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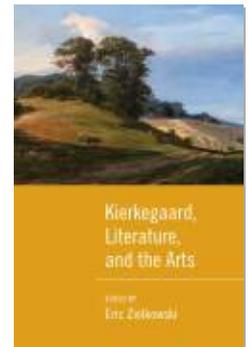
Published by Northwestern University Press

Ziolkowski, Eric & Garff, Joakim & Jøthen, Peder & Rovira, James.

Kierkegaard, Literature, and the Arts.

Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018.

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Kierkegaard's Notions of Drama and Opera

Molière's *Don Juan*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and the Question of Music and Sensuousness

Nils Holger Petersen

In a recent article, George Pattison discusses Kierkegaard's theatrical criticism in relation to the particular Danish literary and theatrical context in the first half of the nineteenth century. The dominant figure in theater criticism in this period was Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860), dramatist, poet, critic (inspired by Hegel), as well as editor of literary journals and, late in his life, director of the Royal Theater in Copenhagen. Heiberg had been helpful and encouraging to the very young Kierkegaard and, as Pattison demonstrates, Kierkegaard in his theater criticism at least up to and including 1845 remained influenced by Heiberg and his notion of correspondence between idea and form, although in many other respects he turned against Heiberg (and Hegelian criticism).¹ Pattison discusses examples of Kierkegaard's criticism concerning opera and comedy mainly through texts from *Either/Or* (1843): the essay on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (in Danish German culture of the time usually referred to as *Don Juan*), which I will also discuss, and the one on Scribe's play *The First Love* in Heiberg's translation (*Den første Kjærlighed*), supplemented by a few other texts from the years 1840–45. Pattison summarizes Kierkegaard's aesthetic position as "the life-view of the reflecteur who deliberately maintains a critical distance from the immediate object of consciousness in order to judge this object in the light of its relationship to ideality." At the same time, Pattison makes clear that Kierkegaard accepts this attitude only within a sphere of aesthetics, but not "its application to the personal life."²

In this essay I shall pursue the question of Kierkegaard's theatrical aesthetics and attempt to come to terms with his treatise on Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* and to understand it in relation to broader questions of worldview.³ As is well known, in the treatise "The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical-Erotic" in part 1 of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard's aesthetic pseudonym "A" discusses Mozart and *Don Giovanni*, his main object of analysis; he also discusses the musical medium as such and further uses his understanding of the character of the musical medium to discuss different aesthetic criteria he

sets up for opera and spoken theater in connection with the Don Juan theme. This discussion is carried out not least by reference to Molière's *Don Juan* (1665) in K. L. Rahbek's Danish translation (1813) as well as the free Danish version, which Heiberg wrote in 1812 and published (probably in a revised form) in 1814 (SKS K2–3:131–32). In the first part of this essay I shall primarily focus on the understanding of the musical medium as “A” develops it in “The Immediate Erotic Stages” as a basis for his distinctions and aesthetic criteria for music drama and spoken theater. In the second part, I shall consider some consequences of this view with respect to its possible meaning in a broad context of cultural history and life view.⁴

Drama and the Medium of Music

In his piece “Other Versions of Don Juan Considered in Relation to the Musical Interpretation,” which constitutes section 2 of the treatise “The Immediate Erotic Stages or The Musical-Erotic” (SKS 2:107–18 / EO 1:103–15), “A” takes up a claim launched from the very beginning of the treatise for a more thorough discussion of the relationship between music drama and spoken theater. The assertion is that Mozart's version of the Don Juan myth captures the essence of this myth precisely because of the musical medium—in combination, of course, with Mozart's command of this medium. The main question elaborated in different ways all through “A's” treatise concerns the relationship between music and language, on the one hand, and between sensuousness and spirit, on the other, and how these two pairs are interconnected.

Early in the treatise, “A” uses the idea of Faust, with its rich literary tradition, as a backdrop for his understanding of the idea of Don Juan, which he considers to be more abstract and universal. Don Juan is the firstborn of the kingdom of sensuousness, a kingdom expressed in the medieval idea of Mount Venus, where sensuousness has its home. Language, however, has no home here. “A” argues that for this reason the Don Juan myth has not been the object of literary treatment in the same way as Faust has. It is a main idea of “A” to associate Faust with language and reflection, and Don Juan with music. “A” sees both as demonic, but “Faust is the expression for the demonic qualified as the spiritual that the Christian spirit excludes,” whereas “Don Juan . . . is the expression for the demonic qualified as the sensuous.” It is only when reflection sets in that the realm of the sensuous is identified as sinful, “but then Don Juan has been slain, then the music stops” (SKS 2:95 / EO 1:90).

Even earlier in the treatise, “A” remarks that “*Faust* has language as its medium, and since it is a much more concrete medium, for that reason, too, many works of the same kind are conceivable” (SKS 2:64 / EO 1:57). When this idea is brought up again in the section on other versions of Don Juan, “A” emphasizes that his discussion of such other versions “is done not for

their own sake . . . but only in order to illuminate the significance of the musical interpretation more fully" (SKS 2:109 / EO 1:105–6). The focus is on what music can achieve as opposed to words. It is important to have in mind, however, that the relationship between the two media, language and music, is dialectic: one sets the limits for the other, as will become clear. "An interpretation of Faust can merit being called perfect, and yet a later generation will give rise to a new Faust, whereas Don Juan, because of the abstract character of the idea, lives on forever, in every age, and to wish to produce a Don Juan after Mozart will always be like wanting to write an *Ilias post Homerum* [*Iliad* after Homer] in a sense even more profound than is the case with Homer" (SKS 2:108 / EO 1:105). This, on the other hand, does not suggest that "a particular gifted nature should not have attempted to interpret Don Juan in some other way" (SKS 2:108 / EO 1:105). Here "A" brings in Molière, claiming that "not everyone may have noticed that the model for all other interpretations is essentially Molière's *Don Juan*." "A" does, however, find an exception in Heiberg's version, judging it to have "a great advantage over Molière's." While praising Heiberg for his "sure esthetic eye," he also argues that Heiberg may have been indirectly inspired by Mozart to see "how Don Juan must be interpreted as soon as music is not made its proper expression or he is placed in completely different esthetic categories" (SKS 2:109 / EO 1:105).

