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Sentimental and Anti-Sentimental in *Le nozze di Figaro*

STEFANO CASTELVECCHI

I hasten to laugh about everything, for fear of having to weep about it.
—Beaumarchais, *Le Barbier de Séville*

The culture of sentiment and sensibility in eighteenth-century Europe is a phenomenon of such proportions that it is often viewed as epoch-defining.[1] The indebtedness of Da Ponte's and Mozart's operatic comedies to the development of sentimental trends in literature and drama has been variously recognized.[2] In this essay, I wish to explore some of the specific ways in which *Le nozze di Figaro* interacts with aspects of sentimental culture, and to show that this opera owes at least as much to a complementary tendency, one with explicit *anti*-sentimental components. First, however, it may be helpful to provide a brief sketch of the culture in question. This is not intended to do justice to the variety and complexity of the subject, but only to provide some background for the argument of the present essay; it is therefore bound to be partial (in both senses of the word).

Versions of this paper were presented at the Sixty-Second Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society (Baltimore, 1996), at the Institute of Advanced Musical Studies (King's College London, 1998), and at the universities of Bristol and Leeds (1999). The paper stems from my Ph.D. dissertation ("Sentimental Opera: The Emergence of a Genre, 1760–1790," The University of Chicago, 1996), currently being revised as a book, and as such shares to various degrees the larger project's debt to a long list of people and institutions; here, I wish at least to thank those whose comments helped me in its specific refashioning as an article, Laurence Dreyfus, Roger Parker, and the three anonymous referees for this journal. All translations are mine unless otherwise specified.

1. In a frequently cited article of 1956, Northrop Frye labeled as an "age of sensibility" the entire second half of the eighteenth century, at least in the field of English literature ("Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," *ELH* 23 [1956], 144–52).

2. For two different views on this subject see Paolo Gallarati, "Mozart and Eighteenth-Century Comedy," and Edmund J. Goehring, "The Sentimental Muse of Opera Buffa," both in *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*, ed. Mary Hunter and James Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 98–111 and 115–45, respectively.

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Central to the emergence of a sentimental culture in eighteenth-century Europe was a new confidence in the fundamental goodness of emotions and in their power to act as a binding force between humans. For a good part of the century, the semantic area of sentiment and sensibility was often associated with the best one could hope for in the human, moral, and aesthetic realms.[3] When it comes to the more specific phenomenon of the development of sentimental genres in literature, drama, and art, however, no less important was a related set of strong convictions: first and foremost, that it was possible for works of art to treat contemporary, everyday life in serious or even tragic ways; second, that works thus conceived would be more likely to "interest" (that is, to move and involve) their readers, spectators, and beholders; and finally, that the power to elicit such personal involvement would in turn reinforce the (purported) aim of these works, that of moral edification. The formation of such a poetics can be traced in countless documents, beginning with the texts (and paratexts) of such archetypal works as George Lillo's play *The London Merchant* (1731) and Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740).[4]

In the theater, the poetics of the sentimental was bound to upset the prevailing system of genres. Indeed, what we can call, for the sake of brevity, "sentimental drama" or "bourgeois drama" is better described as a family of experimental (sub)genres; the family is almost as numerous and diverse as the variety of labels adopted (*bourgeois tragedy, domestic tragedy, sentimental comedy, tearful comedy, serious comedy, serious drama*—and the list could go on). Common to these enterprises was, again, a drive to give sympathetic and moving treatment to the private life of contemporary, ordinary people. Everyday life, however, was traditionally the realm of comedy, according to a classicist theory of decorum that would reserve serious treatment for characters of a different condition (the monarchs and heroes of tragedy, remote both in station and in time). By opening up the new and complex space of a "third genre"—one different from the established genres of comedy and tragedy—bourgeois dramas presented a challenge to that classicist system. It is therefore understandable that many of them were allowed to leave home only with the escort of some kind of theoretical statement: Diderot's contributions to the genre—his two plays from the 1750s—certainly owe much of their paradigmatic status to the bulky essays that accompanied them in their printed versions.[5] In presenting what he called the *genre sérieux*—what his French followers would

3. For a general survey of the topic, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986). For the terminological aspect, still fundamental is Erik Erämetsä, *A Study of the Word "Sentimental" and of Other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth-Century Sentimentalism in England* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1951).

4. George Lillo, *The London Merchant: or, The History of George Barnwell,* in *The Dramatic Works of George Lillo,* ed. James L. Steffensen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 113–209; and Samuel Richardson, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded,* ed. T. C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

5. Denis Diderot, *Le Fils naturel, ou Les Epreuves de la vertu. Comédie en cinq actes, et en prose, Avec l'Histoire véritable de la Pièce* (Amsterdam [Paris], 1757) and *Le Père de famille, comédie en cinq actes, et en prose, avec un discours sur la poésie dramatique* (Amsterdam [Paris], 1758). Both

soon label, quite simply, *drame*—Diderot defended it against the frequent accusation of being a "mixed" genre: the new type of theater had nothing to do with the abrupt juxtaposition of modes that marred tragicomedy.[6] (And in fact, whereas even recent opera scholarship tends to refer to mode-mixture as a defining feature of the "third genre," representative plays and operas are often rather consistently serious in tone.)

The programmatic insistence on the moral effect of sentimental works may be viewed in many cases as little more than a defensive move (and, especially in the realm of drama, a move in rather traditional terms). Yet, in more general respects, the emergence of a sentimental poetics can be seen as a response to widely felt needs—needs represented in the important motifs that bourgeois drama shares with forms of literature developing in the same period: the staging of the self, and the foregrounding of anxieties about identity and familial roles. Indeed, the corollary of this poetics at the level of reception is also well documented. One example among many is provided by the reactions of Rousseau's readers, as studied by Robert Darnton. A typical reader of Rousseau

> did not read in order to enjoy literature but to cope with life and especially family life.
>
> . . . [O]rdinary readers from all ranks of society were swept off their feet. They wept, they suffocated, they raved, they looked deep into their lives and resolved to live better, then they poured their hearts out in more tears.[7]

Here, too, the relationship between strong emotional appeal, reference to the quotidian, and moral preoccupation is made explicit.

