to specific harmonic features such as subdominant

and submediant harmonies. By examining this harmonic feature, I will suggest that the harmony within Cherubino's recitatives reveals possible clues to his feminine gender. Through this consultation with the score, we can perhaps begin to understand these compositional choices as direct gender choices as well. This might, in fact, be Mozart's way of hinting at Cherubino's female gender. Ford discusses that women's psychological instability and lack of autonomy [...] was expressed through [...] the overall harmonic tendency to be drawn towards the 'natural' gravitational pull of the subdominant.¹⁷² He then proceeds to highlight the feminine subdominant in the music of other female characters, for instance Fiordiligi and Despina,¹⁷³ but fails to take into account the subdominant features that occur in Cherubino's music. These features are visible primarily in Cherubino's recitatives.

After "Non so più," Cherubino is next seen when he is invited into the Countess' bedroom to sing "Voi che sapete." The recitative that precedes the aria begins in G major (example 21).

Gn.

Ach, wie pein-lich, Su-san-na,
 Quan-to duol-mi, Su-san-na,

Cembalo
 e
 Basso
 continuo

Example 21: Recitative before No. 11 "Voi che sapete."

But Cherubino's first words move through two "sub-harmonies," first the minor subdominant (C minor), then the flat submediant (E-flat). (See example 22.)

¹⁷² Ibid., 111.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 162, 177.

Cherubino

ann. Nenne mich nicht mit dem ver-haß-ten Na-men, der mich er - in-ner-t, daß ich sie mei-den
t. Ah non chia-marmi con no-me sì fa-ta-le, ei mi ram-men-ta, che ab-ban-do-nar degg

Example 22: Recitative before No. 11 “Voi che sapete.”

After the ensuing aria, Cherubino, Susanna, and the Countess engage in another recitative that begins in B-flat major (example 23).

Gn.
S.

Bra-vo, welch schöne Stimme; ich wußte!
Bra-vo, che bel-la vo-ce; io non sa

embalo
e
Basso
continuo

Example 23: Recitative after No. 11 “Voi che sapete.”

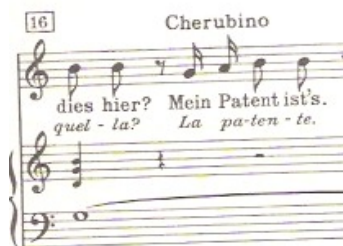
Cherubino’s first utterance is once again in the subdominant, this time E-flat (example 24).

Cherubino

gut. Ich weiß schon al-les.
fa. Tut-to mi dis-se.

Example 24: Recitative after No. 11 “Voi che sapete.”

The next time he speaks, he does so in the key of G (the submediant), and stays there until the close of the recitative (example 25 and 26).



Example 25: Recitative after No. 11 “Voi che sapete.”



Example 26: Recitative after No. 11 “Voi che sapete.”

Much of Cherubino’s music surrounds this particular harmony and may be why Levarie sees the character, and his sensuality in particular, as belonging to the subdominant realm.¹⁷⁴

The analysis of specific harmonies, subdominant and submediant in particular, has shown that these tonalities might represent Cherubino’s femininity, if Ford is correct about subdominant harmonies expressing women’s psychological instability. As Hertz not only discussed the relationship between keys but also their individual meaning, Ford does so as well by discussing the key of G minor and its scandalous connotations in *Le nozze di Figaro*. He argues that Mozart identified the web of sexual scandal, jealousies and deceits, and doubts and suspicions with this given key. Ford makes a link between G minor and femininity by remarking that the women’s understanding of these scandals is related to the

¹⁷⁴ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 257.

feminine power that runs through *Le nozze*.¹⁷⁵ Without directly attributing femininity to Cherubino, Ford does notice that at the very mention of his name, “the music plunges giddily into G minor”¹⁷⁶ (example 27).

Example 27: Finale II mm. 564- 568.

Example 27: Finale II mm. 564- 568.

If Cherubino is, in fact, meant to be a woman, no other character would represent “sexual scandal” as he would. But the sexual scandal is not so much his over-abundance of sexuality. Nor is it his affair with the Countess. It is simply the possibility that he is a lesbian. Roland Tenschert further characterizes the use of G minor in Mozart’s operas: “for Mozart, this key represented more than expression of passion, of the daemonic, of defiance or rebellion against adverse fate, [in] womanly passivity, [it represented] the soulful condition of

¹⁷⁵ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 166.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

despondency, grief, painful resignation, and despair.”¹⁷⁷ Now clearly, Cherubino is anything but passive, but may, in fact, be entirely womanly. Not only is G minor a prominent facet in *Le nozze* analyses but so too is G major. Lewin explains G major as the love key in *Figaro*: the wedding ceremony begins in G, G is the key of the final reconciliation between the Count and Countess.¹⁷⁸ If Wheelock is correct about the femininity of the minor mode, the scandalous G minor might therefore suggest a feminine depiction of the G major love key. We must not forget that G minor is also the subdominant, albeit minor, of the D major keynote of *Le nozze* and, therefore, the fact that G minor can be associated with femininity is intensified by the fact that harmonically it acts as the feminine subdominant in relation to the opera as a whole. This may speak to the femininity of the key, and maybe Cherubino, but may also support an understanding that *Le nozze* expresses these feminine themes at the core of the work.

III: Rhythm

The possible markers of Cherubino’s femininity that have been examined in domains of melody and harmony might also appear in rhythm particularly when it is unstable or irregular. Ford, for instance, hears this association throughout Mozart’s operas in general, and in *Le nozze* in particular, he cites the Countess’ “Porgi Amor” with its “rhythmically dislocated representation of feminine morbid anxiety.”¹⁷⁹ Ford sees the aria as breaking down the musical hierarchisation of time thereby producing a diffuse and fluid sense of musical time, equaling a feminine style. In this section, I will suggest that comparable

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Wheelock, *Schwarze Gredel and the Engendered Minor Mode in Mozart's Operas*, 104.

¹⁷⁸ Lewin, *Studies in Music with Text*, 103.

¹⁷⁹ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 150.

instances of rhythmic instability throughout “Non so più” suggest something similar in Cherubino.

Before discussing how the rhythm of “Non so più” is upset throughout the course of the aria, however, I will briefly touch upon specific rhythmic gestures that in and of themselves might be taken as suggestive of femininity. In Allanbrook’s analysis of “Non so più,” she states that the text of the aria “consists of two stanzas each containing three ten-syllable lines or *decasillabi*, and a fourth with nine syllables:”¹⁸⁰

Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio,
Or di foco, ora sono di ghiaccio
ogni donna cangiar di colore,
ogni donna mi fa palpitar.

Allanbrook first acknowledges the femininity of the rhyming scheme, maintaining that the first three lines of each stanza end with feminine rhymes (*faccio, ghiaccio, colore*).¹⁸¹ More importantly, however, these feminine rhymes are matched with feminine rhythmic properties. Allanbrook takes the rhythmic shape of the anapest (two weak beats followed by a strong beat) as a masculine ending.¹⁸²



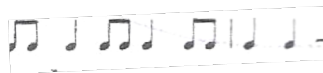
This rhythmic germ is repeated three times in each line thereby generating nine syllables per line. But, as Allanbrook observes, with the addition of an extra beat at the end of the phrase,

¹⁸⁰ Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 85.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 85. Although she does not explain this specific gender association, she attributes femininity to the rhymes presumably because they end on vowels versus the “*palpitar, spiegar*” rhymes that she explains as masculine.

¹⁸² McClary’s analysis most clearly describes this metaphor of gender, defining a masculine ending as occurring on a strong beat versus a feminine ending where the phrase is postponed to fall on a weak beat.

“each of the first three lines closes with a feminine ending,” turning the nine-syllable line into a typical *decasillabi* and upsetting the anapest.¹⁸³



Whereas a masculine ending would be maintained if the anapest was kept intact, the altered ending becomes feminine as the last note ends on the weaker second beat. According to Allanbrook, the analysis of rhythmic gestures provides clues to a given character, and as such, this rhythmic femininity could stand as a marker for Cherubino’s femininity.

Just as the masculine anapest was upset in favour of a feminine ending, by examining the process in which the opening musical statements transform throughout the aria, we may argue that these rhythmic changes throughout “Non so più” might also suggest Cherubino’s femininity. Levarie points out that the four opening lines evenly produce four two-measure units (example 28).

Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin, was ich tu - e,
Non sò più co-sa son, co-sa fac-cio,

bald in Frost, bald in Glut, oh-ne Ru-he!
or di fo-co, o-ra so-no di ghiac-cio,

Je-de Mäd-chen, ach, macht mich er-rö-ten,
Je-de o-gni don-na can-giar di co-lo-re,

je-de Da-me ent-zün-det mein Herz,
o-gni don-na mi fa pal-pi-tar,

Example 28: “Non so più,” mm. 1-9.

Levarie asserts that because of the introductory measure in the orchestra, each of the two-measure units begins on a weak bar and leads towards a strong bar. That is to say that apart from the pickup beats, the phrases begin on even-numbered measures and lead towards odd-numbered measures as would normally be expected. However, despite this normality, this

¹⁸³ Ibid.

stable rhythmic pattern is upset in several different ways. First, the even-numbered measures are ready to invite accents as well, particularly at mm. 2 and mm. 6 because they emphasize the tonic triad (example 29 and 30).

no
nicht, wo ich bin, was ich
più co-sa son, co-sa

Example 29: “Non so più,” mm. 2.

Mäd-chen, ach, macht mich er-
don-na can-giar di co-

Example 30: “Non so più,” mm. 6.

But, in this view, this resistance (to the strength of odd-numbered measures) is not a serious one: the deliberately spaced accents lead the stresses to the heavy measures once again.

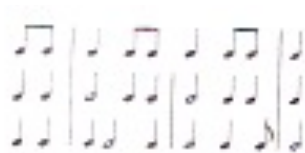
However, the rhythm is only upset further when the two-measure units that pervade the first stanza of poetry are stretched into three measures (example 31).

z, je-de Da-me ent-zün-det mein Herz,
o-gni don-na mi-fa-pal-pi-tar,

Example 31: “Non so più,” mm. 9-12.

Levarie describes that the eighth-note anacrusis, or upbeat of the original phrase, immediately increases to two quarter notes on “ogni.” As such, “the notes of the phrase itself

appear almost doubled, the former eighth- and quarter-notes now turned into quarter- and half-notes.”¹⁸⁴ Allanbrook notes that this augmentation involves syncopation as well (example 32).



Example 32: Here Allanbrook shows the original phrase, then how the phrase would look in augmentation and finally how it appears in the aria, with augmentation and syncopation at mm. 9-12.

And with this augmentation comes a disturbed rhythmic setting, for the strong beats within the former two-measure phrases have now been shifted as a result of the expansion. This lengthening upsets the meter as the strong beats no longer lead into odd-numbered measures but temporarily see their accent on the evenly numbered mm. 10 and 12 (see example 31). Increasing to a three-measure phrase, this rhythm across three bars (or *ritmo di tre battute* as noted by Levarie) carries over into the next strophe as well. Cherubino begins the next strophe with two phrases, each spanning three measures (example 33).

Musical notation for Example 33, showing a three-measure phrase with German and Italian lyrics. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "Hör ich Wor-te der Lie-be nur nen-nen, fühl in Glut ich die Wan-gen ent-bren-nen, So - - lo ai no - mi d'a-mor di di - let - to, mi si tur-ba, mi s'al - te-ra il pet - to".

Example 33: “Non so più,” mm. 16-21.

After these two rhythmically hurried passages, “Cherubino finds his breath again” and returns to two measure units within the phrases (example 34).

¹⁸⁴ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 52.

ach und doch treibt mich, von Lie-be zu re - den,
e a par - la - re mi sfor - za d'a - mo - re

Example 34: “Non so più,” mm. 22-25.

However, while he has returned to the initial two-bar phrase, “the underlying duple rhythm within each phrase remains disturbed by irregularities between the phrases.”¹⁸⁵ The first mention of “un desio,” though in the original structure of the two-bar phrase, “becomes a sentimental insertion that, like a parenthesis, delays the direct flow from the third to the fourth line of the second poetic strophe”¹⁸⁶ (example 35).

ein Ver - lan - gen, ein Ver - lan - gen
un de - si - o, un de - si - o

Example 35: “Non so più,” mm. 26-29.

Solo ai nomi d'amor, di diletto,
 mi si turba, mi s'altera il petto
 e a parlare mi sforza d'amore
 un desio ch'io non posso spiegar

As a result, the fourth line does not find its end without returning to the parenthetical “un desio,” this effect being produced by means of “a surprise elision” which brings about a last reminiscence of the *ritmo di tre battue*¹⁸⁷ (example 36).

nicht - deu - ten kann, ein Ver - lan - gen,
pos - so spie - gar, un de - si - o,

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 52.