The main point for "A's" dichotomy between a literary and dramatic (i.e., spoken dramatic) treatment of Don Juan and a musical one is made clear in the following way: "As soon as he [Don Juan] is given spoken lines, everything is changed. That is, the reflection that motivates the lines reflects him out of the vagueness in which he is only musically audible" (SKS 2:109 / EO 1:106).⁵ The vagueness, or perhaps rather the obscurity of a musical representation of Don Juan is something "A" discusses much earlier in his treatise; in his view, vagueness is an important characteristic for musical representations altogether. In a sense, this is the main thread running through the whole discussion of *Don Giovanni*. "A" claims *Don Giovanni* to (be the only one of Mozart's works to) make Mozart a "classic composer" (SKS 2:58 / EO 1:51), an epithet that goes far beyond delight or admiration: "With his *Don Giovanni*, Mozart enters the rank of those immortals, of those visibly transfigured ones, whom no cloud takes away from the eyes of men; with *Don Giovanni* he stands supreme among them" (SKS 2:59 / EO 1:51). "A's" panegyric statements about Mozart and *Don Giovanni* in the beginning of the treatise, including the expression just cited, are based on enthusiasm for the music Mozart wrote for this opera but just as much on an aesthetic notion of correspondence between idea and form—and, we might add, medium—as well as on "A's" general conception of music. It is in order to demonstrate that Mozart's *Don Giovanni* truly is a classic work that "A" establishes this correspondence.

First, "A" claims that the "sensuous in its elemental originality [*den sandselige Genialitet*]" is the most abstract idea conceivable. Asking, "But through

which medium can it be presented?," he immediately gives his answer: "Only through music" (*SKS* 2:64 / *EO* 1:56). His argument for this assertion lies, first, in the relationship between language and music, to which I shall turn in a moment; second, in the broader historical idea that it is "first by Christianity" that "sensuality is posited as a principle, as a power, as an independent system"; and third, in a formulation that leads into the discussion of the relationship between language and music, that "sensuality was placed under the qualification of spirit first by Christianity." However, sensuality is posited in such a way as to be excluded, "but precisely because it is to be excluded it is defined as a principle" (*SKS* 2:68 / *EO* 1:61).

In his discussion of media, "A" insists that "language, regarded as medium, is the medium absolutely qualified by spirit, and it is therefore the authentic medium of the idea," and further that, as opposed to other media, "in language, the sensuous as medium is reduced to a mere instrument and is continually negated." The point here seems to be that what is important in the use of language is the message that language conveys, not the sounds it employs: "If a person spoke in such a way that we heard the flapping of his tongue etc., he would be speaking poorly" (*SKS* 2:74 / *EO* 1:67). "A" goes on to say that "language is the perfect medium precisely when everything sensuous in it is negated" (*SKS* 2:74 / *EO* 1:68). The continuation of this sentence appears slightly surprising, since the general point "A" is about to establish concerns music as the medium for presenting the sensuous: "That is also the case with music; that which is really supposed to be heard is continually disengaging itself from the sensuous" (*SKS* 2:74 / *EO* 1:68). I shall return to this point later. For now, however, "A's" main point must be established: his argument for why music is the medium through which sensuous immediacy can be expressed.

On the whole, "A" describes music in its contrast with language, although, as just pointed out, music also has a common ground with language; indeed, "A" emphasizes, more than once (including the sequel to the just cited statement), that music is also a kind of language. His comparison of music and language begins with the admission that language is the only medium that occurs in time. However, he again admits that this is true also for music, except that the musical "occurrence in time is in turn a negation of the feelings dependent upon the senses" (*SKS* 2:75 / *EO* 1:68).⁶ This last remark must be read in the context of "A's" following claim of music's ephemerality. The immediacy of music may be understood to betray the feelings to which the music gives rise: "Music does not exist except in the moment it is performed, for even if a person can read notes ever so well and has an ever so vivid imagination, he still cannot deny that only in a figurative sense does music exist when it is being read. It actually exists only when it is being performed" (*SKS* 2:75 / *EO* 1:68). His attempt at explaining the basic relation between language and music begins with the assumption that prose language is the least musical, while already the rhetorical delivery of an oration "in

the sonorous construction of its periods” provides an “echo of the musical.” In such ways he can proceed through poetic declamation, metrical constructions, and rhyme until “language leaves off and everything becomes music.” However, he also encounters music when moving in the opposite direction from prose language, which is “permeated by the concept,” to sheer interjections “which in turn are musical, just as a child’s first babbling is musical” (SKS 2:75–76 / EO 1:69).

Summing up so far: music is close to language; indeed, “language is bounded by music on all sides” (SKS 2:76 / EO 1:69). This claim connects music to the sensuous qualities of language on either side of its reflective semantic uses, the sophisticated sonorous qualities of poetry on the one hand and the spontaneous sound of exclamations, screaming, babbling, and so forth on the other. Music in this view, then, is less precise and reflective than language. In my trying to come to terms with “A’s” account, I have so far avoided commenting on his often confusing ranking of language and music. It is a recurring, apparently important point for him to state that music is, in the end, inferior to language as a medium. This may to some extent be part of a polemic against the early Romantics, for whom music was the highest of the arts, an art form that, foremost in music without words (or experienced as “pure” music apart from words), could transcend this world and move the listener to a higher or a deeper world, as for instance described by the young poet Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–1798) in his *Herzensergießungen eines Kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1797, known in English as *Confessions from the Heart of an Art-loving Friar* or [*Heart-felt*] *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*), unfinished at the author’s early death, edited (and finalized) by his friend, the poet Ludwig Tieck in 1799.