From its very beginnings, however, sentimental culture seems to carry with it an anti-sentimental counterface, most conspicuous in texts that refer in explicit (though negative) ways to its recognizable features, both stylistic and ideological. A typical anti-sentimental strategy—of which the classical example is the immediate rereading of *Pamela* offered by Fielding's *Shamela* (1741)—would be to invoke the repertory of sentimental topoi and treat them subversively (in the root sense: turn them upside down). The moralizing tones and pathetic attitudes of sentimental characters would either become the sport of cynics and libertines (see the example from Laclos in note 29 below) or be exposed as suspicious if not downright dishonest ("faints that are feints," in the words of one literary scholar).[8]

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texts are available in a critical edition: *Diderot: Le Drame bourgeois,* ed. Jacques Chouillet and Anne-Marie Chouillet, vol. 10 of *Diderot: Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Hermann, 1980).

6. *Diderot: Le Drame bourgeois,* 130–32.

7. Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," chap. 6 of his *Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Random House, 1985), 241–42.

8. Thomas Keymer, introduction to Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams and An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews,* ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xvi.

Needless to say, the opposition is not an absolute one. For instance, it is possible (and indeed usual) to claim that some potential for voyeurism was already implicit within the literature of *sensibilité,* in the erotic or sadistic pleasures that the distress of virtuous characters afforded other characters as well as readers. Even so, at a basic level the two approaches remain quite distinct: a reader of our day may doubt Janet Todd's claim that sentimental works "discourage multiple readings,"[9] but it is still true that the "implied" author and reader of a typical sentimental text subscribe to a worldview that is radically different from that of the opposite camp (and the choice of camp was often presented as a moral or even existential one). This is why the coexistence of sentimental and anti-sentimental drives in so many aspects of eighteenth-century life continues to intrigue critics, and even to perplex them when those drives are seen to operate within a single work.[10] We should not try to explain away the opposition as nonexistent, nor is there any need to ask for a resolution of this tension: in either case, we may be shying away from the complexity of the culture in question. We can, rather, bring its two facets to the fore and contemplate in their perpetual interplay a central and fascinating aspect of the entire period.

The attraction to both poles, the sentimental and the anti-sentimental, is a constant in the work of Beaumarchais. The playwright made his debut by writing a few pieces in the low comic genre of the *parade* (1757–63).[11] Already in this period, however, he must have become involved with Diderot's *genre sérieux,* since the earliest sketches for his first work of a Diderotian cast (*Eugénie*) date from 1761. Within a few years, he would embrace openly the cause of the "serious genre": the prefatory essay to *Eugénie* (1767) is one of the most powerful pronouncements in favor of this new kind of theater.[12] Yet, after his second *drame* (*Les Deux Amis,* 1770), Beaumarchais turned to comedy, creating his most successful works, *Le Barbier de Séville* (1772–75) and *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1778–84).[13] This was a conscious change of direction, and the playwright now seemed to satirize the serious genre almost as explicitly as he had earlier promoted it. Indeed, in the light of Beaumarchais's involvement

9. Todd, *Sensibility,* 3.

10. Béatrice Didier, for instance, studied at length the perpetual vacillation characterizing the production of Beaumarchais (to which we shall return) and the endless ambivalence of Laclos's *Liaisons dangereuses* (see her *Beaumarchais ou la passion du drame* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994] and *Choderlos de Laclos: Les Liaisons dangereuses. Pastiches et ironie* [Paris: Éditions du temps, 1998]).

11. The *parade* had origins in the *théâtre de la foire* and was akin to the Italian *commedia dell'arte;* it was often characterized by pseudo-plebeian language and obscene content.

12. Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Eugénie,* in his *Œuvres,* ed. Pierre Larthomas (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 117–97.

13. On the complex chronology of these works, see Beaumarchais, *Œuvres,* 1300–1301 and 1364–66.

with the *drame, Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro* may be read as deliberately anti-sentimental pieces: as we shall see, they often play with, and overturn, the recognizable conventions of the recent sentimental genres, literary and theatrical. After the two Figaro comedies, Beaumarchais returned to much darker tones with their sequel, *La Mère coupable* (1784–92).

The *genre sérieux,* then, appears to be a constant point of reference in Beaumarchais's world, whether in a positive or in a negative sense—so much so that Béatrice Didier has recently proposed reconsidering his entire oeuvre from this angle.[14] In Didier's view, *Le Barbier de Séville* and *Le Mariage de Figaro* reveal Beaumarchais's indebtedness to the *drame* both in terms of "contamination" (the presence of frankly serious elements) and in terms of parody. My only objection to her interpretation is one of degree. In her effort to reveal the presence of the *drame* within the Figaro comedies, Didier at times seems to overemphasize their serious side: by her reading, Beaumarchais both uses and destabilizes "serious" procedures, deftly balancing comic and sentimental components.[15] I would suggest that the serious use of sentimental themes and stylemes is quite outweighed by the subversive use of them in *Le Mariage de Figaro,* and perhaps even more in *Le Barbier de Séville.* (True, Rosine's tears and her indignation in the last act of the latter are sincere—an anticipation of the increasingly serious part she will play in the rest of the trilogy—but her counterfeit swoon can only be read as a parody of a literary and theatrical commonplace.)[16] Even Didier admits that, within the "horizon of expectations" of these comedies, most *drame*-like elements are bound to be perceived as essentially parodistic.[17] And indeed, responses contemporary with *Le Mariage de Figaro* insist on its cynical, immoral, and parodistic aspects.[18]

From its earliest stages, bourgeois drama was characterized by an obsession with familial relationships and a corresponding insistence on familial appellations, often reaching its peak in recognition scenes. In championing "domestic tragedy," Jean-François Marmontel had argued, "The sacred names of friend, of father, of lover, of spouse, of son, of mother—in a word, of human

14. Didier, *Beaumarchais.*

15. Ibid., 62, 72.

16. Act 2, sc. 15. Beaumarchais's Figaro comedies are not always unequivocal, however, in their attack on the *drame. Le Barbier de Séville,* for instance, contains an explicitly derisive reference to bourgeois drama, but puts it into the mouth of the least sympathetic character in the play: a reactionary Bartholo lists the *drame* among the foolishnesses of the century, in the good company of the *Encyclopédie,* freedom of thought, and electricity (act 1, sc. 3). Interestingly, in the corresponding passage in Cesare Sterbini's libretto for Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia, drame* would be "translated" as *dramma semiserio,* thus reformulating the joke in the operatic terms of the 1810s.