Example 36: “Non so più,” mm. 30-32.

Cherubino’s rhythm undergoes transformations that show the initial rhythm losing hold. Such disruption conforms to the disorder and unpredictability that Ford ascribes to the feminine.

As noted earlier, Ford’s analysis of the Countess’ aria provides a model for understanding femininity in music. Specifically, Ford sees the overlapping structures by way of elisions throughout “Porgi Amor” as producing a “diffuse and fluid sense of musical time” which he considers to be feminine.¹⁸⁸ The elisions invoke her melancholic recollections of her past as seen in the instrumental prelude to “Porgi Amor.”¹⁸⁹ This passage of the prelude (see example 37) could easily be followed by a tonic triad on the following downbeat that could, in turn, prompt the Countess’ entrance in the subsequent measure.

¹⁸⁸ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 150.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

Example 37: “Porgi Amor,” mm. 7-10.

However, the prelude is extended by the following passage (example 38).

Example 38: “Porgi Amor,” mm. 11-17.

Ford notes the idea of melancholic introspection and equates this with femininity.

Particularly, he uses this explanation to account for another musical feature, the rondo form

(I will discuss this in the next section) where a continuous turning back in on the self

represents femininity.¹⁹⁰ Elisions, however, seem to create a similar effect, acting as vehicles

for a sentimental rehashing of previously sung material that seems all too feminine. This

device sends Cherubino on a similar emotional journey if we recall the elision created by the

inserted “un desio.” Speaking of Cherubino, Levarie asserts that through the “un desio”

elision, Cherubino “turn[s] back once more to the most sentimental place,”¹⁹¹ which can only

be his desire. These elisions, therefore, allow both the Countess and Cherubino the privilege

of a feminine reminiscence of desire that, as we know from Ford, is feminine.

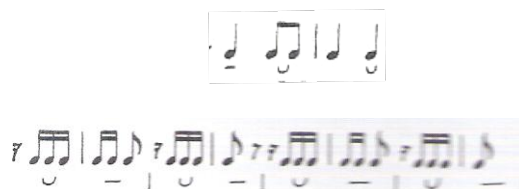
¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 154.

¹⁹¹ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 52.

Similar rhythmic inconsistencies are seen in “Voi che sapete” as well. Allanbrook likens the opening gesture of the aria to a slow contredanse:



But the repetitive trochees and the constant four-measure units lose their hold:¹⁹²



This urgency and breathlessness is also ornamented by a rising chromatic scale in the bass, further destabilizing the initial representation of the rhythmic figure.¹⁹³ Additionally, it is the feminine property of chromaticism that intensifies this effect. Apart from the destabilization of rhythm, “Voi che sapete” and “Non so più” possess other rhythmic similarities.

Specifically, Allanbrook notes the duple meters of both arias.¹⁹⁴ In addition to this main similarity, we should notice that “Voi che sapete” and “Non so più” have almost the exact same rhythm in the strings. This is also very similar to the middle voices in “Porgi Amor,” another duple meter aria (see examples 39-41).



Example 39: “Non so più,” mm. 1.

¹⁹² Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: Le Nozze Di Figaro & Don Giovanni*, 109.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.



Example 40: “Vo che sapete,” mm. 1-2.



Example 41: “Porgi Amor,” mm. 3-4.

The meter of Cherubino’s arias might have as much to say about this character’s gender as the rhythmic settings of his music. Levarie notes that the meters in *Le nozze* reveal possible class distinctions specifying that “the aristocrats in the opera stay aloof from the triple measure.”¹⁹⁵ By examining the chart outlining the meters of each *Le nozze* number (see appendix c), it is clear that meter itself might be a marker not just for class but also for gender for it is almost always women who sing in duple time. (The exceptions are Figaro’s music in duet No. 2, the Count’s music in the No. 16 duet, and his aria No. 17.) If duple time music accounts for the setting of the music for female characters, what could that mean for Cherubino? Additionally, it is notable that the overture is as well in cut time. If duple meters represent femininity, the metric setting of the overture could signify that the main theme of *Le nozze* is really femininity and maybe Cherubino’s in particular.

IV: Form

¹⁹⁵ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 257.

Just as melody, harmony, and rhythm can serve as possible markers of femininity so too can aspects of formal structure. Ford, for instance, links formal stability with the masculine, formal instability with the feminine. Dorabella's aria "È amore un ladroncello" from *Così*, in his view, is feminine since it is cast in the relatively unstructured, form of a rondo.¹⁹⁶ Although he assigns this gender characterization with little explanation, he links its formal structure—a sonata rondo (A¹-A²-B-A³-C-A⁴-D-A⁵)—with melancholic introspection, a continuous turning back in on the self that he links with the feminine.¹⁹⁷ (This formal plan creates an effect similar to the elisions discussed in the previous section.) I will show that Cherubino's arias could be regarded as feminine because of similar inconsistencies and disruptions of form.

According to Levarie, "Non so più" is cast in an "inordinate musical form" that verges on an "uncontrolled dissolution of formal structure."¹⁹⁸ He attributes this mainly to the unstable shifts between a bar and a bow form. The text as a whole is clearly in bar form, or *aab* form: two corresponding strophes of four lines each are followed by an epode of contrasting organization and content.¹⁹⁹

Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio,
Or di foco, ora sono di ghiaccio
ogni donna cangiar di colore,
ogni donna mi fa palpitar.

Solo ai nomi d'amor, di diletto,
mi si turba, mi s'altera il petto
e a parlare mi sforza d'amore
un desio ch'io non posso spiegar

Parlo d'amor vegliando,
parlo d'amor sognando,

¹⁹⁶ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 180.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁹⁸ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 51.

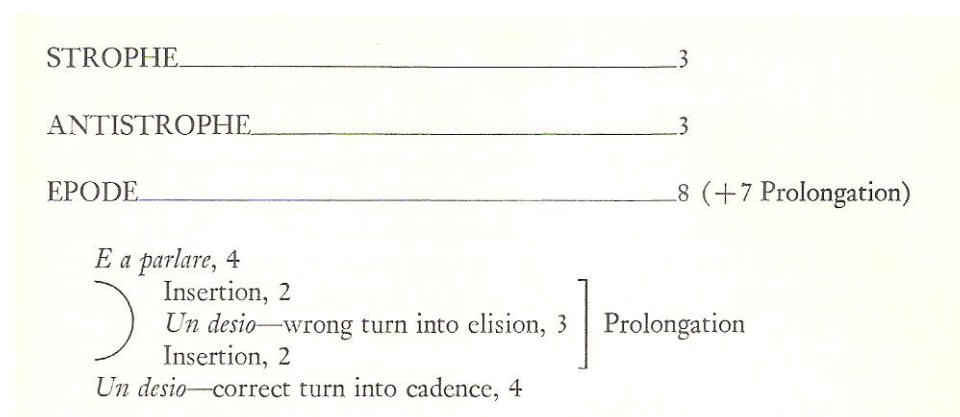
¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

all'acqua, all'ombre, ai monti,
 ai fiori, all'erbe, ai fonti,
 all'eco, all'aria, ai venti,
 che il suon de' vani accenti
 portano via con sé.
 E se non ho chi m'oda.
 Parlo d'amor con me.

Within the larger structure of the aria, the second stanza of the poem emerges musically as a bar form, or *aab* form, as well.

Solo ai nomi d'amor, di diletto,
 mi si turba, mi s'altera il petto
 e a parlare mi sforza d'amore
 un desio ch'io non posso spiegar

Levarie explains that the first line (“Solo ai nomi d’amor, di diletto”) is sung over 3 measures, so too is its antistrophe (“Mi si turba, mi s'altera il petto”), and it is the epode, or the contrasting third section, which lasts 8 measures. However, this epode also embodies a prolongation that extends it by 7 measures (example 57).



Example 42: Levarie’s structural analysis of the second stanza of “Non so più.”²⁰⁰

The epode could, in effect, look like this (example 43):

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 53.

ach und doch treibt mich, von Lie-be zu re - den,
e a par - la - re mi sfor - za d'a - mo - re

ein Ver - lan-gen, das ich nicht deu - ten kann.
un de - si - o ch'io non pos - so spie - gar

Example 43: “Non so più,” mm. 22-25 and 33-37.

However, it is instead expanded through the following prolongation (example 44) that splits the epode:

ein Ver - lan-gen, ein Ver - lan-gen, das ich nicht deu - ten kann, ein Ver - lan-gen,
un de - si - o, un de - si - o ch'io non pos - so spie - gar, un de - si - o,

Example 44: “Non so più,” mm. 26-32.

Here, the “un desio” elision is proven to disrupt not only rhythm but the larger formal plan as well. In the second stanza, the clear bar form of the text is musically disrupted by a prolongation that is not suggested in the poetic structure. A similar instance occurs in the third stanza.

Parlo d'amor vegliando,
parlo d'amor sognando,
all'acqua, all'ombra, ai monti,
ai fiori, all'erbe, ai fonti,
all'eco, all'aria, ai venti,
che il suon de' vani accenti
portano via con sé

Levarie directs attention towards the rondo-like repetition of this stanza because the repetition is not called for by the poem. After this stanza is first sung (mm. 54), the text is repeated again (mm. 73) thereby producing the effect of a bow form through its repetition. However, this new bow form does more than contrast the structure of the previous stanza: it

upsets the form of the aria as a whole. The repetition of the third stanza also prompts further disruption with regard to the closing lines of the aria.

E se non ho chi m'oda.
Parlo d'amor con me

The bar form of the poem provides the logical way of leading up to the last lines “which must not be an expected consequent to, or repetition of, an earlier statement.”²⁰¹ That is to say that the punch line (the moment when Cherubino exclaims that if no one cares to listen, he will talk of love to himself) should be nothing but another new musical idea to finish off the *b* section. However, Levarie shows that Cherubino’s inordinate presentation of a bow form (through the repetition of the “Parlo d’amor vegliando” section) destroys the poetic bar form’s formal plan and obliges him to lead up to the punch line in an impromptu—and with regard to conventional procedure—disrespectful manner.²⁰² Levarie sees “the formal ambiguity of this aria seems to be the ingenious result of the composer’s conscious planning.”²⁰³ He not only recognizes the inconsistent, disparate representations of form that are embedded in the aria, he also sees them as deliberate. These shifts between forms contribute to a hysteric representation of structure, an undecided, impulsive quality that may be what Ford attributes to the feminine.

A similar inconsistency is seen in Cherubino’s second aria, “Voi che sapete.” The fourteen lines of poetry seem to resemble an Italian sonnet in how they are organized, two quatrains followed by a sestet:

Voi che sapete che cosa e amor,
Donne, vedete s'io l'ho nel cor.
Quello ch'io provo vi ridiro,
E per me nuovo, capir nol so

²⁰¹ Ibid., 53.

²⁰² Ibid., 53.

²⁰³ Ibid., 55.

Sento un affetto, pien di desir,
 Ch'ora e diletto, ch'ora e martir.
 Gelo e poi sento l'alma avvampar,
 E in un momento torno a gelar.

Ricerco un bene fuori di me,
 Non so ch'il tiene, non so cos'e.
 Sospiro e gemo senza voler,
 Palpito e tremo senza saper,
 Non trovo pace notte ne di,
 Ma pur mi piace languir cosi.

But it is not a strict sonnet for the rhyming pattern does not at all adhere to that of the regular sonnet. Over the course of the sonnet's development, its structure and rhyme scheme have evolved but traditionally it is seen to have the rhyme scheme *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g* as seen in the work of Shakespeare, for instance. In "Voi che sapete," the lines are instead grouped into naive couplets, or *aa, bb*, seen in the rhymes of "amor" and "cor" or "ridiro" and "nol so." Furthermore, the middles of each line are linked to one another by internal rhymes as in "sapete" and "vedete," "provo" and "nuovo." Apart from the departure from a regular sonnet, Levarie suggests that the "conventional design of the poem is further destroyed by the music to which it is set."²⁰⁴ The natural bar form (or *aab* structure) of the poem as a whole is made to fit a musical bow form instead. This occurs as Cherubino repeats the first couplet at the close of the aria, thereby increasing the standard fourteen lines of the poem to sixteen. Through the repetition of these couplets, the aria is a "perfect bow form" though it destroys the literary form on which it is based.²⁰⁵ However, according to Levarie, Cherubino would be untrue to his nature if he was rigidly bound by the outline of a well-organized form.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 86.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 82.

Cherubino's arias could easily have unfolded using potentially normative forms. Indeed, it would have been an easy matter for Mozart to write music that fit the poetic mould instead of trying to create dissolution between the text and music. Clearly Mozart chose to unsettle or disrupt this norm. Levarie sees this choice as depicting Cherubino's naivety, childishness, or rebellion. Could this be extended to include a rebellion of a kind different from the adolescent, a rebellion of a woman who refuses to conform to the roles set out for her? By replacing cohesion between text and music with disorder and disparity, could formal irregularity become an expression of one very irregular woman?