This work constitutes, among other things, an early example of the new Romantic aesthetics of music, surfacing for instance in a fictional letter from a young painter to a friend describing an experience of music during a mass in Rome. Here “the full Latin song, rising and falling through swelling musical tones like ships sailing through the waves of the sea, raised my mind ever higher,” and a moment later, “trombones and I do not know which almighty tones blared and thundered a sublime devotion through all limbs.”⁷ Albeit in a more academic style, a similar approach to music is found in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s statement “Mozart leads us into the deep layers of the spiritual realm. . . . In a similar way Beethoven’s instrumental music opens the realm of the immense and immeasurable.”⁸ Altogether, statements to such effects about music as transcending the worldly and as the highest art form are common among the Romantics.⁹

The idea that music can express what words are not able to convey has deep roots in Western Christian traditions and was possibly first formulated by Augustine in his *Expositions of the Psalms* when explaining and appropriating theologically the notion of *iubilus*, or jubilation. The spiritual side of the musical medium in Augustine’s view seems to parallel the no longer explicitly

theological idea in Romantic aesthetics.¹⁰ What I suggest is an indirect polemic against such Romantic views in “A’s” account comes to the fore in his comparison between language and music. Describing the movement from language to music in a poetic direction, as quoted above, “A” contends “that language leaves off and everything becomes music.” He continues, “Indeed, this is a pet phrase poets use to indicate that they, as it were, abandon the idea; it disappears for them, and everything ends in music. This might seem to imply that music is even closer to perfection as a medium than language. But this is one of those sentimental misconceptions that sprout only in empty heads” (*SKS* 2:75 / *EO* 1:69). Instead, “A” wants to establish a distinction between language and music based on music’s inferiority to language when it comes to reflection and precision. As already pointed out, “A” maintains that one arrives at music from language by way of moving away from ideas and reflection, either by way of poetic rhetorical devices or by way of the movement from conceptual formulation to the mentioned interjections, like the child’s babbling: “Here the point certainly cannot be that music is closer to perfection as a medium than language, or that music is a richer medium than language, unless it is assumed that saying ‘Uh’ is more valuable than a complete thought” (*SKS* 2:76 / *EO* 1:69). What music can do is express “the immediate in its immediacy.” However, for “A,” this primarily shows the limitation of music as a medium in relation to language. On the other hand, in the case of “sensuousness in its elemental originality,” posited by Christianity outside the realm of spirit, music is the perfect medium precisely because of its limitation: “Reflection is implicit in language, and therefore language cannot express the immediate. Reflection is fatal to the immediate, and therefore it is impossible for language to express the musical, but this apparent poverty in language is precisely its wealth. In other words, the immediate is the indeterminate, and therefore language cannot grasp it; but its indeterminacy is not its perfection but rather a defect in it” (*SKS* 2:76 / *EO* 1:70). Thus, “A” has established that music is especially suited to the subject of the sensuous in its immediacy, which is the topic of *Don Juan* as determined by “A” in the section “The Elementary Originality of the Sensuous Qualified as Seduction” (*SKS* 2:92–107 / *EO* 1:87–103). Altogether this substantiates the claim that Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* is a classic work—granted Mozart’s musical genius—because the medium, as mastered by Mozart, is in complete correspondence with the idea that the work expresses: “In Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, we have the perfect unity of this idea and its corresponding form. But precisely because the idea is so very abstract and because the medium also is abstract, there is no probability that Mozart will ever have a competitor. Mozart’s good fortune is that he has found a subject matter that is intrinsically altogether musical, and if any other composer were to compete with Mozart, there would be nothing for him to do except to compose *Don Giovanni* all over again” (*SKS* 2:64 / *EO* 1:57).¹¹

The conceptualization of music established by “A” lies behind the discussion of Molière’s *Don Juan* and of Heiberg’s free version of that play. The

main point, again, is that spoken lines and the reflection behind them change Don Juan into a concrete individual, thus removing him from the ideality "A" attributes to him (*SKS* 2:109 / *EO* 1:106). This point is repeated in the context of the discussion of Molière and Heiberg. Whereas a musical Don Juan is a seducer without strategy and does not need any particular means to be victorious in his sexual conquests (*SKS* 2:112 / *EO* 1:109), a reflective Don Juan loses this immediacy:

The musical Don Juan enjoys the satisfaction; the reflective Don Juan enjoys the deception, enjoys the craftiness. The immediate pleasure is past, and reflection on the enjoyment is enjoyed more. In this respect there is a little hint in Molière's interpretation, except that this can by no means be developed, because all the remainder of the interpretation is a hindrance. Don Juan's desire is aroused because he sees a girl happy in her relation to the one she loves; he begins to be jealous. This is an interest that in the opera would not occupy us at all, simply because Don Juan is not a reflective individual. As soon as Don Juan is interpreted as a reflective individual, an ideality corresponding to the musical ideality can be attained only when the matter is shifted into the psychological realm. (*SKS* 2:111 / *EO* 1:108)

In this context "A" emphasizes the comic effect that can be obtained by denying Don Juan the means, thus constructing an incongruence; this is partly so in Molière's piece, but "A" makes a point of claiming that Heiberg is more consistent in the comical and more "correct" (*SKS* 2:112–13 / *EO* 1:109–10). Two important examples discussed by "A," however, apply to both Molière's piece and Heiberg's version. One, which "A" acknowledges is a true comical and fitting scene in a spoken Don Juan play, is the scene where Don Juan's creditor M. Dimanche—Hr. Paaske in Heiberg's version—visits Don Juan in order to get his money but is elegantly, politely, and comically diverted. This scene makes him lose the ideality he has in the opera with a comical effect. This scene would not do in an opera (*SKS* 2:112–13 / *EO* 1:109–10).¹²

The other example concerns the judgment scene where the Commander as a statue comes to fetch Don Juan. "A" makes the point that this scene is "a stumbling block from a dramatic point of view." If Don Juan is interpreted in the ideal way, that is, not as an individual but "as power, as passion"—as the idea of the sensuous—"then heaven itself must intervene." If Don Juan is seen as an individual character, it would make much more sense to let him confront the juridical system: "It is far more practical for Mr. Paaske to have Don Juan put into the debtor's prison." "A" suggests that it would be much more convincing to let Don Juan "know the commonplace bounds of actuality" (*SKS* 2:115 / *EO* 1:112).