17. Didier, *Beaumarchais,* 63.

18. See Daniel Heartz, *Mozart's Operas,* ed., with contributing essays, by Thomas Bauman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 131.

being: these are the attributes that move us; they will never lose their claims."[19] This is well exemplified by a passage from the final scene of Diderot's paradigmatic bourgeois drama *Le Fils naturel* (1757), the dialogue of which consists almost entirely of those "sacred names":

CONSTANCE: Et vous, Mademoiselle, courez embrasser votre père. Le voilà.
ROSALIE: Mon père!
DORVAL: Ciel! que vois-je! C'est Lysimond! c'est mon père!
LYSIMOND: Oui, mon fils. Oui, c'est moi. Approchez mes enfants, que je vous embrasse . . . Ah, ma fille! . . . Ah, mon fils! . . . Du moins, je les ai vus . . . Mon fils, voilà ta sœur . . . Ma fille, voilà ton frère. . . .
ROSALIE: Mon frère!
DORVAL: Ma sœur!
ROSALIE: Dorval!
DORVAL: Rosalie!
Ces mots se disent avec toute la vitesse de la surprise, et se font entendre presque au même instant.
LYSIMOND: Oui, mes enfants [. . .]

CONSTANCE: And you, Mademoiselle, run and embrace your father. There he is.
ROSALIE: My father!
DORVAL: Heavens! What do I see! It's Lysimond! It's my father!
LYSIMOND: Yes, my son. Yes, it's me. Come here, my children, let me embrace you . . . Ah, my daughter! . . . Ah, my son! . . . At least I have seen them . . . My son, here is your sister . . . My daughter, here is your brother. . . .
ROSALIE: My brother!
DORVAL: My sister!
ROSALIE: Dorval!
DORVAL: Rosalie!
These words are uttered with all the rapidity of surprise, and are heard almost simultaneously.
LYSIMOND: Yes, my children [. . .]

In his Diderotian plays, Beaumarchais diligently made use of the same techniques. Here is a recognition scene from *Les Deux Amis*:

AURELLY *lui tend les bras:* Tu es cette fille chérie.
PAULINE *s'y jette à corps perdu:* Mon père!
AURELLY *la soutient:* Ma fille! ma fille! la première fois que je me permets ce nom, faut-il le prononcer si douloureusement?
PAULINE *veut se mettre à genoux:* Ah mon père!
AURELLY *la retient:* Mon enfant . . .[20]

19. "Les noms sacrés d'ami, de père, d'amant, d'époux, de fils, de mère, d'homme enfin: voilà les qualités pathétiques: leurs droits ne prescriront jamais" (Marmontel, *Poétique françoise* [Paris: Lesclapart, 1763], 2:147–48). Marmontel's precept would later be expounded by his own characters: his libretto for Grétry's *Lucile* (Paris: Comédie-Italienne, 1769)—a successful *opéra comique* in the tearful vein—includes the quartet "Où peut-on être mieux," which became the anthem of familial sentimentalism and opens with the words "What better than to be within the bosom of one's family? [. . .] The names of spouse, of father, of son, and of daughter are delightful" (Marmontel, *Lucile* [Paris: Merlin, 1770], 10).

20. Act 3, sc. 5 (*Œuvres,* 239).

AURELLY *holding out his arms to her:* That beloved daughter is you.
PAULINE *throwing herself into his arms:* My father!
AURELLY *supporting her:* My daughter! My daughter! The first time I allow myself to utter that name, must it be so painful?
PAULINE *going to kneel:* Ah, my father!
AURELLY *restraining her:* My child . . .

As Béatrice Didier aptly remarks, "At the most intense moment, the characters are unable to utter anything other than the name of the familial tie they have just discovered: . . . kinship is first and foremost a matter of language."[21] Beaumarchais was well aware that such techniques were hallmarks of the *drame*—something he made explicit later, in the preface to *Le Barbier de Séville*. There, in a tongue-in-cheek sketch, the playwright showed how easy it would be to rewrite this comedy "à la manière [. . .] *dramique,*" with Bartholo recognizing in Figaro his natural son: "Mon Fils! ô Ciel, mon Fils! mon cher Fils! . . ."[22] This recognition scene, foreshadowed in the preface to *Le Barbier de Séville,* would in fact take place in *Le Mariage de Figaro,* the second comedy of the trilogy. Here, Beaumarchais's conscious exploitation of situation and language can only be seen as the parodying of a well-established tradition:

BARTHOLO, *montrant Marceline:* Voilà ta mère.
FIGARO: . . . Nourrice?
BARTHOLO: Ta propre mère.
LE COMTE: Sa mère!
FIGARO: Expliquez-vous.
MARCELINE, *montrant Bartholo:* Voilà ton Père.
FIGARO, *désolé:* O o oh! aïe de moi!
MARCELINE: Est-ce que la nature ne te l'a pas dit mille fois?
FIGARO: Jamais.
LE COMTE, *à part:* Sa mère![23]

BARTHOLO, *pointing at Marceline:* Here is your mother.
FIGARO: . . . Nurse?
BARTHOLO: Your own mother.
THE COUNT: His mother!
FIGARO: Explain yourself.
MARCELINE, *pointing at Bartholo:* Here is your father.
FIGARO, *disconsolate:* Oh oh! poor me!
MARCELINE: Has nature not already told you this a thousand times?
FIGARO: Never.
THE COUNT, *aside:* His mother!

21. "Et au moment le plus intense, les protagonistes ne peuvent rien dire d'autre que de nommer ce lien de parenté qu'ils viennent de découvrir: . . . la parenté est avant tout affaire de langage" (Didier, *Beaumarchais,* 57).

22. *Œuvres,* 274–75. The term *dramique,* Beaumarchais's coinage, makes explicit the reference to the *drame* (in the specific sense of the new genre): the existing term *dramatique* could be understood as referring to *drame* in the standard, general sense of "drama."