V: Instrumentation

While harmonic and rhythmic features can point towards a feminine reading of Cherubino, perhaps the element most suggestive of femininity is instrumentation. Ford, for instance, hears femininity in the sound of muted strings in "Soave sia il vento" from *Così* where this sonority seems to depict a "dwelling amidst the consummate plenitude of feminine desire."²⁰⁷

A similar effect may result by way of the *con sordine* accompaniment in "Non so più" (example 45).



Example 45: "Non so più," mm. 1.

²⁰⁷ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 142.

This particular sonority could be a possible marker of femininity in Cherubino's music, but the choice of instrument may be an even stronger marker, for Mozart uses a new orchestration in "Non so più" (see appendix b). In addition to the two bassoons, two horns, and strings, Brown-Montesano draws attention to the presence of the clarinet, stating that Cherubino's aria is the first of the opera to feature this instrument.²⁰⁸ While several authors note the presence of the clarinet throughout *Le nozze*, only one seems to have delved deeper into its function within the opera and "Non so più" in particular. Tibor Kozma, while addressing specific qualities of the clarinet, speaks of its unique sonority and its connection to Cherubino. The latest addition to the woodwind family (the first documented use is presumed to be around 1750), the clarinet is often taken as having feminine attributes. This is not because there is something feminine about clarinets, but because it is part of a broader cultural practice of ascribing distinctive personalities to musical instruments. Kozma explains that while the oboe and clarinet are close relatives, "the former is the ingénue, the latter the emotional heroine."²⁰⁹ And he goes one step further by equating the instrument with a female voice type, a "lyric-dramatic soprano or even mezzo soprano."²¹⁰ Other authors also remark at the seemingly feminine qualities of the instrument as when Levarie speaks of its gentleness and elegance or Liebner of its sensuality. Interestingly, both authors refer to Cherubino's music in this regard.²¹¹ The clarinet may be feminine and if so, its association with Cherubino could stand as a marker for his femininity.

To be sure, Mozart's use of the clarinet does not begin with Cherubino nor *Le nozze*. It appears throughout his operatic output from *Idomeneo* onwards. In *Idomeneo* (1780),

²⁰⁸ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 169.

²⁰⁹ Kozma, *The Clarinet in Figaro*, 59.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

²¹¹ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 74.; Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage*, 102.

Mozart uses the instrument sparingly, in only ten of its thirty-two numbers (the Overture, Idamante's aria "Non ho colpa," Idomeneo's arias "Vedrommi in torno" and "Torno la pace," Ilia's aria "Zeffiretti," as well as Elettra's "Odo la lunge," the no. 15 chorus, no. 21 quartet, and no. 26 duet). In *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), he makes slightly more use of the clarinet, in ten of twenty-one numbers (the Overture, Belmonte's three arias "Herr soll ich dich den sehen," "Wenn der Freude Tränen fliessen," and "Ich baue ganz auf deine Stärke," Constanze's two arias "Ach ich liebte, war so glücklich" and "Matern aller Arten," Osmin's aria "Ha! wie will ich triumphiren," the no. 5 chorus, no. 7 trio, and the no. 14 duet). The next two operas make little use of it. *L'oca del Cairo* (1784) does not call for one, and *Lo sposo deluso* (1784) uses it in only one of its four numbers but not in the overture. From this point onwards, Mozart seems to make regular use of the instrument. Although it has only four numbers plus overture, *Der Schauspieldirektor* (1786) uses the clarinet in all but one number. After *Le nozze*, the clarinet is featured in *Don Giovanni* (1787) and *Così* (1790). In *Giovanni*, the clarinet is employed more frequently than ever before, even more so than in *Le nozze*. It appears in the women's arias (Elvira's arias "A chi mi dice mai" and "Mi tradi," Zerlina's "Vedrai, carino," and Anna's "Crudele! Ah no, mio bene"), in three ensembles (the no. 9 quartet, no. 15 trio, no. 19 sextet, and the finales, as well as in two male arias (Don Giovanni's "Fin ch'han dal vino calda la testa" and Don Ottavio's "Il mio tesoro"). In *Così*, the clarinet is featured even more prominently than in *Don Giovanni*, seen in about half of the numbers (sixteen of thirty-one), the majority of ensembles, as well as in five arias (Dorabella's arias "Smanie implacabili" and "È amor un ladroncello," Fiordiligi's "Come scoglio," and Ferrando's "Un' aura amorosa" and "Ah lo veggio quell' anima bella"). Mozart's use of the clarinet in *Le nozze*, however, illustrates that this new sonority might

have served a specific function in relation to Cherubino in particular, the character for which it seems to have been reserved.

Kozma discusses the orchestration of *Le nozze* and traces the presence of the clarinet throughout. He begins with the overture and explains that, while the clarinets are present, they are only heard for one brief moment, “called upon to add body to tutti passages [...] but [do] not obtain soloistic prominence.”²¹² After the overture, Mozart dismisses the trumpets, timpani and clarinets while the strings, flutes, oboes, bassoons and horns take over, a combination that Kozma maintains is fitting for the duet between Susanna and Figaro. He argues that trumpets and timpani would have been too aggressive for this scene but questions why the lyric clarinet would also be omitted. Kozma then examines the subsequent numbers, reminding us of Figaro’s “Se vuol ballare,” Bartolo’s “La Vendetta,” and the coy duet between Susanna and Marcellina, all while remarking: “Still no clarinets!” Kozma jokes that perhaps Mozart did not know what to do with the instrument but remarks that he might have instead been saving them for some very special moment. This moment, according to Kozma, is “Non so più” and the entry of Cherubino. Like Kerman, Kozma understands Cherubino’s music as directly reflecting his character. But what exactly about his character does it reveal? If the clarinet has a feminine association, could it be pointing to Cherubino’s femininity?

It might seem to be a stretch to believe that the clarinet was a symbol for Cherubino’s feminine gender. However, the way this instrument is used to depict Cherubino should at least alert us to the distinctiveness of the instrument, and maybe, therefore, the distinctiveness of the character. Scholars who analyze *Le nozze* understand the clarinet as a unique feature although few speculate why. Additionally, some might argue that the clarinet’s consistent association with Cherubino in *Le nozze* was nothing other than

²¹² Kozma, *The Clarinet in Figaro*, 61.

coincidence. Perhaps, as Kozma jokes, Mozart did not in fact know what to do with the clarinets. However, as illustrated in a letter to his father, Mozart was not confused by, or oblivious to, this instrument, but was instead excited about the possibilities it might open up.

Monsieur mon très cher Père! Mannheim, December 3, 1778 (excerpt)

Does Herr Feiner play the English horn as well? If only we had clarinets in the orchestra!—You wouldn't believe what marvellous effects flutes, oboes, and clarinetti produce in a Sinfonie.²¹³

In fact, Mozart was so excited about the clarinet that, in “Non so più,” he “dispenses with flutes and oboes lest their kindred voices, moving in a similar range, overshadow the blushing, languishing, restrained sensuousness of the clarinets.”²¹⁴ It is evident that the clarinet was not a mindless addition for Mozart but was a special instrument that deserved special recognition. It is certainly significant that, in *Le nozze*, it was saved for Cherubino and this fact, therefore, makes this character special as well.

Kozma adds that, not only are the clarinets a new feature, introduced for the first time in “Non so più,” but they are the dominant obbligato instrument throughout the aria.²¹⁵ If the sheer presence of this new instrument is not enough to take notice, its function as an obbligato throughout the aria should be. In addition to featuring the clarinets, the aria also has the instrument play many of the melodic and rhythmic properties that supposedly evoke femininity: it is the clarinets that upset meter through syncopations (example 46-47). Furthermore, the clarinet is given chromaticisms (example 48), specifically in the measure where Cherubino speaks of his desire.

²¹³ Spaethling, *Mozart's Letters, Mozart's Life: Selected Letters*, 197.

²¹⁴ Kozma, *The Clarinet in Figaro*, 62.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

Allegro vivace

2 Clarinetti in B

Example 46: “Non so più,” mm. 1-5.

Example 47: “Non so più,” mm. 60-64.

Clarinet:

Cherubino:

Example 48: “Non so più,” mm. 31-32.

After “Non so più,” the clarinets become a prominent feature for another important *Le nozze* woman. After appearing in the trio following Cherubino’s aria, they are absent until the Countess’s aria, “Porgi Amor,” which, as discussed earlier, shares the same key, similar meter, and now the clarinet sonority with Cherubino’s “Non so più.” According to Ford, the clarinets here are noteworthy for how they convey, through wilting thirds, the Countess’ femininity, representing her grief and sexual dependence.²¹⁶ (See example 49.)

Example 49: “Porgi Amor,” mm. 7-10.

²¹⁶ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 151.

Could the clarinets' setting in wilting thirds, which interestingly enough also occur in "Non so più," be a marker of femininity? (See example 50-51.)




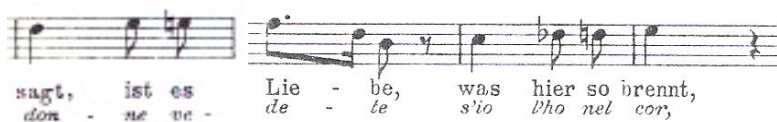
Example 50: "Non so più," mm. 84-86.



Example 51: "Non so più," mm. 76-81.

The clarinets return to take another prominent role in Cherubino's second aria "Voi che sapete," doubling the chromatic vocal line as Levarie has already pointed out²¹⁷ (example 52).

Clarinet: 

Cherubino: 

Example 52: "Voi che sapete," mm. 13-16.

Furthermore, at the reprise of the opening melody (mm. 61), the clarinet is the instrument that "anticipates Cherubino's chromaticisms [...] spelling its first chromatic ascent"²¹⁸ (see example 53).

²¹⁷ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 83.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

Clarinet: 

Cherubino: 
 ennt, sagt, ist es
 ennt, don - ne ve -

Example 53: “Voi che sapete,” mm. 65-66.

Again, just as with “Non so più,” it is evident that Mozart, by giving chromaticism to the clarinet, tasks this instrument with exposing what can be taken as musical markers of femininity. Could this newest member of the classical orchestra function as a musical sonority of the feminine?

Another way in which the clarinet might be heard as having a suggestive function might be found in instrumental preludes to arias. Ford, speaking of the Countess’ “Porgi Amor,” for instance, argues that the “very presence of an orchestral introduction, and then such decorative expansiveness, suggests an entirely different world of sensibilities, implying a malleable and irrational subjective temporality—[it is] the music of femininity.”²¹⁹ “Voi che sapete” begins with such an introduction and, therefore, could be seen as representing the character’s femininity. More specifically, in this introduction, it is the clarinet that introduces the melody, intensifying the femininity of the instrumental introduction itself by tasking the clarinet to evoke it most clearly (example 54).

1 Clarinetto in B 
dolce

Example 54: Clarinet in “Voi che sapete,” mm. 1-3.

²¹⁹ Ford, *Così?: Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas*, 140.

VI: Conclusion

If Mozart did, in fact, create music that could embody meaning through its elements, the various musical features he used for Cherubino could be heard to signify a feminine gender. Having examined these features in his music, it would seem that certain musical features can not only be taken to represent femininity thereby allowing Cherubino to be seen in a new and provocative light. But the delineation of character through musical analysis alone, even when the argument can find support through the libretto or play, is not sufficient evidence for justifying my central claim, that Cherubino should be regarded as a woman. I would like to suggest that this is the case not only because there are other kinds of music associated with Cherubino, but also because music itself is indecisive when it comes to what it can mean. In addition to what I have argued are feminine elements in Cherubino's music, there are instances where Cherubino's musical settings evoke masculinity. Speaking to the opening of "Non so più," for instance, Levarie characterizes its opening diatonic progressions, uncomplicated harmonies, symmetrically repeated phrases, and perfect authentic cadences as strong in the masculine sense.²²⁰ In the same aria, Liebner sees similarities in the music of other Mozartian men. The ceaseless quaver motion of the aria "already glows [with] the demoniacal passion of the champagne aria of Don Giovanni, yet still suffused with the bloom of youth."²²¹ Even more troubling, all of the aforementioned musical features that Ford wants to associate with femininity are not found only in conjunction with female characters, nor can they always point to femininity. If lyricism is to be understood as a token of femininity, should we understand all male characters who sing lyrically to be women too? Is the hero of *Zauberflöte* to be feminized simply because his portrait aria "Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernet

²²⁰ Levarie, *Mozart's Le Nozze Di Figaro, a Critical Analysis*, 49.

²²¹ Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage*, 104.

schön?” is lyrical? Or if the presence of chromaticism is to be gendered as feminine, then all men with chromaticism in their music would be women.