Modern interpreters such as Ivan Nagel have made a similar point about opera in Mozart's time, referring to two different musical dramatic genres:

opera seria and *opera buffa*. The first of these belongs to the traditional court opera of absolutism, with grace as its most fundamental notion, whereas the second belongs to the more recently emergent bourgeois opera of Enlightenment in which conflicts are resolved rationally. For Nagel, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* can be understood as a play between the two operatic genres.¹³ Whereas the same point concerning absolute power versus rational governance could easily be made concerning spoken theater as for musical theater of similarly different social contexts, this, for "A" (who, like Kierkegaard, must be assumed to be a child of an absolute monarchy), is a question of the musical medium:

In the opera, it is entirely appropriate to have the Commendatore [i.e., the term used for the Commander in the Italian libretto of Mozart's opera] come again, but, after all, his conduct has ideal truth. The music immediately makes the Commendatore more than a particular individual; his voice is enlarged to the voice of a spirit. Therefore, just as Don Juan in the opera is interpreted with esthetic earnestness, so also is the Commendatore. In Molière, he comes with an ethical solemnity and heaviness that make him almost ludicrous; in the opera, he comes with esthetic lightness and metaphysical truth. No power in the play, no power on earth, has been able to constrain Don Juan; only a spirit, an apparition, is able to do that. Understood correctly, this in turn will illuminate the interpretation of Don Juan. A spirit, an apparition, is reproduction; this is the secret implicit in the coming again. But Don Juan is capable of everything, can withstand everything, except the reproduction of life, precisely because he is immediate, sensate life, of which spirit is the negation. (SKS 2:115 / EO 1:112–13)

In the following section, where "A" discusses the individual characters in Mozart's opera, he also summarizes his view on the dramatic differences between an opera and a drama (spoken theater). The main difference emphasized is closely connected to the discussion of the musical medium and its capacity in relation to language. "A" demands that a drama should leave a total impact that should "be less a mood than a thought, an idea." Nothing should be left over "of the mood from which the drama emerges, that is, nothing of the mood *qua* mood, but everything is converted into the dramatic sacred coin: action and situation." Reflection transfigures mood into action. If the mood predominates, the drama becomes lyrical, which "is a defect, but . . . is by no means a defect in an opera" (SKS 2:119–20 / EO 1:117). In an opera there must be a dominant tone that produces the unity of mood while maintaining the plurality of voices within this unity. "Opera does not have so much character delineation and action as its immanent objective; it is not sufficiently reflective for that." Rather, "unreflective, substantial passion"

(SKS 2:120 / EO 1:118) is expressed. Therefore the opera does not have the same urgency toward action as a drama must have. Instead, "it is characterized by a kind of tarrying, a kind of self-extension in time and space. . . . The action in an opera can be only immediate action" (SKS 2:121 / EO 1:118).

The descriptions and discussions of the various figures in *Don Giovanni* in agreement with this view emphasize the dependency of all these figures, except the Commendatore, on the protagonist Don Giovanni. For all these other characters, then, the point is less the action as such than the lyrical expression of these dependencies. But the Commendatore is precisely the counterpower to Don Juan, the power of spirit or consciousness against which Don Juan rebels in vain:

The Commendatore appears only two times. The first time it is night; it is in the background of the theater; we cannot see him, but we hear him fall before Don Giovanni's rapier. Already at the very outset his earnestness, which is made all the more manifest by Don Giovanni's caricaturing mockery, something Mozart has superbly expressed in music—already at the very outset his earnestness is too profound to be human; before he dies, he is spirit. The second time he appears as spirit, and the thundering voice of heaven sounds in his earnest, solemn voice. But just as he himself is transfigured, so his voice is transfigured into something more than a human voice; he no longer speaks, he passes judgment. (SKS 2:126 / EO 1:124)

It is well known that "A's" account does not completely fit the opera as it was actually written by Mozart and Da Ponte (1787) and generally performed. The Commendatore actually appears three times in the opera, not two. In his account, Kierkegaard let "A" omit the rather central churchyard scene where Don Giovanni invites the statue to dinner. Many scholars have commented on the relationship between "A's" account and the opera, often pointing out that "A's" account has its own purpose and inner logic presenting a literary rewriting of Mozart's opera rather than being a straightforward analysis of the opera; at the same time it is obviously inspired by and relating to the opera.¹⁴

The correspondence between idea and form,¹⁵ and medium as well, clearly appears as the important criterion in "A's" theatrical evaluations, in agreement with what was shown by Pattison at the beginning of this essay. The appraisal of Heiberg for his improvement of Molière's piece, possibly through the indirect inspiration of Mozart's opera, also confirms Heiberg's crucial bearing on Kierkegaard's aesthetics—or, at least, "A's" aesthetics. However, the construction of "A's" aesthetic universe, and not least the intensity in the constant deliberations about the musical medium and the relationship between spirit and sensuousness, language, and music, seem to me to reveal "A" to be a figure quite different from the "reflecteur" who always maintains his critical distance, as Pattison summarized Kierkegaard's aesthetic position.