23. Act 3, sc. 16 (*Œuvres,* 445–46).

This parodistic reference did not escape Da Ponte when he was preparing the libretto for *Le nozze di Figaro*.[24] Beaumarchais's mechanical symmetry (note, in the passage just quoted, how Marceline's first line duplicates Bartholo's opening) is reproduced in the corresponding passage of the libretto:

BARTOLO: Ecco tua Madre.
FIGARO: Balia . . .
BARTOLO: No, tua Madre.
CURZIO: / *a 2* / IL CONTE: } Sua Madre!
FIGARO: Cosa sento!
MARCELLINA: Ecco tuo Padre.
Riconosci in questo amplesso
(*Marcellina corre ad abbracciar Figaro*)
Una Madre amato figlio.
FIGARO: Padre mio, fate lo stesso,
Non mi fate più arrossir.
[. . .]
CURZIO: / *a 2* / IL CONTE: } Ei suo Padre, ella sua Madre [. . .][25]

BARTOLO: Here is your Mother.
FIGARO: Nurse . . .
BARTOLO: No, your Mother.
CURZIO: / *a 2* / THE COUNT: } His Mother!
FIGARO: What do I hear!
MARCELLINA: Here is your Father.
Recognize in this embrace
(*Marcellina runs to embrace Figaro*)
Your Mother, dear son.

24. In the same period, the autumn of 1785, Da Ponte reworked Goldoni's sentimental comedy *Le Bourru bienfaisant* (Paris, 1771) into a libretto for an opera by Vicente Martín y Soler, *Il burbero di buon cuore,* whose premiere at the Burgtheater (January 1786) took place a few months before that of *Le nozze di Figaro* (May 1786). It is worth noting that, while daring to write in French for a French audience, Goldoni had given one of his protagonists the name of Dorval (kept by Da Ponte in his libretto adaptation), a possible reference to Diderot's serious genre (Dorval is the protagonist of *Le Fils naturel*). Goldoni's comedy can be read in *Tutte le opere di Carlo Goldoni,* ed. Giuseppe Ortolani, vol. 8 (Milan: Mondadori, 1948), 1019–72. The libretto of *Il burbero* has recently been reprinted in Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Libretti viennesi,* ed. Lorenzo della Chà (Parma: Guanda, 1999), 1:87–161. The relationship between the opera and Goldoni's source is discussed in Bruce Alan Brown, "*Lo specchio francese:* Viennese Opera Buffa and the Legacy of French Theatre," in Hunter and Webster, *Opera Buffa,* 61–63.

25. Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro* (Vienna, 1786), act 3, sc. 4. A facsimile of the libretto may be found in *The Librettos of Mozart's Operas,* vol. 3, *The Da Ponte Operas,* ed. Ernest Warburton (New York: Garland, 1992).

FIGARO: Dear Father, do the same,
Let me blush no longer.
[. . .]

CURZIO:
a 2
THE COUNT: } He's his Father, she his Mother [. . .]

The effect is intensified later in the same scene, in the passage in which Susanna makes the same discovery:

MARCELLINA: [. . .]
Sua Madre abbracciate,
Che vostra or sarà.
(*corre a abbracciar Susanna*)

SUSANNA: Sua Madre?
TUTTI: Sua Madre.
FIGARO: E quello è mio Padre,
Che a te lo dirà.
SUSANNA: Suo Padre?
TUTTI: Suo Padre.
FIGARO: E quella è mia Madre
Che a te lo dirà.
(*corrono tutti quattro ad abbracciarsi*)

MARCELLINA: [. . .]
Embrace his Mother,
Who will now be yours.
(*runs to embrace Susanna*)

SUSANNA: His Mother?
ALL: His Mother.
FIGARO: And that is my Father,
Who will confirm it.
SUSANNA: His Father?
ALL: His Father.
FIGARO: And that is my Mother
Who will confirm it.
(*all four fall into each other's arms*)

In Mozart's setting (the third-act Sestetto "Riconosci in questo amplesso"), Bartolo, Marcellina, and Figaro obsessively repeat "Figlio amato," "Parenti amati" (the latter is Mozart's addition to the text). If one applies to that setting the stage directions from the libretto, the newfound family should remain frozen in an embrace throughout the first forty-five measures of the piece, their insistence on the "sacred names" forming the background against which other incidents take place.

Mozart's use of the passage just quoted is remarkable for its reformulation of the poetic text. The following transcription of the words from the score shows how the composer pushed Beaumarchais's and Da Ponte's game to

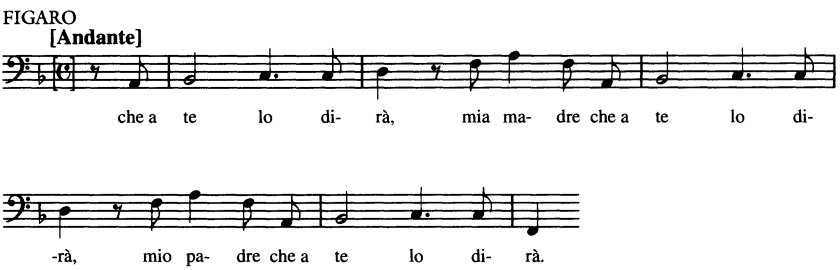
extremes, exaggerating all of its points (note the obsession with the familial epithets, and the play of duplication and symmetry both at the local level and at that of the overall structure):

MARCELLINA: [. . .]
sua madre abbracciate, che or vostra sarà,
sua madre abbracciate, che or vostra sarà.
SUSANNA: Sua madre?
BARTOLO: Sua madre!
SUSANNA: Sua madre?
IL CONTE: Sua madre!
SUSANNA: Sua madre?
CURZIO: Sua madre!
SUSANNA: Sua madre?
MARCELLINA: Sua madre,
BARTOLO: Sua madre, sua madre!
IL CONTE: Sua madre, sua madre!
CURZIO: Sua madre, sua madre!
MARCELLINA: Sua madre, sua madre!
} [*a 4*]
SUSANNA: Tua madre?
FIGARO: E quello è mio padre che a te lo dirà, che a te lo dirà.
SUSANNA: Suo padre?
BARTOLO: Suo padre!
SUSANNA: Suo padre?
IL CONTE: Suo padre!
SUSANNA: Suo padre?
CURZIO: Suo padre!
SUSANNA: Suo padre?
MARCELLINA: Suo padre,
BARTOLO: Suo padre, suo padre!
IL CONTE: Suo padre, suo padre!
CURZIO: Suo padre, suo padre!
MARCELLINA: Suo padre, suo padre!
} [*a 4*]
SUSANNA: Tuo padre?
FIGARO: E quella è mia madre che a te lo dirà, che a te lo dirà, mia madre che a te lo dirà, mio padre che a te lo dirà.