Throughout this chapter, I have made reference to authors who maintain that drama and characters are created by the music alone. If this were really the case, Cherubino would be a hermaphrodite considering that both masculine and feminine qualities are embedded in his/her music. And most other characters would be too. While musical notation may play a role in the depiction of a character, it certainly cannot take credit for creating or even establishing basic features of characters. Brophy has already come to this realization. She states: “perhaps we should re-examine our notion of what, in opera, is musically and what is dramatically achieved. For the music is so obviously the more important partner that we may be gulled into supposing that, because the music does most, it does all.”²²² Despite having had this insight, she seems to have been gulled herself when she states that “our concept of operatic characters is drawn from the words and the dramatic action.”²²³ Through my analysis of the music as well as the libretto and implied action of the drama, I have discovered that neither of these aspects of the work create the character, nor are they able to depict the character accurately, at least when it comes to assigning gender. For that we now turn to the role of performance for it is in this domain that Cherubino’s gender can actually be realized.

²²² Brophy, *'Figaro' and the Limitations of Music*, 35.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 36.

Chapter 4: Cherubino in Performance

The life of the mezzo-soprano is often vocalized in songs that poke fun at their roles, travesti in particular, and the challenges they pose. Ben Moore's "I Can Be a Sexy Lady," written for mezzo soprano Susan Graham, makes mention of the trouser role and of Cherubino in particular.

It's true that you've seen me in collars and pants
 In those operas by Mozart and Strauss
 And I guess it's my fate, 'cause the music's so great
 And I so often bring down the house

But one can get tired of those dammed old pants
 So I'm here to proclaim
 If you give me the chance
 You will see at a glance that
 I can be a sexy lady
 All your doubts will disappear
 I can tell you'll have to agree with me. How sir? Well, it's very clear

I can be a sexy lady
 Why can't mezzo strut their stuff
 You reply: "There's Carmen and Delilah,"
 Well sweetie pie, that ain't enough
 'Cause I... ("Voi che sapete" melody played)
 Yes, it's a brilliant tune
 Makes people swoon
 You can sing it, praise it, till you're out of your wits
 But you don't have to hide your waist or strap down your...

"Der Rosenkavalier," now that's just too cruel
 To turn down Octavian you'd have to be a fool
 But at least I get to wear a dress when I'm a girl playing a boy playing a girl
 What a mess!

Let me be a sexy lady
 I'm so tired of kissing chicks
 Don't get me wrong, it's perfectly fine with me
 But it isn't so great when you're single and straight and you want your kicks

I should have known
 Handel would hold a candle to those pants role every mezzo longs to sing
 But with all those counter tenors what's the use
 For although we all love David Daniels, we girls might as well be cocker spaniels

I guess I'll just have to give in
 But no I won't fall for the trap that you've set
 Now I'm the whistle blower
 I'll play Tosca you can bet
 Just put it down a wee bit lower

And then I can be a sexy lady
 It's my turn to strut my stuff
 And don't even mention a certain new role I've been singing
 'Cause I'm still seeing red from the moment they said I would play a nun

What can I say...
 It's too hard to resist
 I'll sing Cherubino but still I insist
 I can be a sexy lady even though I'm 6 feet tall
 I'll sing all your pants roles, old maid, even dance roles
 Oh what the hell, I'll sing them all²²⁴

This song reflects many issues for the performance of trouser role characters, some of which I will discuss in this chapter. However, the song's lyrics insist that the mezzo can, *despite* the travesti role, be a sexy lady. Perhaps what Moore as well as those who theorize about the pants role and *Le nozze*'s pageboy in particular do not realize is that all those Cherubinos could have been sexy ladies all along.

In previous chapters, I have examined how features of music and text might be viewed as markers of Cherubino's femininity. However, the presence of many counterfactuals, the presence of lyricism or chromaticism or rhythmic instability and the like cannot be taken as sufficient conditions for establishing the gender of Cherubino. While I still understand these structural elements as possible markers of gender, it is not actually

²²⁴ Transcription by E. Puttee from You tube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6aovAqtrUAc>

these elements that tell us who and what Cherubino is. In this chapter, I will argue that it is the act of performing that creates character and, with that, gender.

It may be that Mozart and Da Ponte wanted to depict an alternate femininity in Cherubino, and that what might be seen as markers femininity in both music and text are indexes of that intention. But what does it matter if these markers are in the score but the performer does not take notice? What happens is that we are left with male Cherubinos regardless of what Mozart and Da Ponte may have wished. This is borne out by the countless portrayals of male Cherubinos that have graced the stage. It becomes clear that it takes a performer to notice the clues in the score and to actualize them in performance. The feminine properties of Cherubino's music and text only result in a feminine Cherubino if the performer chooses to perform this character as feminine. Only then will we finally have the female Cherubino we might have been meant to see all along.

I believe that performance is the key factor because it was only after my performance of Cherubino that my insights into this character were formed. I am now convinced of his femininity, but this understanding was not as a result of analysis of the score or text but through playing the character in actual performance. Upon reflection of my interpretation, one moment stands out in particular as a catalyst for this transformation in thinking: Cherubino's costuming. This character's dress is so drastically different from the costumes for other female operatic roles that it presents a unique set of challenges, especially when it comes to breast binding. Before each performance, I would roll out the yard of tensor bandage, enlisting the other Cherubino whose breasts you bound the night before, to 'defeminize' you. When the novelty wore off, I deeply struggled with this element of costuming. This aspect of costuming changed breathing, posture, stance and movement. As in my first operatic experience in Poulenc's *Dialogue des Carmelites*, where I had to become

accustomed to being dressed in a nun's habit and the implications this had in regards to resonance whilst wearing a head piece, I remembered how much costuming impacts the singing, and in the case of Cherubino's tensor bandage, how much the costuming impacts gender as well. In my second night as Cherubino, I was preparing for Cherubino's entrance for "Non so più" in which I was to confess my love to all the women of the palace. Before the aria began, I felt the pin that secured the binding unclasp. Each movement that I had planned to exude masculinity by assuming some bold or youthful stance prompted the further loosening of the binding. When I stretched out my arms, or when I passionately embraced Susanna, I could feel my femininity slowly take over, as the tensor bandage, designed to conceal it, unravelled. By the time my aria was over (after Cherubino had jumped on the bed, hidden behind it and in it, and been thrown about by an energetic Figaro in "Non più andrai"), the tensor bandage had fallen around my waist. From the audience's perspective, breast binding might strip away the evidence of femininity, but, for me, it only highlighted what is really there, underneath the cloth. It may appear that Cherubino is flat-chested and this may be taken as a sign of his masculinity for any observer, but the reality is that the binding is there to conceal the truth, a truth that, for the performer cannot be concealed. In the previous performance and rehearsals, the tightness of the securely fastened binding would labour every breath and only drew attention to what it was hiding. Yet when the pain is gone, and the bandage as well, femininity is exuded just the same from the performer's perspective. It was these physical sensations that sparked new insights for me, insights that suggested Cherubino should be a woman. However, this is just my opinion, formed through the embodied experience of performance. This does not mean that Cherubino cannot be a man. In fact, that was how I was supposed to portray him in my performance. I did not, therefore, create the female interpretation of Cherubino for which I have advocated in this

thesis because I had not yet gained the performance-based understanding I now have of this character. If I were to perform this character again, I would—if the director were willing—portray him as a female so that I might finally solidify this character’s gender in the only way that matters, in performance.

In this chapter, I will discuss how gender is created through action, thereby challenging the notion that operatic meaning, specifically the traits that can or cannot be attributed to characters, is created by music or text. I will show instead how Cherubino’s gender is determined by how he is performed. I will begin this chapter by examining theories of gender performativity to show that action, or performance, is what actually creates gender. With this in mind, I will examine the key gender scenes of *Le nozze* to show how Cherubino’s gender is a function of how “he” is performed.

I: Acts

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that gender identity depends on action. Gender is “performative,” constituted through a series of “acts” that have been repeated by the body over time. It is these acts that create, rather than express, gender identity.²²⁵ In “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” she argues that acts are traditionally understood as expressive of a core identity and that “these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way.”²²⁶ This popular belief, that gesture is expressive of gender, is problematic in that it “suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, posture and gestures.”²²⁷ Butler argues that if gender attributes and acts

²²⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 43.

²²⁶ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 489.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 489.

are regarded as performative instead of expressive then there is no pre-existing identity and, therefore, gender is not a characteristic imposed on the body but is rather constituted by the actions the body create.²²⁸ It is tempting to apply this theory of gender performativity to the question of Cherubino's gender. We could argue that Cherubino, who lives within the written words of *Le mariage* and in the music and text of *Le nozze*, has no pre-existing gendered identity. He is neither intrinsically male nor female but becomes one or the other (or both!) through the repetition of chosen acts. Thus, his "true" gender arises not in musical structure or dialogue but in how he is played.

Of course, Butler's theory of gender performativity was not designed to apply to operatic characters to begin with and, clearly, has been confused with performance in the sense of acting. For, a distinction should be made between performativity and performance in the theatrical sense. Butler herself addresses this difference, stating that performativity refers to a process, a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, while performance is a bounded act.²²⁹ Geraldine Harris, in turn, analyzes this distinction: "in short, if I understand Butler correctly, a performative act only appears as theatrical in that it seems to arise from the authority or will of the act."²³⁰ If this is indeed the case, that performing gender is not the same as "acting" in the theatrical sense, perhaps the theory of gender performativity should not apply to Cherubino. But it is difficult to dismiss its applicability altogether because, as Butler asserts, "the body becomes its gender through acts"²³¹ and in opera, both the body and its acts are facets that manifest in both musical performance and actual life.

²²⁸ Ibid., 488, 489.

²²⁹ Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 72.

²³⁰ Ibid., 73.

²³¹ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 485.

Another aspect of Butler's theory is how much it advocates for the reconstitution of gendered norms. Indeed, her work continues "to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power."²³² We are urged to make "gender trouble" by disrupting the categories that keep gender in its place, and we do this specifically through "mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation," all of which need to be performed. One situation in which we can perform this task involves dressing in drag for drag is a way of destabilizing the divisions and categories that keep gender norms in their place. Could Cherubino, especially a Cherubino who is a woman in disguise as I have argued in previous chapters, be a prototype for this social project? Could he (she) be a paradigm for a new model of what it means to be a woman? And is the covert narrative of *Le nozze*, therefore, about engendering gender trouble?

If Butler's theory does not actually address performance in the theatrical or musical sense, we can turn to Sue-Ellen Case, whose work can more readily apply to an operatic character. Although Butler seems to argue that gender is dependent upon a series of acts, she rarely specifies what these acts are or how one act versus another creates a male or female gender. Case, however, makes these distinctions much more explicit by referring to the theatre of ancient Greece in which female characters were played by male actors in drag. (Women were, of course, banned from stage performance at this time.) She writes: "besides wearing the female costume and the female mask, the male actor might have indicated gender through gesture, movement and intonation."²³³ In *Split Britches*, she expands upon the idea of gender difference by highlighting the "sexual difference that people 'wear'

²³² Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 44.

²³³ Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 11.

through stance, gesture, movement, mannerisms, voice and dress.”²³⁴ Of course, when she speaks of the performance, as opposed to the performativity, of gender, Case is not referring to operatic characters or music at all. Nevertheless, the elements she tasks with the creation of gender can easily be found in operatic performance. In what follows, I will use these facets of gender identity to analyze how gender is portrayed in specific performances of *Le nozze*. If gender is created through action, or through the differences that people “wear,” the only way an operatic character can assume a gender is if it is created through such acts, which are only discernible through performance. If we understand that Cherubino’s gender is created in performance, this understanding still might not be enough to warrant performing him as a woman, unless of course we are following Butler’s imperative to create gender trouble. Even though Cherubino is most often performed as a male, the character’s portrayal as a woman is entirely feasible. For if gender is something that is not inherent but is constituted, then that brings the possibility that his gender is “capable of being constituted differently.”²³⁵

II: Specific Performances

Despite this possibility, that the gender of a character depends on how he is played, directors, conductors, and costume designers involved in productions of *Le nozze* tend to understand Cherubino as male, if actual performances are taken as an index of belief. It is impossible to say why Cherubino is almost always performed as a male. Perhaps it has to do with how they understand the travesti tradition, how they read the libretto, or, most likely, because that is how it was done when they saw von Stade’s Cherubino at the Met. Nevertheless, there is a

²³⁴ Sue-Ellen Case, *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 13.