“A” is more than a critic, although “The Immediate Erotic Stages” is seemingly all about aesthetics. In particular the situation of the musical aesthetics and of the figure of Don Juan in relation to Christianity may be read as pointing to a grander but also more dangerous perspective.

Music and Existence in “A’s” Treatise

Ettore Rocca has read “The Immediate Erotic Stages” as a Christian text claiming that what Christianity in “A’s” discourse posits and excludes is the idea of the sensuous, but not therefore necessarily also the medium of sensuousness. In addition, regarding a statement about music in “A’s” treatise, Rocca observes that it does not follow—in “A’s” words—“that one must regard it [music] as the devil’s work,” although it “is an imperfect medium and . . . consequently it cannot have its absolute theme in the immediately spiritual qualified as spirit” (*SKS* 2:79 / *EO* 1:73). Rocca’s argument is based on “A’s” discussion of how Christianity first posited the idea of the sensuous by excluding it. As we have seen, “A” claims that the medium in which the sensuous can be expressed in its immediacy is music, and he therefore understands *Don Giovanni* as a classic work. In this context, Rocca points to the following formulation by “A”:

If the elemental originality of the sensuous-erotic in all its immediacy insists on expression, then the question arises as to which medium is the most suitable for this. . . . In its immediacy, it can be expressed only in music. . . . The significance of music thereby appears in its full validity, and in a stricter sense it appears as a Christian art or, more correctly, as the art Christianity posits in excluding it from itself, as the medium for that which Christianity excludes from itself and thereby posits. In other words, music is the demonic. In elemental sensuous-erotic originality, music has its absolute theme. This, of course, does not mean that music cannot express anything else, but nevertheless this is its theme proper. (*SKS* 2:71 / *EO* 1:64–65)¹⁶

Rocca’s conclusion is that “music can properly express sensuality . . . only by presupposing spirit, only by presenting it from the point of view of spirit or Christianity. . . . Music in its perfection will tell about sensuality, but the agent who *uses* this medium is spirit, as it were.”¹⁷ Whether this makes “A’s” treatise Christian, I am not sure, but it is important to point out that music, in “A’s” construction, fulfills a role in a Christian context, although, as the last quotation from “A’s” treatise also makes clear, music, in “A’s” view, is indeed excluded from Christianity.

In this connection, one might recall the surprising analogy drawn by “A” between music and language, which was cited early in this essay in connection

with the comparison between language and music more generally. Although the general context was one in which language and music were contrasted, language being reflective as opposed to the immediacy of music, "A" asserts that "language is the perfect medium precisely when everything sensuous in it is negated." He adds, "That is also the case with music; that which is really supposed to be heard is continually disengaging itself from the sensuous" (*SKS* 2:74 / *EO* 1:68). Possibly this may support Rocca's contention that the function of music—considered in the larger, spiritual context necessary for music to be posited as the medium of the sensuous immediacy—is to act under the power of the spirit. The quotation certainly seems to be in agreement with the ephemerality of existence, which "A" attributes to music: quite physically, by being ephemeral, music disengages itself from itself and leaves the stage, as it were, to the spirit.

The same function attributable to music must also be attributable to Mozart's opera as a whole in view of the intimate correspondence between the idea and the form of this work. This correspondence comes to the fore in "A's" discussion of the struggle between the powers of the Commendatore and Don Juan in his account of the overture (*SKS* 2:127–31 / *EO* 1:125–30). Here he describes the emergence of Don Juan's power, which is born in anxiety: "There is an anxiety in him, but this anxiety is his energy" (*SKS* 2:131 / *EO* 1:129). He sees, or rather hears, and, as I have submitted elsewhere, "A's" ears must have been Kierkegaard's ears, and it is easy to see in the description of the overture, through "A's" nontechnical, literary descriptions, exactly what in the music has made Kierkegaard hear this anxiety, although this musical element may be interpreted very differently from the way "A" interprets it.¹⁸ In the overture, "A" claims, someone familiar with the opera will hear the "forces he has learned to identify in the opera move with a primitive power, where they wrestle with one another with all their might." The power of the Commendatore, however, is the victor, even before the battle, and the power of Don Juan flees, "but this flight is precisely its passion, its burning restlessness in its brief joy of life" (*SKS* 2:129 / *EO* 1:127).

It is the struggle between the spirit, the Commendatore, who, as pointed out earlier, is spirit from the outset of the opera, even before he dies (killed by Don Giovanni in the very first scene of the opera), and Don Juan who embodies the idea of the sensuous in its immediacy. For "A," it is important to claim "that the interest of the opera is Don Giovanni, not Don Giovanni and the Commendatore" (*SKS* 2:129 / *EO* 1:127). This is connected to the (distorted) assertion, already mentioned, that the Commendatore appears only twice. "The Commendatore is the vigorous antecedent clause and the outspoken consequent clause, between which lies Don Giovanni's intermediate clause, but the rich content of this intermediate clause is the substance of the opera" (*SKS* 2:126 / *EO* 1:124). And this again must be so, in "A's" account, because the music precisely is able to express Don Juan's life even as "he dances over the abyss, jubilating during his brief span" (*SKS* 2:131 / *EO*

1:130), connected again to his claim “The more the Commendatore would be drawn to the foreground, the more the opera would cease to be absolutely musical” (*SKS* 2:126 / *EO* 1:124). As spirit and consciousness, “A” claims the Commendatore lies outside the musical medium’s central theme. This is a difficulty in “A’s” presentation of the opera, and therefore he cannot do justice to the musical setting of the lines of the Commendatore, nor mention the churchyard scene where the Commendatore warns Don Giovanni in music that associates strongly with church music.¹⁹