What could have been a moment of intense emotion is turned into a piece of parody. The setting forces Figaro to point repeatedly at each parent, and it is virtually impossible for him to sing the concluding, repetitive passage without such symmetrical gestures. Unlike so many characters of the bourgeois drama, this recovered son has never heard the *voix du sang* (as we have seen, Beaumarchais's text is adamant: "MARCELINE: Has nature not already told you this a thousand times? FIGARO: Never."). Mozart, elsewhere the master of the pathetic, recurs here to a stock pattern—the line $\hat{3}$–$\hat{4}$–$\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$, $\hat{3}$–$\hat{4}$–$\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$, $\hat{3}$–$\hat{4}$–$\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ (Ex. 1).[26] Even the beautiful ensemble passage that follows (and concludes

26. Musical examples for *Le nozze di Figaro* are from the vocal score (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1976) based on Ludwig Finscher's critical edition for the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1973).

Example 1 Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro,* Sestetto "Riconosci in questo amplesso," mm. 97–102



this sextet), while restoring a degree of Mozartean sympathy, cannot altogether dispel the parodistic effect of the recognition scene (and the sublime flights of Susanna's voice may have more to do with her realization that she is not in danger of losing Figaro than with the recovery of his parents).[27]

The sentimental view of the family often extended to the whole of society, and the relationship between masters and servants would typically be portrayed as an idyllic one.[28] Beaumarchais treated this stereotype with equal irony: tableaux representing a blissful social harmony, so frequent in sentimental literature, return insistently in *Le Mariage de Figaro,* but always within dramatic situations that overturn their usual, reassuring meaning. First tableau: servants and villagers pay homage to the Count's generous renunciation of the *ius primae noctis,* but the Count is understandably *embarrassé* (as we read in the stage direction), since this homage follows his attempt to seduce Suzanne. Second tableau: the scene in which the village girls offer flowers to the Countess is abruptly exposed as a masquerade (in which Chérubin *en travesti* has received an unsettling kiss from the Countess) and followed by Fanchette's (innocent?) disclosure of the Count's advances to her (Fanchette is the twelve-year-old daughter of the gardener, the Barbarina of Da Ponte's version). Third tableau: in the *divertissement* that follows, two village girls sing the praises of their generous master, who has virtuously given up his "rights" over Suzanne; it is *during* this duo that the Count enthusiastically receives Suzanne's *billet-doux* proposing the garden appointment for that night.[29]

27. From the moment of the discovery on, attitudes and relationships within the newfound family will be variously treated (and here, as in other cases, the opera balks at the extremes of cynicism found in the play), but they result in an overall matter-of-factness that is a far cry from the exploitation of similar situations in sentimental literature.

28. Da Ponte's own portrayal of the relationship between Ferramondo and his servant Castagna in *Il burbero di buon cuore* is of this type, replicating that between Géronte and Picard in Goldoni's *Le Bourru bienfaisant* (see above, n. 24).

29. *Le Mariage de Figaro,* act 1, sc. 10; act 4, sc. 4–6; and act 4, sc. 9. A similarly iconoclastic attack is found in Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782), a work contemporaneous with *Le Mariage de Figaro.* Tear-jerking tableaux displaying the benevolence of noblemen and the resulting gratitude of the needy were stereotypical in sentimental literature: in *Les Liaisons dangereuses,*

In Da Ponte's libretto, the first tableau finds expression in the chorus "Giovani liete" (act 1, sc. 8), the second gives rise to "Ricevete, o padroncina" (act 3, sc. 10), and the third becomes "Amanti costanti" (act 3, sc. 14). Mozart's music for these passages reinforces the dramaturgical conflicts in a paradoxical way. The stereotypical, unproblematic musical portrayal of the peasantry and of their submissive love for their masters seems to ignore the real social tensions of the story, to clash with the complexity of the situation and the licentiousness of its detail. For all this music's charms, one can understand why Massimo Mila found it somewhat silly and superficial.[30] Mila heard in it a parody of stock pastoral nostalgia; it may be more apposite to say that this music takes up and reinforces the anti-sentimental attack on the portrayal of society as an extended, harmonious family.

The first appearance of the villagers on stage (Coro "Giovani liete") is greeted by the sarcastic response of the Count ("Cos'è questa Comedia?").[31] Clearly, he will not be part of the tableau, and dismisses his subjects without granting the little ceremony they have come for (the "crowning" of Susanna with a virginal veil). After this, their mechanical repetition of "Giovani liete" as they leave the stage sounds even more ironic. For the flat *ottonari* of "Ricevete, o padroncina" Mozart resorted to a standard bagpipe melody (almost identical to one still heard in Italy over Christmas).[32] The human backdrop provided by these peasants contrasts strikingly with the few servants who come to the fore as characters in *Le nozze di Figaro,* individuals with rounded personalities and defiant attitudes. Indeed, that contrast reinforces the iconoclastic effect: once these harmless peasants are set against Figaro, Susanna, and Barbarina, any sentimental portrayal of subordinates is unmasked as inauthentic and risible.[33]

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one such tableau is cynically set up by the libertine Valmont in order to impress the virtuous Présidente de Tourvel (the scene is of seminal importance, being instrumental in Valmont's seduction of Tourvel). Valmont calls this a "spectacle," and the reference to Diderotian drama is explicit: the old paterfamilias (who is truly in need and sincerely grateful) weeps, other family members prostrate themselves at Valmont's knees, and the latter sees himself as having "appeared not unlike the Hero of a *Drame,* in the denouement scene" ("je ne ressemblais pas mal au Héros d'un Drame, dans la scène du dénouement"). Valmont's inability to keep back *his* tears signals, again, a not entirely unambivalent relationship to sentimentalism. See Pierre-Ambroise-François Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses,* in *Œuvres complètes,* ed. Laurent Versini (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), letter 21 (pp. 45–47).

30. Massimo Mila, *Lettura delle "Nozze di Figaro": Mozart e la ricerca della felicità* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), 59–60, 141, 143.