²³⁵ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 483.

full range of how Cherubino might be performed that is documented on video recordings. To illustrate this range, I will contrast three vastly different depictions of Cherubino, from the most demure to the most suggestive. The three performances are:

- John Eliot Gardner and the English Baroque Soloists with Pamela Helen Stephen as Cherubino, directed by Olivier Mille.²³⁶
- Nikolaus Harnoncourt and the Wiener Philharmoniker with Christine Schäfer as Cherubino, directed by Brian Large.²³⁷
- Craig Smith and the Wiener Symphoniker with Susan Larson as Cherubino, directed by Peter Sellars.²³⁸

This comparison does not only represent traditional versus provocative performances. It also is designed to show how certain productions minimize or maximize the key gender scenes of *Le nozze*. I will focus primarily on Act II beginning with Cherubino's "Voi che sapete," the dressing scene that follows, and Cherubino's interaction with the Countess and Susanna in these moments. Along the way, I will refer to my own performing experience as well as other productions:

- John Pritchard and the London Philharmonic Orchestra with Frederica von Stade as Cherubino, directed by Peter Hall.²³⁹
- Georg Solti and the Paris National Opera Orchestra and Chorus with Frederica von Stade, directed by Giorgio Strekler.²⁴⁰
- René Jacobs and the Concerto Köln with Angelika Kirchschrager as Cherubino, directed by Jean-Louis Martinoty.²⁴¹
- Antonio Pappano and Covent Garden Orchestra of the Royal Opera House with Rinat Shaham as Cherubino, directed by David McVicar.²⁴²
- Franz Welser-Möst and the Orchester der Oper Zurich with Judith Schmid as Cherubino, directed by Felix Breisach.²⁴³

²³⁶ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, DVD, directed by Olivier Mille (Hamburg, Germany: Deutsche Grammophon GmbH, 2001)

²³⁷ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, DVD, directed by Brian Large (Hamburg, Germany: Deutsche Grammophon GmbH, 2006)

²³⁸ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, DVD, directed by Peter Sellars (London: Decca, c1990, p1991)

²³⁹ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, VHS, directed by Peter Hall (New York: Video Artists International, 1973)

²⁴⁰ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, VHS, directed by Giorgio Strekler (Paris, France: Antenne 2, 1908)

²⁴¹ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, VHS, directed by Jean-Louis Martinoty (Paris: Bel Air Classiques, 2006)

²⁴² *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, E-Book, directed by David McVicar (Waldron, England: Opus Arte, 2008)

²⁴³ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, VHS, directed by Felix Breisach (Paris, France: EMI Records, 2010)

- Karl Böhm and the Wiener Philharmoniker with Maria Ewing as Cherubino, directed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle.²⁴⁴

i: Mild

Perhaps the most traditional performance of Cherubino is found in the Gardiner/Mille production of *Le nozze di Figaro*. In keeping with Gardiner's purist approach, this performance is generically traditional. Cherubino, played by Pamela Helen Stephen, is represented as a young male, his gender created through illustrations of the voice, dress, and body. In Act II, Cherubino enters the Countess' bedroom where he is asked to sing his canzone. Stephen takes her place and begins "Voi che sapete" and, through performance, creates a conception of the character that exudes masculinity and youth in particular. For the first stanza of the aria, Stephen sings in a childish voice. Her sound is thin perhaps to evoke the nervousness of the character. Her phrases are short, interrupted by gulps and gasps for air, and on occasion, her voice cracks (on purpose, of course) suggesting the awkward nature of an adolescent boy whose voice is changing. Through this performance, particularly the methods employed regarding the manipulation of her voice, Stephen evokes the masculinity of her character.

Masculinity is also indexed by the design concept for Cherubino. This is, presumably, not a choice of Stephen's but rather that of the costume designer, Patrick Lebreton. Stephen's hair is cut short (or masked by a short wig), her torso appears to be wrapped tightly as there is little to no hint of her bosom, and the beige pants that she sports throughout are tailored to insinuate a masculine physique as they are strategically fitted to pucker at the front, leaving space for the male appendage the audience is to assume is there. Apart from this costuming

²⁴⁴ *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, DVD, directed by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle (Hamburg, Germany: Deutsche Grammophon GmbH, 2005)

that remains constant throughout most of the production, the Act II dressing scene reveals choices in costuming that further affect the perception of Cherubino's gender. After "Voi che sapete," Susanna (Alison Hagley) begins to dress Cherubino in women's clothing. We know, from consulting the libretto in chapter 2, that dressing Cherubino is not the extent of the action: later in the drama, when Cherubino is forced to hide with the arrival of the Count, the Countess confesses to her husband that Cherubino is in the closet but also that he is half naked.²⁴⁵ If this is the case, the dressing scene would not only have involved dressing Cherubino in women's clothing but also undressing him. How else could he end up half naked? But the Gardiner/Mille production does not illustrate this. During Susanna's "Venite inginocchiatevi," Stephen's Cherubino merely takes off his vest, and Susanna puts women's clothing right on top of his existing clothes. Without seeing any hint of Stephen's female body, we are more readily able to buy into the male reading of Cherubino that the Gardiner/Mille production clearly wishes us to prescribe to the character. As such, we are nudged into the traditional understanding of the character without being tempted by the gender play that would ensue if the performer playing Cherubino were to really undress on stage. This staging is not uncommon. Other than outer clothing (such as a jacket or vest), no undressing occurs in the Pritchard/Hall production either. However, an alternative to undressing in full view is often employed as well. In the Solti/Strekler, Jacobs/Martinoty, and Pappano/McVicar productions, for instance, Cherubino is dressed in women's clothing but all the action takes place behind a screen. Not only is this action hidden from view, audience members cannot even tell if Cherubino has undressed behind the screen, or if he simply has put the female clothing overtop of his male outfit. In the University of Ottawa's

²⁴⁵ Hughes, *Famous Mozart Operas: An Analytical Guide for the Opera-Goer and Armchair Listener*, 61.

2010 production, this (un)dressing scene was cut entirely, perhaps because of the time constraints the production had to meet, or perhaps because the undressing scene itself would have opened up the possibility of gender play. While the Gardiner/Mille production uses illustration of voice, dress, and body that create a male character, it too inhibits gender play. It does not cross the line of appropriateness even if this line might have been meant to be crossed. I cannot determine who had control over these factors (whether it was the conductor, director or costume designer who made these distinct choices), but it is clear that these elements create Cherubino's masculinity on stage.

Voice and dress are facets noted by Case as creating gender but so is gesture. Von Stade's portrayal, in the Pritchard/ Hall production for instance, creates Cherubino's masculinity through the gestures she delivers. When von Stade enters to sing "Non so più," she embodies masculinity through the stance she takes. Her strides are long, her posture is strong, and her gestures are abrupt. Half way through the aria, she sits down on a chair with her legs apart. This stance is prominent, firstly, because it is one of the only variations in movement throughout the aria (the rest of the time von Stade is stationary) but also because it is a characteristically male gesture, going against the "legs closed" philosophy of femininity. This gesture is matched by Schäfer's Cherubino who sings most of "Voi che sapete" leaning against a wall with her legs wide apart.

ii: Medium

This performance, with Schäfer as Cherubino, takes a more disruptive stance in how it represents sexuality, one that seems to blur the gender lines. The undressing scene in particular is one of the most provocative I have seen to date. Here, Susanna (Anna Netrebko) kneels down to undo Cherubino's pants and, for the rest of "Venite inginocchiatevi," he

remains in only his underwear. This is much like Judith Schmid's portrayal where Cherubino is undressed down to his underclothes as well. (In this production though, to top it off, Susanna (Martina Janková) undresses herself down to her lingerie and then proceeds to get dressed in Cherubino's clothing instead.) This performance by Schmid certainly opens the door for gender play by virtue of how much Cherubino's actual female body (and Susanna's too) are revealed. But Schäfer's portrayal takes matters even further. In this production, directed by Brian Large, there are many intimate moments not only between the Countess and Cherubino but also between all three ladies. During Netrebko's "Venite inginocchiatevi," for instance, the Countess and Cherubino kiss for approximately twelve measures of the aria (mm. 24-36). Then, in a brief two measures of rest (mm. 37-39), Susanna interrupts the Countess and kisses Cherubino herself. After both of the women have had their turn, Susanna (still singing her aria) lays down on the floor as an offering to Cherubino. She unbuttons her blouse and takes Cherubino hands and guides them over her body. Cherubino then takes Susanna's place on the floor and both the women return the favour. The Countess then assumes the position and she and Cherubino begin to kiss once again as Susanna sings the final words of her aria. This sensual interaction is only broken once the audience's applause has ceased.

Such a staging is certainly provocative in terms of its sexual connotations. Furthermore, it has clearly favoured gender play, as Cherubino has only been undressed and never gets redressed in women's clothing at all, quite the opposite from the Gardiner/Mille production. Another aspect of this performance is suggestive with regard Cherubino's gender: this particular performance adds a character not in the *dramatis personae* that Da Ponte specifies. Instead of the typical eleven characters, this production adds a twelfth silent role, that of a cherub. The cherub is present from the beginning and has the task of

awakening the still characters from their statue positions in the overture. However, the cherub takes on a more prominent and provocative role as the action ensues. Dressed in the same clothing as Cherubino, he acts as a sort of happy *Doppelgänger* to the pageboy. Such a doubling is completely consistent with what many critics have noted about *Le nozze*: it is all about pairings. Kerman, for instance, suggests that the pairing of Figaro and Susanna against the Count and Countess illustrates a parallel in which Mozart delighted and included in his other works: in *Seraglio*, Belmonte-Constanze versus Pedrillo-Blonde; in *Così*, Ferrando-Fiordiligi versus Guglielmo-Dorabella; and (most explicitly of all) in *Zauberflöte*, Tamino-Pamina versus Papageno-Papagena.²⁴⁶ In every case, the pairs complement each other carefully, and, in *Figaro*, the pairing is hammered home by having the two women (Susanna and the Countess) pose as each other.²⁴⁷ These pairings often play out in performance where more pairs are seen than just those illustrated by Kerman. These pairings in *Le nozze* are most clearly represented in the finale. Here, all rightful pairs are reunited: husbands and wives are reconciled or new matches are formed (e.g. Marcellina and Bartolo). Whether old or new, these matches are often reflected in the staging of the finale where each pair stands as a distinct unit, either embracing or linked by holding hands. In the Gardiner/Mille production, for instance, not only are the Count and Countess and Figaro and Susanna joined as expected, but Cherubino too is matched with Barbarina, not an unreasonable match especially given that their union was decided just a few scenes earlier (recitative before no. 22- Act III finale). This pairing is also seen in the staging of several productions including both von Stade productions, the Jacobs/Martinoty, Pappano/McVicar, and Böhm/Ponnelle

²⁴⁶ Joseph Kerman, "Marriages in *Figaro*," in *The Opera News Book of Figaro*, ed. Frank Merkling (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1967), 42.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

productions: each Cherubino is joined with his respective Barbarina. Such a pairing might suggest Cherubino's masculinity as he is the masculine counterpart in each pair.

Groupings were also carried out in the University of Ottawa's production with one important exception: Cherubino did not necessarily represent an unambiguous masculine counterpart to Barbarina. Instead, his ambiguity was highlighted. In the finale, for instance, our staging did not outline pairs but divided male and female characters into two distinct groups instead. This grouping is untraditional in two respects: firstly, the finale has characters sing about pairings "Sposi! Amici!" (Spouses! Friends!) and would seem to clearly warrant grouping in pairs. Secondly, the staging in the University of Ottawa production had Cherubino standing in the group of women instead of with the men. Although our production seemed to highlight a male-female divide instead of male-female counterparts, the final curtain call illustrated the traditional couplings as it involved singers coming out for their final bow in male/female pairs. With the exception of Don Curzio and Basilio—two minor characters who came out together—the Countess and Count, Susanna and Figaro, Marcellina and Bartolo, and the father/daughter pair of Antonio and Barbarina each took their bows together. As Cherubino, I took my final bow alone, not as a marker of my importance but rather as a signifier of my not belonging. Of course, with only eleven characters, someone will always have to be out of place, and it seems natural that that someone would have to be Cherubino. This production highlighted Cherubino's lack of a counterpart, and this played upon the ambiguity inherent in this character.