If the earlier quoted statement—in connection with the comparison of Molière’s and Mozart’s uses of the statue—that “Don Juan . . . can withstand everything, except the reproduction of life, because he is immediate, sensate life” is contextualized with the statement, also quoted earlier, that music exists only while being performed, then it seems that “A’s” understanding of music is one that does not allow for musical memory because music is the medium of sensuous immediacy. One obviously needs to be careful about drawing overly strict musical-philosophical implications out of a treatise that, after all, is written in a literary, associative style rather than based on a consistent theoretical construction. Still, it seems to make sense to think of “A’s” musical understanding (and Kierkegaard’s?) as being based on notions of ephemerality and of music being silenced by reflection and memory. What the statue brings is the memory of what Don Giovanni has done in his dance over the abyss, the humans he has hurt or killed or disregarded. This is what the opera seems to be about when it is considered in the context of its original dramatic history from the first (known) Don Juan play by Tirso de Molina in the early seventeenth century, through Molière, to Mozart and Da Ponte, not to mention the many others along the way, including the numerous operas on this subject written before Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in the eighteenth century.²⁰ This is what the opera seems to be about when the Commendatore is not considered to be outside its main interest.

But if the opera is considered as “A” considers it, then it must vanish like its own idea, and like Don Giovanni, into the abyss, so that all that is left is the deep voice of the spirit, of the Commendatore, who is not absolutely musical. If music is understood radically to be the medium of sensuous immediacy, it seems to be contradictory to repeat it, to perform it. The thrice-repeated “hear” in “A’s” famous appraisal and exhortation to listen to Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* seems to expose an inherent contradiction in “A’s” overall construction of the opera as a musical work expressing what cannot be retained: the immediate, ephemeral, and nonrepeatable sensuousness of the moment. In this way, possibly by the author’s intention, the whole treatise annihilates itself in order to leave the stage to reflection: “Listen to the beginning of his life; just as the lightning is discharged from the darkness of the thunderclouds, so he bursts out of the abyss of earnestness, swifter than the lightning’s flash, more capricious than lightning and yet just as measured. Hear how he plunges down into the multiplicity of life, how he breaks against its solid

embankment. Hear these light, dancing violin notes, hear the intimation of joy . . . hear the whisper of temptation, hear the vortex of seduction, hear the stillness of the moment—hear, hear, hear Mozart's Don Giovanni" (*SKS* 2:106–7 / *EO* 1:103). But what is the treatise itself, if not reflection? And can music exist at all without memory (and repetition)?²¹

In book 11 of his *Confessions*, Augustine discusses the notion of time and how to measure it through an example in which he imagines that he is about to sing a song which at that point is still fully contained in the future, as he has not yet started singing. As he sings, Augustine describes how the song gradually moves through the singer and how, as the song is finished, it belongs completely to the past. During the singing, some of the song belongs to the past, some to the future, and only one short part, the tone being sung in the moment, belongs to the now. What is important in this context is, first, how Augustine deconstructs the idea of the "now" by pointing out that even the tone he is singing in the moment can be divided up so that he has already sung some of it, while some of it still belongs to the future, and only a small part even of that tone is in the "now" or present moment. Because he can go on in this way (similar, actually, to the way infinitesimal calculus was invented some 1,200 years later) the "now" cannot be seen to have any duration. It is the ultra-short moment between the past and the future. Augustine must conclude that the only way he can measure time is through memory, since any time period to be measured must be said mostly not to exist: part of it lies in the past, which no longer exists; part of it, in the future, which does not yet exist; while only the ultra-brief present moment exists, ever so fleetingly.²² For Augustine, all of this concerns the notion of time and how to measure it.

The modern Danish philosopher and theologian K. E. Løgstrup (1905–81), however, has used Augustine's philosophy of time with a different purpose in mind while drawing also upon Heidegger and Husserl, and especially employing the notion of retention—specifically retention through memory, the attempt at holding on to what is disappearing into the nonexistence of the past. In his *Skabelse og Tilintetgørelse* (1978, *Creation and Annihilation*),²³ using Augustine's thought as his basis, Løgstrup argues that perception of time arises by comparison with at least temporarily unaltered objects, against which the passing of time can be experienced. Such objects are spatial, and that is how we can experience them as unchanged in time. In this way time and space are connected. Løgstrup further argues that even an object purely of time can be retained in what he calls a fictional space. Here he takes up Augustine's example of the melody, claiming that the way we remember a melody is by its shape, its structure, its "character." These are timeless characteristics. "For a melody," writes Løgstrup, "it is necessary not only that its parts follow in the right order; also its character is necessary. But time cannot grant character to a progress in time; only space can do that."²⁴ For this reason, Løgstrup speaks about the fictional space of the melody, in which it is preserved for our memory, as a "timeless" structure.

Many questions arise out of this construction, and most fall outside the scope of this essay.²⁵ Even the notion of a melody in itself is problematic if it is not historicized. However, in the context here I need only to apply it to the situation in “A’s” construction of music and of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. In this context, the notion of melody is unproblematic and is certainly used in many places by “A.” If one accepts Løgstrup’s philosophical construction, or even just Augustine’s, how can the melody that is sung be perceived as a melody if there is no musical memory? Take, for instance, a lyrical scene “A” describes poetically: Don Giovanni is singing his so-called champagne aria in the first act. “A’s” description is convincing, even touching, with its image of Don Giovanni “intoxicated, so to speak, with himself”:

If all the girls in the world encircled him at this moment, he would not be dangerous to them, for he is, as it were, too strong to want to infatuate them; even the most multifarious pleasures of actuality are too little for him compared with what he enjoys in himself.