31. "What is this Comedy?" (*Nozze,* act 1, sc. 8). The phrase anticipates one that Beaumarchais's Count utters much later in the drama (between the following two tableaux): "LE COMTE, *outré*: Jouons-nous une comédie?" (*Mariage,* act 4, sc. 6).

32. An analogous borrowing occurs in another passage of *Le nozze di Figaro:* the bagpipe melody in the Finale of act 2 (mm. 331–35) is taken wholesale from a popular tune. See Heartz, *Mozart's Operas,* 143–44.

33. Others may perceive these peasants as rather aware, and their "naive" homages as consciously ironic. Of course, this would not invalidate an anti-sentimental interpretation of these

If Da Ponte and Mozart were ready to recognize Beaumarchais's corrosive references to the commonplaces of the sentimental tradition, their Viennese audience was arguably no less prepared to enjoy similar allusions in *Le nozze di Figaro*. The Burgtheater had offered numerous productions of "serious" pieces; in particular, both Diderot's *Le Père de famille* (in Lessing's translation *Der Hausvater*) and Beaumarchais's *Eugénie* were staged there virtually every year between 1776 and 1785.[34]

If one can argue, however, that Beaumarchais's Figaro comedies are not entirely unequivocal in their approach to the stereotypes of the *drame* and of sentimental ideology, such tensions are even more palpable in *Le nozze di Figaro:* Da Ponte's words and (more often) Mozart's music can resist the general anti-sentimental thrust of their French source and adopt more frankly sentimental tones. The style of Barbarina's Cavatina "L'ho perduta," for instance, is redolent of a piece in Goldoni's and Piccinni's *La buona figliuola* (1760), the entrance aria for Sandrina, "Poverina, tutto il dì." (*La buona figliuola,* ultimately deriving from Richardson's *Pamela* and generally viewed as an archetype of the sentimental mode in opera, was one of the greatest theatrical hits of the eighteenth century and already known to Viennese audiences.)[35] For "L'ho perduta" (act 4, sc. 1), Da Ponte seems to resort to a rather direct sentimental style, marked by the typical overpunctuation and fragmented speech:

BARBARINA: L'ho perduta . . . me meschina! . . .
Ah chi sa dove sarà?
Non la trovo . . . e mia cugina! . . .
E il padron cosa dirà?

---

passages, but only give a different spin to their parodistic treatment of stereotypical, conciliatory tableaux. For all these anti-sentimental passages, however, *Le nozze di Figaro* does not go as far as to include its source's most extreme moment of skepticism: Figaro's monologue in Beaumarchais's nocturnal act (act 5, sc. 3). Believing himself to have been betrayed by his bride, Figaro launches into an attack on women that gradually turns into a more general, quasi-philosophical tirade (including a sarcastic retelling of the recovery of his parents). With the chilling dissection of his own self ("ce *Moi* [. . .] un assemblage informe de parties inconnues"), this barber-*philosophe* gets frighteningly close to the abysses of modernity; but there are extremes that are not permitted to a comic libretto, even one of the quality of *Le nozze di Figaro.*

34. See Franz Hadamowsky, *Die Wiener Hoftheater (Staatstheater) 1776–1966: Verzeichnis der aufgeführten Stücke mit Bestandsnachweis und täglichem Spielplan* (Vienna: Prachner, 1966), 1:60, 40, and passim.

35. *La buona figliuola* reached the Viennese stage in 1764 and was revived in 1768 and 1777 (see Hadamowsky, *Die Wiener Hoftheater* 1:20; and Claudio Sartori, *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800: Catalogo analitico con 16 indici,* vol. 1 [Cuneo: Bertola e Locatelli, 1990], 442–43). The influence of Piccinni on Mozart was noted at least as early as Abert, who related Barbarina's aria to a piece from *La molinara* (Hermann Abert, *W. A. Mozart* [1919; reprint, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1973], 1:354).

BARBARINA: I have lost it . . . wretched me! . . .
Ah, who knows where it may be?
I cannot find it . . . and my cousin! . . .
And my master, what will he say?

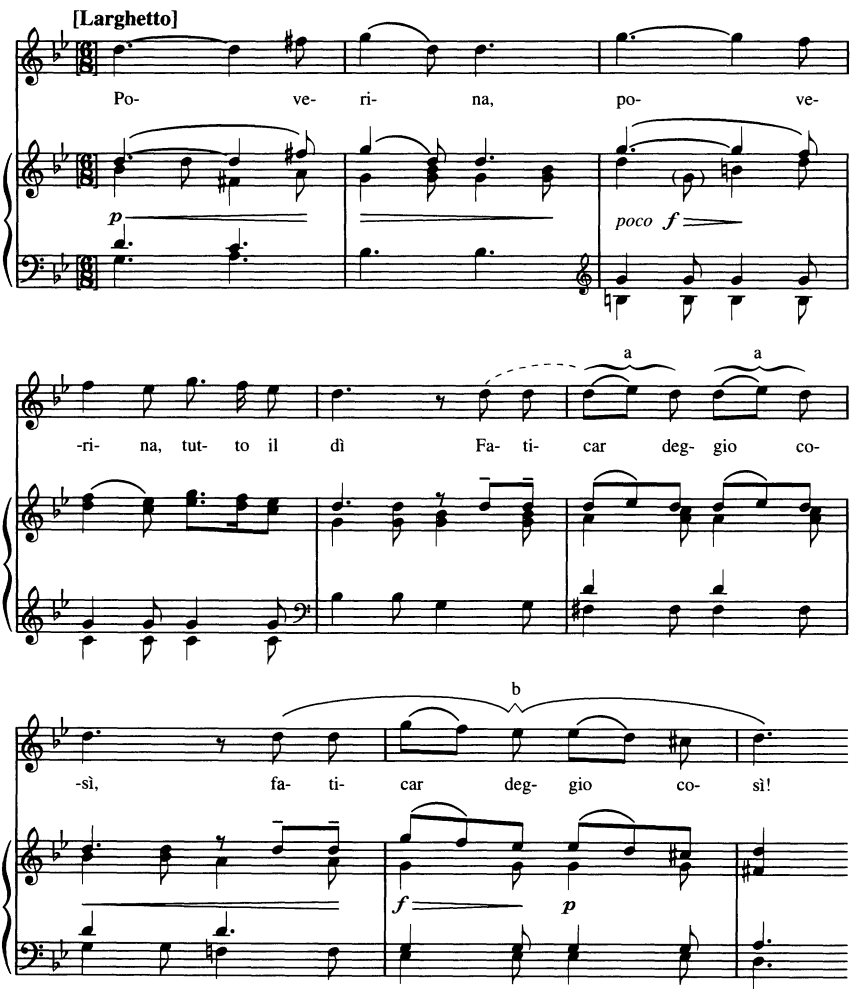
In a broad sense, Barbarina's Cavatina and the aria from *La buona figliuola* share several aspects of dramatic context (the young woman of humble extraction, the helpless lament) and of realization (*ottonari,* 6/8 time, a moderate pace, strings only, and in both cases the only minor-mode number in the entire opera). The two pieces show a degree of emotional intensity and a sadness that appear almost excessive, given the respective situations. Their similar expressive qualities are heard in the general affect, and are noticeable in such details as the motivic elements marked "a" in Examples 2a and 2b (with the pathetic insistence on the melodic semitone $\hat{5}$–$\hat{6}$), and the augmented-sixth half cadence with its associated melodic gesture (marked "b").[36] In both arias, the half cadence functions as a fitting correlative to the anxious questions in the poetry. Piccinni's piece will later come to an emphatic halt on another half cadence, on the question "Chi mi viene ad aiutar?" ("Who will come to my aid?" [Ex. 3a]); Mozart went as far as *ending* Barbarina's piece on a similar gesture (Ex. 3b)—an ending that is not a conclusion, even by any Phrygian stretch of the imagination. The Cavatina is then emphatically not a closed number; within the language of *sensibilité,* such a lack of overall formal closure can signal a character's state of agitation.[37]