In Schäfer's performance, however, Cherubino is matched with another character created precisely for that purpose. In the final moments of the finale, the cherub, instead of awakening the characters as he did in the overture, now puts them to sleep. Acting as a sort of puppet master, the cherub guides each of the dazed characters into their places. In this

arrangement, Cherubino is nestled with the Countess in the adagio moments of the finale when the characters sing “Ah tutti contenti saremo così” (Ah! Thus everyone shall be happy). Then, with the sudden musical shift to the *allegro assai*, the characters seem to break free from a spell and sing “Questo giorno di tormenti, di caprici e di follia, in contenti e in allegria solo amor può terminar” (Only love can end this day of torments, fancies and change it in contentment and joy). As they break away from their places, their movement seems to insinuate that the madness of this crazy day was really at the hands of the puppet-master cherub. Now acting of their own volition, the rightful pairs are reconciled: the Countess returns to the Count, Figaro and Susanna are reunited, and Marcellina and Bartolo sit together despite the efforts of the cherub to keep them apart. Each of the characters rejects the cherub until he goes to Cherubino and caresses him. I first wondered if this moment represented not a reunion of two individuals, but two parts of one person: the cherub was, perhaps, caressing Cherubino as if saying goodbye to part of himself (perhaps also explaining their identical costuming). However, I remarked that this was a passionate moment instead, and it was clear to me that the final pair had been made. For me, this pairing symbolized yet another male-female relationship, showing Cherubino’s femininity in opposition to her male counterpart, the cherub. This is the meaning that I have derived from this performance, and I recognize that other viewers may understand it differently. Nevertheless, this production certainly brings the idea of sexuality—and maybe even Cherubino’s gender—to the fore.

iii: Hot

While the Harncourt/Large production illuminates the idea of gender and sexuality far more overtly than the Gardiner/Mille production, it is certainly no match to the production

conducted by Craig Smith with the Wiener Symphoniker, directed by Peter Sellars. During the 1980s, Sellars, and set designer Adrienne Lobel, set each of the Mozart/Da Ponte operas in contemporary New York: *Così fan tutte* was set at a New York diner, *Don Giovanni* in the South Bronx, and *Figaro* in Trump Tower.²⁴⁸ In this 1990 production of *Figaro*, Cherubino is depicted as a lesbian, or as Dellamora puts it, “a cross-dressed dyke in her mid-thirties.”²⁴⁹ David Levin describes Sellars’ depiction of this character: “Cherubino (Susan Larson) enters noisily, wearing jeans, sneakers, a red baseball cap, and a Marcel Dionne New York Rangers jersey.”²⁵⁰ Levin describes how Sellars’ evocation of Trump Tower is fitting for *Le nozze* characters. The Count’s libido can represent Donald Trump himself, but the other characters also seem to translate easily into familiar, though less specific, referential figures: “the young and impoverished lovers, the jilted trophy wife, the sly, slick nefarious gossip.”²⁵¹ Levin then states that Cherubino is not as easily placed, despite the geographic and cultural specificity of the hockey jersey. He explains that “the kind of irresolute singularity Cherubino offers at the conclusion of this production is [...], in part, attributable to the necessary irresolution of gender that the figure embodies.”²⁵² Clearly, while Dellamora has interpreted Larson’s Cherubino as a lesbian, Levin has a different view of this character. He begins by stating that Cherubino is a “modern-day sports-obsessed adolescent.”²⁵³ While seemingly implying the masculinity of the character, Levin quickly withdraws this association of gender and instead argues that “Cherubino emerges as something like a hermaphroditic figure.”²⁵⁴ As Levin’s

²⁴⁸ David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 71.

²⁴⁹ Dellamora, *Mozart and the Politics of Intimacy: The Marriage of Figaro in Toronto, Paris and New York*, 259.

²⁵⁰ Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, Zemlinsky*, 91.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

earlier quotation illustrates, it is the conclusion of the production where Cherubino's lack of gender is highlighted and it is, once again, his pairing, or lack thereof, where this is most clearly embodied. Unlike typical productions where Cherubino and Barbarina are joined at the end, the Sellars production depicts Cherubino's gender through "the irresolute singularity" that Cherubino emphasizes in the finale. Levin explains that the finale presents a flurry of domestication: "Figaro and Susanna are rejoined, as are the Count and the Countess, as well as Bartolo and Marcellina."²⁵⁵ Levin, however, questions "and what about Cherubino and Barbarina? The piece figures them among those uniting or united at the work's conclusion. While the other characters are set to be married or reconciled in marriage, Cherubino and Barbarina's marriage remains unscheduled when the opera comes to a close."²⁵⁶ As the principals pair off and exit the stage, Cherubino is left without a partner. Levin explains that "as the final accord resounds, we are afforded a fleeting glimpse of a single figure, Cherubino, left behind,"²⁵⁷ while questioning what we are to make of this. By taking into consideration the traditional male/female pairings in Mozart's operas, as well as how these pairings play out on stage, we could assume that Cherubino is not paired in the Sellars production because he embodies the male/female counterpart on his own.

Seeing how one critic in particular is unsure of what Cherubino's gender in this particular production might be, we could assume that Sellars was intent on representing gender ambiguity instead of the femininity that Dellamora attributes to the character. Levin says that, traditionally, Cherubino appears as a neutral figure but explains that Sellars' production has Cherubino embody a fundamental instability, "a kind of polyvalent sex and

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 78.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 78.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 89.

gender unsteadily encompassing male and female positions of identity and desire.”²⁵⁸ This gendered ambiguity in the Sellars performance can be as a result of factors that create both male and female evocations of gender and, therefore, express an ambiguity in the character of Cherubino. Case has made it clear which elements are key in gender determination, that of stance, gesture, movement, voice, and dress. Levin understands Cherubino’s masculinity in this production through examples of masculine gesture: “Cherubino’s groin joins the cellos in enacting the musical pulse during the course of “Non so più.”²⁵⁹ Levin reveals that “with this gesture, Sellars physicalizes the hyperbolized confusion and oblivion registered in the page’s aria: this is libido on autopilot,”²⁶⁰ noting it as an instance of adolescent oblivion. Understood as a masculine character through instances of gesture, Larson’s Cherubino, conversely, has been understood as feminine through the depictions of dress. Specifically, Dellamora describes the Act II dressing scene as Cherubino “acquires a new skin, inhabiting a feminized body.”²⁶¹ The male gestures, as understood by Levin is in opposition to feminized body that Dellamora interprets. Through these two elements that Case has tasked with creating gender, that of gesture and dress, an unsteady conception of gender has been created through the evocation of both male and female attributes. In this production, whether Cherubino is the “cross-dressed dyke” or the hermaphrodite, both of these scenarios challenge the traditional performances of *Le nozze* as well traditional understandings of Cherubino. In such traditional depictions, Cherubino’s masculinity has been created through masculine depictions of gesture, voice or dress. However, these factors performed differently create femininity instead.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 94.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 92.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.

²⁶¹ Dellamora, *Mozart and the Politics of Intimacy: The Marriage of Figaro in Toronto, Paris and New York*, 259.

In the Gardiner/Mille production, Stephen's portrayal of Cherubino led to a performance that created masculinity through choices of voice. Her distinct performance undeniably reinforced masculinity, but a different performance could create femininity instead. Singher, in his *Interpretive Guide to Operatic Characters*, speaks about Cherubino's arias. As noted earlier, he states that, despite the *Allegro vivace* marking, "Non so più" is not a mad rush. Singher says nothing of the frequency with which this aria is performed in a breathless, frantic manner but he does, however, maintain that when "singing the whole aria presto, it is impossible to indicate all its changes in mood and to reveal Cherubino's mobile, intense heart."²⁶² As I questioned earlier, perhaps Beaumarchais did not want a boy to play the role of Cherubino because the essence of the character is not boyish, or male, at all. Instead of using Singher's analysis as a way of supporting my feminine interpretation of the character, we could instead use this analysis to facilitate how, in performance, we could make the character feminine. If Cherubino were to be interpreted as a woman in performance, then perhaps the aria should not be performed in a breathless and boyish manner, because, in doing so, it is impossible to convey the aria's lyricism and, therefore Cherubino's feminine qualities. Without performing the aria in a rushed, breathless manner, a feminine lyric quality may instead be represented. To avoid any misunderstanding, it is not the musical gesture that is feminine but how it is performed instead. Furthermore, without expressly manipulating her intonation to signify masculinity as Stephen did, the unaltered voice of the performer would stand for femininity because it is, of course, the mezzo female timbre that would naturally be evoked.

²⁶² Singher, *An Interpretive Guide to Operatic Arias: A Handbook for Singers, Coaches, Teachers, and Students*, 153.

Not only do traditional performances choose masculine depictions of voice and gesture to create a masculine Cherubino but they attempt to suppress the issues of gender play that seem to be inherent in the work. Gardiner/Mille, Pappano/McVicar, Pritchard/Hall all succeed, although in different ways, to shield the audience from Cherubino's undressing. A production that aimed to create a female Cherubino would use this scene to depict Cherubino in the unmistakably feminine form: the dressing scene would involve undressing first to highlight Cherubino's feminine body, blurring the lines of gender and bringing the erotic charge that Brown-Montesano explains as necessary to the dress-up scene.²⁶³

The three performances analyzed depict Cherubino differently. Through the depiction of alternate treatments of gesture, costuming, movement and voice, different kinds of Cherubinos have been created. What we should notice, most importantly, is that in each of these productions, the music (i.e. libretto and notation) has stayed the same: these three performances all follow the same music and text but three very different Cherubino's emerge. By understanding how diverse performances have created distinct representations of the same character, it is clear that neither the score nor the libretto is the site where characters are determined but rather a framework that gives the boundaries within which characters are to be performed.

While the score may depict musical structures and gestures to which we can assign the gendered attributes of masculinity or femininity, it is performance that defines what these musical gestures mean. The same musical motifs, as well as linguistic markers, can be employed while representing different genders. How the same musical content can signify different genders is through the characteristics that Case describes as key features in gender representation: the costuming, intonation, gesture, voice, and mannerisms that accompany

²⁶³ Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 182.

the musical gestures. We saw this to be borne out in the diversity of the three performances of *Le nozze* are despite following the same text and notation. The conclusion that we can draw here is that these musical elements have no inherent meaning and no inherent capacity to mark gender. How you perform the musical gestures defines what they mean. If it was Mozart and Da Ponte's aim to present a covert narrative that challenges sexual norms, they were able to do so precisely because the music could not represent it. For music works in another way. Its meaning is not something that is decoded from reading the libretto or analyzing the score. Its meaning arises as a function of how it is performed.

Admittedly, before performing the role of Cherubino myself, the only two productions I had seen were the Gardiner and Solti productions. As these two are among the most traditional, I feel now as if I might have been nudged into a more traditional view of the character, which was expressed through my performance with my rendering of Cherubino as male. I wish I had seen the direction of Brian Large with Schäfer as Cherubino or the Peter Sellars production with Susan Larson before I performed the character of Cherubino myself. I wonder if doing so might have given me license to depict a female Cherubino and confuse gender norms as these productions did. However, I do not think that having the privilege to see these performances would have given me such license, only performing it did. If I were to interpret this character again, I would portray a female Cherubino so that I might finally solidify this character's gender in the only way that truly can, in performance. I like to think that Mozart would have delighted in this. In performance, the character that Da Ponte and Mozart were confined to represent through fixed elements of the score can perhaps finally embody the meaning they prescribed. These views that composer and librettist may or may not have encoded in the score are, no less, reliant on a performance for them to truly exist. And through the performance of this character, the views depicted in *Le nozze*, with

Cherubino in particular, are able to reach an audience who could be affected by this revolutionary character. And even if the production I was in was not supposed to portray Cherubino as a woman, there was enough going on in the performance for at least one member of the audience to ask “What’s a lesbian doing in this story?”

Conclusion

In the last chapter, I argued that gender, particularly Cherubino's gender, is not to be found within the confines of the score or libretto, but is rather created through the act of performance. Even though putative markers of gender can be located in the text and music, it is ultimately this act that not only makes operatic characters who and what they are, but also allows music to do its social work. For those performances that styled the pageboy Cherubino as a pagegirl in disguise, effectively create a new female persona, not only in regard to the drama but also in opposition to gender norms. As such, a female Cherubino extends beyond the confines of what a score and libretto can signify to exemplify an archetype with whom women seeking alternate paradigms of femininity can identify. In this view, Cherubino may play a role in something far larger than *Le nozze di Figaro*. We would not easily say that the feminist movement began as early as the 1780s or that *Le mariage* or *Le nozze* are major participants in the cause, but perhaps we could argue that Cherubino plays a small part.

As discussed in chapter 1, Beaumarchais' play was seen as a catalyst to a revolution, one that I maintain is more about gender than anything else. Indeed, Beaumarchais has been called one of the first feminists with his attempt to improve the condition of women and his creation of a new female archetype with the pageboy may, indeed, have been a way to address the issue of gender and equality on a larger scale. Mozart and Da Ponte followed suit with their representation of Cherubino, expressing this alternate sexuality through features of the libretto and the score (discussed in chapters 2 and 3 respectively). I believe that it was Mozart and Da Ponte's intention to reveal alternate femininities in the operatic work, but,

through the act of performance, they become successful in this task. With performance, Cherubino's character can represent a new type of woman and, therefore, acts as an icon for women that hope to destabilize norms. This speaks to Cherubino's possible femininity, but also the act of performance and the power of *Le nozze di Figaro*.