What it means to say—that Don Giovanni’s essential nature is music—is clearly apparent here. He dissolves, as it were, in music for us; he unfurls in a world of sounds. . . . What we must see especially is that it does not stand in an accidental relation to Don Giovanni. Such is his life, effervescing like champagne. And just as the beads in this wine, as it simmers with an internal heat, sonorous with its own melody, rise and continue to rise, just so the lust for enjoyment resonates in the elemental boiling that is his life. Therefore, the dramatic significance of this aria comes not from the situation but from this, that here the opera’s dominant tone sounds and resonates in itself. (SKS 2:135–36 / EO 1:134)

But what about this melody? In “A’s” view, if taken at face value, as discussed earlier, it would have to dissolve into nothing in order to be consistent with the character of music as a medium for the immediacy of sensuousness. To remember the melody, to repeat it and to describe its lyrical character, seems to contradict the construction of the opera and of the musical medium in “A’s” treatise. Apparently Kierkegaard, if not “A,” went to hear (if not see) the opera many times,²⁶ but “Don Juan . . . can withstand everything, except the reproduction of life, because he is immediate, sensate life” (SKS 2:115 / EO 1:113). Since in “A’s” construction, Don Juan is killed by such repetition, also the retention of a melody expressive of him, and indeed the retention of the whole opera, the very classic work of music drama that celebrates him becomes problematic.

Evident here is the same kind of contradiction that would eventually emerge in the modernism of the mid-twentieth century, where Adorno in his *Philosophy of Modern Music* (*Philosophie der neuen Musik*, 1949) wrote that “music, compressed into a moment, is valid as an eruptive revelation of

negative experience.”²⁷ This idea of music as knowledge, and as true suffering condensed into a moment, was part of a rather revolutionary understanding of music's condition in the modern world, seen and understood especially through the twelve-tone system of Schoenberg and Webern. The inherent contradiction between the idea of artworks and the idea of real suffering condensed into a moment was captured and appropriated in Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus* (written in 1943–46; published in 1947), recontextualizing Adorno's contemporary understanding of music and culture into his own large-scale historical view in which Schoenberg's twelve-tone system was adapted (in a somewhat changed perspective) and resignified as a Faust pact.²⁸ All this falls outside the scope of this essay, except that precisely this Faust pact was made with explicit reference to “A's” identification of music as excluded from Christianity, as stated by the devil in his offer of the pact to the composer-protagonist Adrian Leverkühn: “He [the author of the Don Juan treatise in *Either/Or*] knew and understood my particular relation to this beautiful art—the most Christian of all arts, he finds—but Christian in reverse, as it were: introduced and developed by Christianity indeed, but then rejected and banned as the Devil's Kingdom—so there you are. A highly theological business, music—the way sin is, the way I am.”²⁹

To conclude, I wish to suggest that the music philosophy of “A” collapses if one takes it seriously in detail. His is a brilliant essay, brilliant in provoking readers to discuss the meaning of *Don Giovanni*, and, much more than that, the meaning of music as such and of existence seen through the intensity of music and drama that engage those who listen, read, and watch. The essay is far more than music or theater criticism; just as Mann much later was able to use the politicocultural aesthetics of Adorno in a large-scale existential confrontation with long-established traditions of Western culture, Kierkegaard's “A” formulated provocative statements to the effect that music would seem no longer a harmless, pleasant entertainment but rather something that potentially could threaten bourgeois life as well as spiritual life. In doing so, he formulated a theory that collapses if one takes its actual statements at face value. I believe, however, that one needs to do so in order to get to the point where this becomes clear.

Notes

Kierkegaard, as was previously the norm in Danish, refers consistently to Don Juan, not Don Giovanni. In modern times, however, the opera and its protagonist are always referred to as Don Giovanni. In order to avoid confusion, I have consistently used Giovanni whenever I refer explicitly to the opera and only the opera, but Juan whenever I refer more generally to the figure. The same seems to be true for the English translation in *EO* 1.

1. George Pattison, "Søren Kierkegaard: A Theatre Critic of the Heiberg School," in *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries: The Culture of Golden Age Denmark*, ed. Jon Stewart, Kierkegaard Studies, Monograph Series, vol.10 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 319–29. See also the discussion of Kierkegaard's relationship to the Heiberg circle in Henning Fenger, "Kierkegaard: A Literary Approach," in Stewart, *Kierkegaard and His Contemporaries*, 301–18.

2. Pattison, "Søren Kierkegaard," 329.

3. For another approach to "A's" treatment of Mozart's opera, see the essay by Peder Jothen in this volume.—Ed.

4. A recent essay by Shao Kai Tseng, "Kierkegaard and Music in Paradox? Bringing Mozart's Don Giovanni to Terms with Kierkegaard's Religious Life-View," *Literature and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2014): 411–24, published after the original submission of this essay, has some main points in common with this one. Tseng argues that Kierkegaard deliberately used "A's" distortion of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* ironically as a satire against a certain trend in Romantic aesthetics. While my interpretation takes a different path, it points in the same overall direction as Tseng's. See also Nils Holger Petersen, "Søren Kierkegaard's Aestheticist and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*," in *Interart Poetics: Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media*, ed. Ulla-Britta Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 167–76.

5. "Vagueness" here renders the Danish word *Dunkelhed*, which could also be translated as "obscurity" or even "darkness."

6. The translator's "a negation of the feelings dependent upon the senses" seems to be a gloss on the original Danish text, which gives only "en Negation af det Sandselige" (a negation of the sensuous).

7. My translation. Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994): "Der volle lateinische Gesang, der sich steigend und fallend durch die schwellenden Töne der Musik durchdrängte, gleich wie Schiffe, die durch Wellen des Meeres segeln, hob mein Gemüt immer höher empor" (84); "Posaunen, und ich weiß selbst nicht was für allmächtige Töne, schmetterten und dröhnten eine erhabene Andacht durch alles Gebein" (85).