The delicate pathos of this piece may seem inconsequential, given the insignificance of the loss it laments (that of a pin). In order to explore a further set of connotations relating to this scene, I would like to turn for a moment to the visual arts and borrow an image that will lead us back to Barbarina by a somewhat different path. More than any other artist of the time, Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805) is generally credited with having provided the most direct visual equivalent of sentimental literature and bourgeois drama. In fact, several of his scenes of family life remind us of Richardson and Diderot, and such works as the grandiose diptych *La Malédiction paternelle* (1777–78) manage to bestow tragic dignity on domestic life and ordinary characters in contemporary clothes. Other paintings by Greuze, however, are more complex in their meaning: indeed, some can be seen, and have been seen, as erotica. If behind the "sad innocence" of Greuze's girls one can sense elements of

36. The examples for *La buona figliuola* are taken from a piano reduction by Giacomo Benvenuti (Milan: I classici musicali italiani, 1942). A manuscript copy of the orchestral score may be found, in facsimile, in Niccolò Piccinni, *La Cecchina, ossia La buona figliuola,* intro. by Eric Weimer (New York and London: Garland, 1983).

37. See Stefano Castelvecchi, "From *Nina* to *Nina:* Psychodrama, Absorption and Sentiment in the 1780s," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8 (1996): 91–112, esp. 102–11.

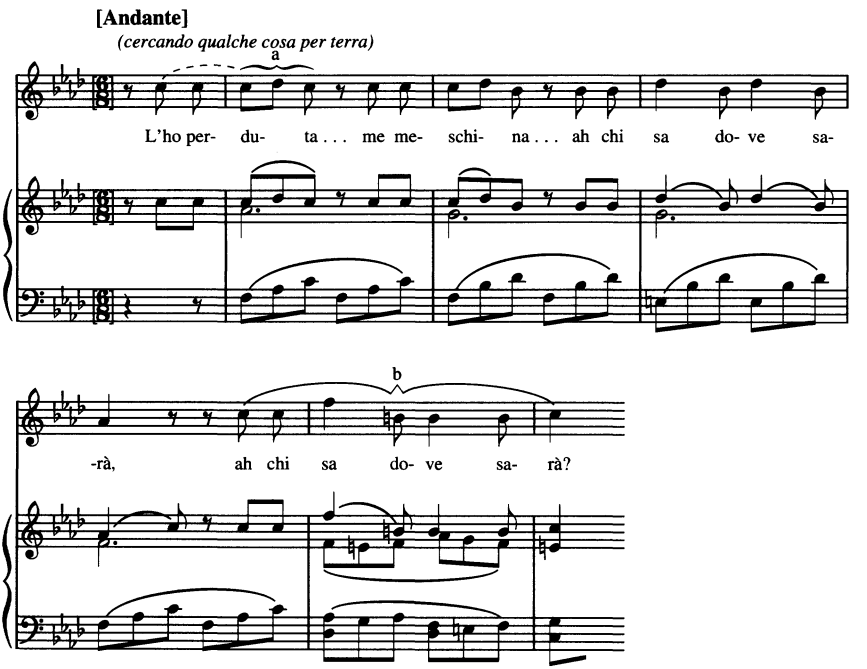
Example 2a Piccinni, *La buona figliuola,* Aria "Poverina, tutto il dì" (Sandrina), mm. 14–22



"sexual titillation,"[38] then we may reconsider the image of Barbarina's Cavatina within the iconology of these eighteenth-century "Lolitas."

38. Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988), 271. See also Jean H. Hagstrum, "Greuze," in *Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 310–16. According to Hagstrum, it was Anita Brookner who first used the term "Lolitas" for Greuze's girls; she also called this production "decent pornography" (p. 314).