McClary upholds that musical works are also cultural practices. Speaking of two works in particular (Bizet's *Carmen* and Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony), she maintains that it is easier to treat them as aesthetic objects than to confront "the social critiques they enact."²⁶⁴ Similarly, Locke sees such action taking place in operatic works. He speaks of the widely held belief that opera acts as a mirror, reflecting social attitudes and customs, but indicates that the idea of opera as a mirror of society is inadequate. Instead, he maintains that cultural products are also cultural practices, "not merely reflecting but also shaping and intensifying the images we carry in our heads and into our lives, of gender-appropriate behaviour and the like."²⁶⁵ Opera might in fact mirror culture, but it does far more. By creating ideas and images that shape our culture, operas and their characters have the power to change it. And, as Locke argues, if opera represents "gender-appropriate" behaviour, why not "inappropriate behaviour" too? By adopting the "opera as shaper" over the "opera as mirror" philosophy, we can acknowledge that Cherubino has played a role that is certainly not confined to the stage but one that shaped his culture and, perhaps, our own as well. The character demonstrates an alternate or subversive form of femininity, but if operatic works are practices, then Cherubino's femininity enacts the very critiques dormant beneath the surface of the work. Without speaking of the character of the pageboy, Beaumarchais himself recognized a power of this kind in his play. Napoleon acknowledged the drama as a

²⁶⁴ McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, 79.

²⁶⁵ Locke, *What are these Women Doing in Opera?*, 62.

“revolution in full swing,” but so did Beaumarchais in the epithet to the play: “I make people laugh and thus change the world.”²⁶⁶ Earlier in this thesis I would have suggested that this statement speaks to the real theme of *Le mariage* and *Le nozze* as well: people laugh at the comic character of the pageboy but his comic nature masks the revolution that he, or possibly she, embodies. But, the essence of Beaumarchais’ statement speaks to the power of the work through an engagement with an audience. Whether the drama represents a covert sexual revolution or just the more overt social one, both have the power to really change the world.

If *Le nozze* has the power to change the world, one of the possible ways it does so is by challenging our perception of gender and sexuality. Without speaking about Cherubino specifically, McClary explains how travesti characters enact such change by creating sexuality instead of just representing a new kind. Specifically, she argues that these “female singers are not merely passive conduits for transmitting works, but are cultural agents in their own right.”²⁶⁷ This helps facilitate the understanding that Cherubino does not only display a new model of femininity and sexuality but creates one as well. As such, the character might not only depict the critique of gender norms but also enacts this challenge as well. This may, in turn, be an action that could be replicated, urging women, offstage, to do the same. If this is the case, *Le nozze*, and Cherubino in particular, are revolutionary in that they promote messages far beyond the scope of their present and act as catalysts for alternate conceptions of femininity.

²⁶⁶ Liebner, *Mozart on the Stage*, 99.

²⁶⁷ Susan McClary, “Gender Ambiguities and Erotic Exces in Seventeenth-Century Venetian Opera,” in Mark Franko and Annette Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000). Here, McClary discusses travesti characters with regard to traditional associations: operatic characters that function as men in the drama but are sung by female singers. McClary’s discussion of travesti characters does not address the distinction between travesti/disguise roles that was put into question in chapter 1.

Perhaps we need to question if opera and its characters really can have its audience “practice” the ideas they preach. Much has been said about the opera queen and his engagement with the singer and the stage. For instance, Koestenbaum vocalizes his own diva worship: “my women, emanations of me, women who assisted me in my metamorphosis, women I wanted to become.”²⁶⁸ Abel, too, speaks about his relationship with opera: “it actively seduces me, draws me in by presenting alluring characters with whom I might not otherwise identify. It creates a fantasy world, where I am encouraged to role-play in the narrative. Opera makes me someone else, at least for the duration of its performance.”²⁶⁹ Not only does the queer male have an attraction to opera, Reynolds argues that we all do. In fact, she says that we all go to the opera house for sex. In her opinion, heterosexuals go for the large passions, “you can see them on Saturday nights at *La Bohème*. Middle-aged businessmen in suits, who never lived in garrets or wrote a line of poetry, weep for the imagined romance of their lost youth. Their wives, all red fingernails and tight little dresses, regret the passing of their day as Mimi but comfort themselves by identifying with the full bloom of Musetta.”²⁷⁰ As to be expected, she asserts that opera queens go for the divas and the display, but questions “And lesbians? Why do they go to the opera?” Reynolds answers her own question by remarking “where else can you see two women making love in a public place?”²⁷¹ McClary, too, discusses the engagement of travesti characters with the audience as she states that “whether intended by composer/librettist, these roles provide women artists and audience members with a site for same-sex fantasies.”²⁷² The most obvious way that

²⁶⁸ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1993), 86.

²⁶⁹ Abel, *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performance*, 33.

²⁷⁰ Reynolds, *Ruggiero's Deceptions, Cherubino's Distractions*, 133.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁷² McClary, *Gender Ambiguities and Erotic Excess in Seventeenth-Century Venetian Opera*, 179. Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179. Franko and

opera speaks of sex, according to Reynolds, is in the variety of gender play. The notion of gender play is not gained from interaction with the score or libretto, but it is the performance of opera that puts the audience directly in touch with these experiences, as described in the previous chapter. Reynolds, although she does not say it directly, not only seems to value the act of performance by speaking of experiences that are not derived through score reading, but also alludes to the notion that these dramatic elements directly affect its audience: this gender play, or specifically “two women making love in a public place,” is of course only encountered in a public place when it is put into action on stage for all to see. But this particular action speaks to a particular subset of society, not to the businessmen in suits or their wives or even the opera queens, but lesbians. We can apply this idea to *Le nozze* and Cherubino in particular. Cherubino’s exchanges with the Countess are not only actualized in performance but these lesbian interactions can in turn speak to a lesbian audience. (This may be intensified by the closet scene that conjures up ideas of homosexuality as well. Hadlock reveals that it is perhaps all too easy to pun on the word “closet” and to feel ourselves on familiar ground: a female body is in the closet, it must be a lesbian.”²⁷³) This lesbian audience may see their sexuality matched in the interactions between characters but may as well hear this interaction. Koestenbaum’s relationship with the singer, although not one of lesbian interaction, of course, involves the role of the singer’s voice. He reveals “a singer’s voice sets up vibrations and resonances in the listener’s body...the listener’s inner body is illuminated, opened up: a singer doesn’t expose her own throat, she exposes the listener’s

Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179. Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179. Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179. Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179. Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179. Franko and Richards, *Acting on the Past : Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, 179.

²⁷³ Hadlock, *The Career of Cherubino, Or the Trouser Role Grows Up*, 71.

interior. Her voice enters me, makes me a “me,” an interior, by virtue of the fact that I have been entered.²⁷⁴ Similarly, Elizabeth Wood analyzes the singing voice, specifically the action of the voice in its expression of what she calls a “lesbian continuum of listening.” She explains her rubric of Sapphonics: “I mean to use it as a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of lesbian possibility, for a range of erotic and emotional relationships among women who sing and women who listen.”²⁷⁵ Sapphonics, for Wood, is a voice that excites her. She goes on to explain a staged intimacy between voices in opera, between the performers singing and being heard and herself, listening. She explains it as a vessel of self-expression and identity, calling it “Sapphonic” for its resonance in sonic space as lesbian difference and desire.²⁷⁶ Though she uses this rubric to discuss performances of straight performers, and straight characters, she nonetheless uses this rubric to express her interaction with the voices of the characters that resonate with her.

If Cherubino’s interactions speak to lesbians, the character’s action, dress, and lifestyle may as well resonate with real women. Hadlock illustrates this possibility as she reveals how the theatrical pageboy tradition has provided a model for the reception and refusal of women’s love for other women but specifically, their travestied desire. (Hadlock’s use of the term travesti here does not signify disguise in the theatrical sense but is used to describe women who dressed in the clothes of the opposite sex.) She explains that in the nineteenth century, while women’s travestied desire for women was not understood or condoned, the pageboy representation nevertheless created an occasion for the discussion of female travesti as well as the representation of something other than standard heterosexual

²⁷⁴ Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*, 42.

²⁷⁵ Philip Brett, Gary Thomas and Elizabeth Wood, *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 27.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

love.²⁷⁷ Hadlock proves this intolerance by discussing the negative connotations attached to female travesti and the increasing discussion of sexual inversion in both medical and literary discourse in the nineteenth century. She states that “medical and legal writings on female ‘criminality’ and ‘sexual inversion’ by sexologists including Albert Moll, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Cesare Lombroso appeared in French translation between 1893 and 1896.”²⁷⁸ This research is matched by Wendy Bashant who demonstrates how the emerging “science” of medical sexology changed perception of women in regards to sexuality: “affection between women, once acceptable, became perverted and even civilization-destroying manifestations of the new category of sexual identity, lesbianism.”²⁷⁹ While publications elicited a growing fear of female homoeroticism, it was the travestied pageboy who had an effect in the criticism that this fear sparked. Hadlock sheds light on a nineteenth-century Parisian salon culture, comprised of prominent lesbian writers such as Natalie Clifford-Barney, Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, and Renée Vivien. These women were key contributors to feminist theory in the late nineteenth century, a theory that sought out new representations of women in response to the rising medical and literary discourse concerning female sexuality. Not only did these women express their lesbian sexuality in their writings but they also dressed as men. Hadlock explains that travesti was no longer a phenomenon confined to the stage, “for the ardent page became a favourite role, in life and in literature for [this community],” appropriating the figure of the page as their symbol of female-oriented sexuality.²⁸⁰ Before the twentieth century, lesbianism was unmentionable: “even until recently, lesbian and gay writers have been forced either to hide their sexual orientation

²⁷⁷ Hadlock, *The Career of Cherubino, Or the Trouser Role Grows Up*, 75.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁷⁹ Wendy Bashant, "Singing in Greek Drag: Gluck, Berlioz, George Eliot," in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, eds. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

²⁸⁰ Hadlock, *The Career of Cherubino, Or the Trouser Role Grows Up*, 75.

altogether from their audience or to present it so indirectly that only the initiates were in a position to recognize it.”²⁸¹ As Karla Jay suggests, in their own cross-dressing, these women created a new sexual persona for women of the nineteenth century that was neither that of a conventional woman nor of an imitation man.²⁸² This advancement parallels what a female Cherubino can be considered to have done for the operatic stage one century earlier. This is what Hadlock means when she states that the “trouser role grows up,” maturing into an icon to represent a woman’s sexual love for another woman. Wearing trousers “freed these women to construct new poetic voices, for the page not only yearns, but sings eloquently about that yearning.”²⁸³ These revolutionary ideas and actions expressed by the women of this nineteenth-century salon parallel Cherubino’s character, whose cross-dressing crossed culture and time as well to become an icon in the formation of a lesbian persona and voice. A female Cherubino provided a model for those who sought to challenge gender norms and this proves that this character’s influence was, therefore, not confined to the stage but perhaps pivotal in the formation of a new voice for modern women.

It is clear that opera has power. The power in *Le nozze di Figaro* may be rooted not only in conveying alternate types of gender but also in creating them. The main plot of this thesis has been to expose Cherubino’s femininity and, therefore, suggest a covert meaning in *Le nozze di Figaro*. However, this research has fostered an alternate meaning itself by examining the role of performance. It is not the libretto or score that creates a character. It is performance. Cherubino becomes a woman not because of how he is written but because of how he is played. It is my hope that performers will be open to this interpretation, perhaps

²⁸¹ Hans Bertens, *Literary Theory: The Basics*, London ed. Routledge, 2008).

²⁸² Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

²⁸³ Hadlock, *The Career of Cherubino, Or the Trousers Role Grows Up*, 75.

even developing their own portrayal from it—for it is here, on stage, where the female Cherubino will truly be embodied. Understanding the role performance plays makes it possible to extend such an analysis past the character of Cherubino. And, *Le nozze* could, therefore, become a site for other alternate sexualities, apart from the lesbian page girl. Perhaps another production might make Marcellina a transvestite, Basilio a queer, and the Countess a bisexual. It could be that these alternate sexualities are also reflected in the score, just as with Cherubino's music and text. But these ideas will remain only latent until someone performs them.