8. My translation. E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Beethovens Instrumental-Musik," in *Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier: Werke 1814*, in *Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Hartmut Steinecke et al. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker, 1985–), vol. 2, pt. 1 (1993), 53–54: "In die Tiefen des Geisterreichs führt uns Mozart. . . . So öffnet uns auch Beethovens Instrumental-Musik das Reich des Ungeheuern und Unermeßlichen."

9. See Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music* [orig. German 1978], trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. 58–77; Eyolf Østrem, "'The Ineffable': Affinities between Christian and Secular Concepts of Art," in *Signs of Change: Transformations of Christian Traditions and Their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000*, ed. Nils Holger Petersen, Claus Clüver, and Nicolas Bell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 265–92.

10. See Østrem, "'The Ineffable,'" 279–83.

11. The notion of form in this quotation should undoubtedly be understood as a general reference to the overall design of the drama, not in the specific musicological sense of musical form from music analysis from the nineteenth century onward.

12. There is no such scene in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. "A's" remark is ambiguous: "The famous comic scene in Molière . . . should, of course, never be included in the opera, where it has a totally disturbing effect" (SKS 2:112–13 / EO 1:109–10). This has led the translators to point out (EO 1:620n77) that such a scene is not included in the Danish libretto that Kierkegaard knew. It should be emphasized that there is also no such scene in the original Italian libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte.

13. Ivan Nagel, *Autonomie und Gnade: Über Mozarts Opern* (1988; Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1991), 39–47. See also the discussion in Nils Holger Petersen, "Seduction or Truth in Music? Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Søren Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2008*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 109–28; see 113.

14. Most recently, Tseng, "Kierkegaard and Music in Paradox?" See also Peter Tschuggnall, *Sören Kierkegaards Mozart-Rezeption: Analyse einer philosophisch-literarischen Deutung von Musik im context des Zusammenspiels der Künste* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1992), esp. 135n12 and 152; Elisabete M. de Sousa, "Kierkegaard's Musical Recollections," in Cappelørn et al., *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2008*, 85–108. De Sousa suggests that "A's" treatise also relates to contemporary music culture and music performances, and not least that it seems to be an indirect tribute to Liszt's fantasy for the piano after Mozart's opera, *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, composed and already widely performed in 1841. See further Ettore Rocca, "'The Immediate Erotic Stages' in *Either/Or* as Christian Writing," in Cappelørn et al., *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2008*, 129–40; Petersen, "Søren Kierkegaard's Aestheticist and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*"; Petersen, "Seduction or Truth in Music?"; Nils Holger Petersen, "Mozart und das Jüngste Gericht: Der Komtur, die Posaune Gottes und . . . Søren Kierkegaard," in *Mozart und die Religion*, ed. by Peter Tschuggnall (Salzburg: Mueller-Speiser, 2010), 191–205.

15. I use the same notion of form as in n. 11 above.

16. See Rocca, "'The Immediate Erotic Stages' in *Either/Or* as Christian Writing," 132–33.

17. *Ibid.*, 133.

18. See Petersen, "Søren Kierkegaard's Aestheticist and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*," 168–71.

19. See Petersen, "Seduction or Truth in Music?" and Petersen, "Mozart und das Jüngste Gericht," with many further references to studies of the opera.

20. See, for instance, Stefan Kunze, *Don Giovanni vor Mozart: Die Tradition der Don-Giovanni-Opern im italienischen Buffa-Theater des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Fink, 1972).

21. See also a forthcoming essay by Christian Verdoner Larsen, "The Musical Problem of Modern Existence: Perspectives on Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Music in *Either/Or* (1843) and the Demonic Dialectic of Don Juan and Faust," in *Transfiguration: Nordic Journal of Religion and the Arts* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2017), in which the author develops the question of repetition and music in Kierkegaard in the context of a performer's perspective, drawing also on the second part of *Either/Or* and Kierkegaard's *The Repetition* (1843).

22. Augustine, *Confessions* 11.27.34–36; Latin text and English commentary, 3 vols., ed. James J. O’Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1:161–62; *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1961), 275–77.

23. K. E. Løgstrup, *Skabelse og Tilintetgørelse: Metafysik IV* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1978), 11–45.

24. *Ibid.*, 38–39, my translation.

25. I deal with this in much greater detail in “Time and Space in W. A. Mozart’s *Ave verum corpus* (1791): The Fictive Space of the Musical Work and Transcendence,” in *Transcendence and Sensoriness: Perceptions, Revelation, and the Arts*, ed. Svein Aage Christoffersen et al., *Studies in Religion and the Arts*, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 287–325, esp. 303–17.

26. Joakim Garff, SAK: *Søren Aabye Kierkegaard. En biografi* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2000), 109.

27. Theodor W. Adorno, “Musik, zum Augenblick geschrumpft, ist wahr als Ausschlag negativer Erfahrung,” in *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, vol. 12 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1975), 43; as rendered in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (London: Sheed and Ward, 1987), 37.

28. Mann had read the finished parts of Adorno’s work about Schoenberg and Webern that were written during the Second World War. See Nils Holger Petersen, “Introduction: Transformations of Christian Traditions and Their Representation in the Arts, 1000–2000,” in Petersen et al., *Signs of Change*, 1–23, esp. 9–16.

29. Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (London: Everyman’s Library, 1992), 246. “Der wußte Bescheid und verstand sich auf mein besseres Verhältnis zu dieser schönen Kunst,—der allerchristlichsten Kunst, wie er findet,—mit negativem Vorzeichen natürlich, vom Christentum zwar eingesetzt und entwickelt, aber verneint und ausgeschlossen als dämonischer Bereich,—und da hast du es denn. Eine hochtheologische Angelegenheit, die Musik—wie die Sünde es ist, wie ich es bin.” Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn erzählt von einem Freunde* (Berlin: Fischer Verlag, 1963), 260.