Appendix a

YEAR	COMPOSER	TITLE	ROLE
1642	Monteverdi	<i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i>	Nero- soprano
1724	Handel	<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	Julius Caesar- mezzo or counter-tenor
1724	Handel	<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	Sesto- mezzo or counter-tenor
1735	Handel	<i>Alcina</i>	Ruggiero- mezzo
1735	Handel	<i>Ariodante</i>	Lurcanio
1738	Handel	<i>Serse</i>	Serse
1762	Gluck	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	Orfeo- mezzo, contralto, or counter-tenor
1766	Haydn	<i>La Canterina</i>	Don Ettore- soprano
1770	Mozart	<i>Mitridate, re di Ponte</i>	Arbate, Sifare, Farnace
1775	Mozart	<i>Il re pastore</i>	Amintas- modern performances lyric soprano
1775	Mozart	<i>La finta giardiniera</i>	Ramiro
1781	Mozart	<i>Idomeneo</i>	Idamante
1786	Mozart	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	Cherubino
1791	Mozart	<i>La clemenza di Tito</i>	Sesto and Annio
1813	Rossini	<i>Tancredi</i>	Tancredi and Ruggiero are sung by mezzo-sopranos or contraltos
1816	Rossini	<i>Otello</i>	
1817	Rossini	<i>La gazza ladra</i>	Pippo- contralto
1819	Rossini	<i>Bianca e Falliero</i>	Falliero- mezzo or contralto
1819	Rossini	<i>La donna del lago</i>	Malcolm- contralto
1823	Rossini	<i>Semiramide</i>	Arsace- mezzo/contralto
1826	Donizetti	<i>Alahor in Granata</i>	Hassem
1828	Rossini	<i>Le Comte Ory</i>	Isolier- mezzo
1829	Rossini	<i>Guillaume Tell</i>	Jemmy
1830	Donizetti	<i>Anna Bolena</i>	Smeaton- mezzo
1830	Bellini	<i>I Capuleti e i Montecchi</i>	Romeo- mezzo
1834	Donizetti	<i>Rosmonda d'Inghilterra</i>	Artura- contralto
1836	Glinka	<i>A Life for the Tsar</i>	Vanya- contralto
1836	Meyerbeer	<i>Les Huguenots</i>	Urbain- mezzo
1838	Berlioz	<i>Benvenuto Cellini</i>	Ascanio- mezzo
1842	Donizetti	<i>Linda di Chamounix</i>	Pierotto- contralto
1842	Glinka	<i>Ruslan and Lyudmila</i>	Ratmir- contralto
1842	Wagner	<i>Rienzi</i>	Adriano- mezzo
1845	Wagner	<i>Tannhauser</i>	Sheppard
1858	Offenbach	<i>Mesdames de la</i>	Croute-au-pot -soprano

		<i>Halle</i>	
1859	Offenbach	<i>Geneviève de Brabant</i>	Drogan- soprano
1859	Gounod	<i>Faust</i>	Siebel- contralto, mezzo, soprano
1859	Verdi	<i>Un ballo in maschera</i>	Oscar- coloratura
1860	Offenbach	<i>Daphnis et Chloe</i>	Daphnis- mezzo
1861	Offenbach	<i>Le pont des soupirs</i>	Amoroso- mezzo
1862	Offenbach	<i>Les bavards</i>	Roland- contralto
1864	Offenbach	<i>La belle Hélène</i>	Oreste- mezzo
1864	Gounod	<i>Mireille</i>	Andreloun- mezzo
1867	Gounod	<i>Romeo e Giulietta</i>	Stefano- mezzo
1867	Offenbach	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	Friday- mezzo
1867	Verdi	<i>Don Carlos</i>	Thibaut/Tebaldo- soprano
1868	Wagner	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg</i>	
1869	Offenbach	<i>Les brigands</i>	Fragoletto- mezzo
1873	Offenbach	<i>La jolie parfumeuse</i>	Bavolet- soprano
1874	Offenbach	<i>Madame l'archiduc</i>	Fortunato- mezzo
1878	Johann Strauss II	<i>Die Fledermaus</i>	Prince Orlofsky - mezzo
1875	Offenbach	<i>Le voyage dans la lune</i>	Prince Caprice- mezzo
1877	Chabrier	<i>L'Etoile</i>	Lazuli (peddler)- soprano
1878	Lecocq	<i>Le petit duc</i>	Title role- soprano
1879	Chabrier	<i>Une education manquée</i>	Gontran de Boismassif- soprano
1881	Offenbach	<i>Les contes d'Hoffmann</i>	Nicklausse- mezzo
1882	Wagner	<i>Parsifal</i>	Two novices in the all-male society of Knights of the Grail are sung by sopranos
1892	Catalani	<i>La Wally</i>	Walter- soprano
1893	Humperdink	<i>Hansel und Gretel</i>	Hansel- mezzo
1899	Massenet	<i>Cendrillon</i>	Le Prince Charmant- written for soprano
1901	Dvorak	<i>Rusalka</i>	Kitchen boy- soprano
1902	Massenet	<i>Le Jongleur de Notre Dame</i>	Jean
1905	Massenet	<i>Chérubin</i>	Chérubin- soprano
1911	Richard Strauss	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	Octavian
1912-16	Richard Strauss	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	The Composer- mezzo
1925	Hahn	<i>Mozart</i>	Mozart- soprano
1925	Ravel	<i>L'enfant et les sortilèges</i>	Title role of male child- mezzo
1930	Janáček	<i>From the House of</i>	Aljeja- mezzo

		<i>the Dead</i>	
2004	Adès	<i>The Tempest</i>	Ariel- soprano

Appendix b

Le Nozze di Figaro

Act 1

	TYPE	CHARACTERS	KEY	INSTRUMENTATION
Overture			D major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 clarinets in A, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in D, 2 trombone in D, Timpani in D and A, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 1	Duetto <i>Cinque, dieci, venti</i>	Susanna and Figaro	G major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 2	Duetto <i>Se a caso madame la note</i>	Susanna and Figaro	B-flat major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in B, alto, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 3	Cavatina <i>Se vuol ballare, signor contino</i>	Figaro	F major	2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in F, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 4	Aria <i>La vendetta, oh la vendetta</i>	Bartolo	D major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in D, 2 trombone in D, Timpani in D and A, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 5	Duetto <i>Via resti servita</i>	Susanna and Marcellina	A major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in A, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello, bass
No. 6	Aria <i>Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio</i>	Cherubino	E-flat major	2 clarinets in B, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in Eb, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 7	Terzetto <i>Cosa sento</i>	Susanna, Basilio and Count	B-flat major	2 oboe, 2 clarinet, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in B, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 8	Coro <i>Giovanni liete, fiori spargete</i>	Chorus	G major	2 flutes, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 9	Aria <i>Non più andrai, farfallone amoroso</i>	Figaro	C major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in G, 2 trombone in G, timpani in C and G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass

Act 2

	TYPE	CHARACTERS	KEY	INSTRUMENTATION
No. 10	Cavatina <i>Porgi amor</i>	Countess	E-flat major	2 clarinets in B, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in E-flat, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello,

	<i>qualche ristoro</i>			bass
No. 11	Arietta <i>Voi che sapete</i>	Cherubino	B-flat major	1 flute, 1 oboe, 1 clarinet in B, 1 bassoon, 2 horn in E-flat, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 12	Aria <i>Venite, inginocchiatevi</i>	Susanna	G major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 13	Terzetto <i>Susanna, or via sortite</i>	Susanna, Count, Countess	C major	2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello, bass
No. 14	Duetto <i>Aprite presto, aprite</i>	Susanna and Cherubino	G major	2 violin, viola, cello, bass
No. 15	Finale <i>Esci omai, garzon malnato</i>	Susanna, Countess, Marcellina, Basilio, Count, Antonio, Bartolo, Figaro	E- flat	2 flute, 2 oboe, 2 clarinets in B, 2 horn in E-flat, 2 Trombone in E-flat, timpani in E-flat and B

Act 3

	TYPE	CHARACTERS	KEY	INSTRUMENTATION
No. 16	Duetto <i>Crudel, perchè finora fermi</i>	Susanna and Count	a minor Switch half way to A	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in A, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello, bass
No. 17	Recit et Aria <i>Hai già vinta la causa</i>	Count	D major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in D, 2 trombone in D, 2 timpani in D and A, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 18	Sestetto <i>Riconosci in questo amplesso</i>	Susanna, Marcellina, Don Curzio, Count, Bartolo, Figaro	F major	2 flutes, 2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in F, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello, bass
No. 19	Recit et Aria <i>E Susanna non vien</i>	Countess	C major	2 oboe, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in C, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello, bass
No. 20	Duetto <i>Che soave zeffiretto</i>	Susanna and Countess	Bb major	1 oboe, 1 bassoon, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 21	Coro <i>Ricevete, o padroncina</i>	Chorus	G major	1 flute, 2 oboe, 1 bassoon, 2 horn in G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 22	Finale <i>Ecco la Marcia, andiamo</i>	Susanna, Countess, Count, Figaro, Chorus	C major-	2 flute, 2 oboe, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in C, 2 trombone in C, timpani in C and G, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello,

				bass
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ACT 4

	TYPE	CHARACTERS	KEY	INSTRUMENTATION
No. 23	Cavatina <i>L'ho perduta, me meschina</i>	Barbarina	F minor	Violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 24	Aria <i>Il capro, e la capretta</i>	Marcellina	G major	Violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 25	Aria <i>In quegl'anni, in cui val poco</i>	Basilio	Bb major	1 flute, 2 clarinet, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in B, violin1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 26	Recit et Aria <i>Tutto è disposto: l'ora dovrebbe</i>	Figaro	E-flat	2 clarinet, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in Eb, violin 1 and 2, viola, cembalo and basso continuo, cello, bass
No. 27	Recit et Aria <i>Giunse affin il momento</i>	Susanna	F major	1 flute, 1 oboe, 1 bassoon, violin1 and 2, viola, cello, bass
No. 28	Finale <i>Pian, pianin, le andrò più presso</i>	Tutti	D major	2 flute, 2 oboe, 2 clarinet in B, 2 bassoon, 2 horn in D, 2 trombone, timpani in D and A, violin 1 and 2, viola, cello, bass

Appendix c

METER	NUMBER	TITLE	CHARACTERS
4/4	No. 1 Duetтино	<i>Cinque...dieci</i>	Figaro and Susanna
	No. 4 Aria	<i>La vendetta</i>	Bartolo
	No. 5 Duetтино	<i>Via resti servita</i>	Marcellina and Susanna
	No. 7 Terzetto	<i>Cosa sento! Tosto andate</i>	Count, Basilio, and Susanna
	No. 9 Aria	<i>Non più andrai</i>	Figaro
	No. 14 Duetтино	<i>Aprite, presto aprite</i>	Susanna and Figaro
	No. 15 Act II Finale	<i>Esci omai, garzon malnato</i>	Count, Countess, Susanna, Figaro, Antonio, Marcellina, Bartolo, and Basilio
	No. 18 Sestetto	<i>Riconosci in questo amplesso</i>	Marcellina, Figaro, Bartolo, Don Curzio, Count and Susanna
	No. 22 Act III Finale	<i>Ecco la marcia</i>	Figaro, Susanna, Countess, Count, and Chorus
	No. 26 Aria	<i>Aprite un po' quegli occhi</i>	Figaro
	No. 28 Act IV Finale	<i>Pian, pianin le andro piu presso</i>	Cherubino, Countess, Count, Susann, Figaro, Barbarina, Marcellina, Basilio, Bartolo, Antonio, and Don Curzio
3/4	No.3 Cavatina	<i>Se vuol ballare</i>	Figaro
	No. 13 Terzetto	<i>Susanna, or via sortite!</i>	Count, Countess, and Susanna
	No. 24 Aria	<i>Il capro e la capretto</i>	Marcellina
	No. 25 Aria	<i>In quegli anni</i>	Basilio
	No. 28 Act IV Finale - Larghetto - Allegro di molto	<i>Finale: Larghetto</i>	- Figaro - Susanna and Figaro
2/4	No. 2 Duetтино	<i>Se a casa madama la note ti chiama</i>	Figaro and Susanna
	No. 10 Cavatina	<i>Porgi, amor</i>	Countess
	No. 11 Arietta	<i>Voi, che sapete</i>	Cherubino
	No. 12 Aria	<i>Venite, inginocchiatevi</i>	Susanna

	No. 19 Aria	<i>E Susanna non vien! Dove sono</i>	Countess
2/2	No. 6 Aria	<i>Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio</i>	Cherubino
	No. 16 Duetto	<i>Crudel! perche finora</i>	Count and Susanna
	No. 17 Aria	<i>Vedro mentr'io sospiro</i>	Count
	No. 27 (original sketch)	<i>Non tardar amato bene</i>	Susanna- the original sketch for the garden aria that is now "Deh vieni" ²⁸⁴
6/8	No. 8 Chorus	<i>Giovani liete</i>	Chorus of countrymen and women
	No. 20 Duettino	<i>Sull'aria</i>	Countess and Susanna
	No. 21 Chorus	<i>Ricevete, o padrocina</i>	Chorus of maidens
	No. 23 Cavatina	<i>L'ho perduta, me meschina</i>	Barbarina
	No. 27 Aria	<i>Giunse alfin il momento</i>	Susanna

²⁸⁴ Hertz, *Mozart's Operas*, 151.

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