Example 2b Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro,* Cavatina "L'ho perduta" (Barbarina), mm. 10–15



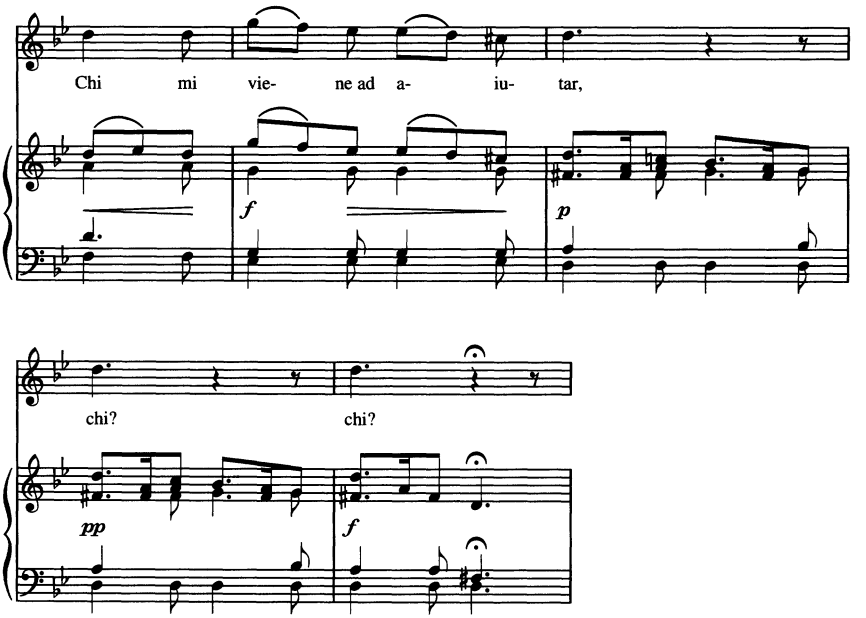
Greuze's *La Cruche cassée* (1773, Fig. 1) is an example of this ambiguous balance of sentimentality and sexual allusiveness.[39] The girl's enigmatic expression is supposedly occasioned by the event identified in the title (*The Broken Jug*), yet critics have commented on the sexual overtones of the image, seeing in it a balance of eroticism and sentimentality.[40] That the girl's clothes are in disarray, held by her hands around her womb, her breast exposed, suggests the more specific theme of the loss of virginity—one for which the broken jug would be an apt metaphor. Indeed, the title of the painting refers to an ancient French proverb sometimes associated with the ruin deriving from the excesses of passion: "Tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin elle se casse" ("The jug goes so often to the well that eventually it breaks").[41]

39. The painting was completed in 1773 but was not exhibited until 1777. Anita Brookner, *Greuze: The Rise and Fall of an Eighteenth-Century Phenomenon* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 116.

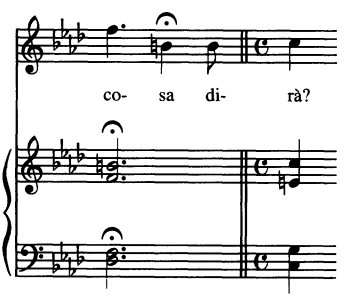
40. Wagner, *Eros Revived,* 271; Brookner, *Greuze,* 117.

41. See Didier Loubens, *Les Proverbes et locutions de la langue française: Leurs Origines et leur concordance avec les proverbes et locutions des autres nations* (Paris, 1889), 248–49; and Joseph Morawski, ed., *Proverbes français antérieurs au XV^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1925), 83.

Example 3a Piccinni, *La buona figliuola,* Aria "Poverina, tutto il dì" (Sandrina), mm. 40–43



Example 3b Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro,* Cavatina "L'ho perduta" (Barbarina), ending



Such an interpretation would not be unusual for a painting of this kind;[42] one need only read Diderot's comment on another of Greuze's works, *Young Girl Weeping over her Dead Bird:*

> But, my child, how profound, how thoughtful is your sadness! What is the meaning of this dreamy, melancholy air? What! For a bird! You are not crying,

42. Indeed, Brookner alludes to such a reading in calling this an "allegory of lost innocence" (*Greuze,* 117).

Figure 1 Greuze, *La Cruche cassée* (Photo RMN, Jean Schormans)

you are grieved, and thought accompanies your grief. There, my child, open your heart to me, tell me the truth, is it really the death of this bird that makes you withdraw so firmly and sadly within yourself? . . .[43]

43. "Mais, petite, votre douleur est bien profonde, bien réfléchie! Que signifie cet air rêveur et mélancolique? Quoi, pour un oiseau! Vous ne pleurez pas, vous êtes affligée, et la pensée accompagne votre affliction. Çà, petite, ouvrez-moi votre cœur, parlez-moi vrai, est-ce la mort de cet oiseau qui vous retire si fortement et si tristement en vous-même? . . ." (Diderot, *Salon de 1765,* ed. Else Marie Bukdahl and Annette Lorenceau [Paris: Hermann, 1984], 180). I have drawn freely from two English translations, one by John Goodman in *Diderot on Art,* vol. 1, *The*

In the long "dialogue" that Diderot imposes on the girl portrayed—itself poised between sentimentalism and voyeurism—he goes on to tell us explicitly a story of seduction and lost virginity.[44] Similar in content, if less direct, is a contemporary comment on the very painting *La Cruche cassée*. In September 1777 the twenty-three-year-old Marie-Jeanne Phlipon (later Madame Roland) paid a visit to Greuze, who showed her this painting. She then described it in a letter to a friend:

> It is a little girl, naive, fresh, charming, who has just broken her water-jug. She holds it with her arm, near the fountain where the accident has taken place; her eyes are not wide open, her mouth is still half-agape. She is trying to understand the event and to determine its gravity. One cannot imagine anything more piquant or prettier. The only objection one could raise is that the painter did not make her sorry enough to prevent her from returning to the fountain. I said this to him [Greuze]: the pleasantry amused us.[45]

In their different ways, the Fanchette of *Le Mariage de Figaro* and the Barbarina of *Le nozze di Figaro* tread a fine line between the role of the innocent and that of the *fausse ingénue*. Of the two texts, the French comedy contains the more explicit allusions to the girl's sexuality. Most notably, Beaumarchais placed in a prominent position (the conclusion of the first act) Bazile's reprimand to Chérubin for his dangerous liaison with Fanchette. Bazile's insinuation takes the form of a familiar proverb:

> BAZILE: Prenez garde, jeune homme, prenez garde! le père n'est pas satisfait; la fille a été souffletée; elle n'étudie pas avec vous: Chérubin! Chérubin! vous lui causerez des chagrins! "Tant va la cruche à l'eau"! . . .

Salon of 1765 and Notes on Painting, ed. and trans. John Goodman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 98; and one by Michael Fried in his *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 59.

44. Toward the conclusion, Diderot goes as far as to admit that he "wouldn't be too displeased to have been the cause of her pain" (*Diderot on Art* 1:99). The passage is discussed in Walter E. Rex, "Diderot Against Greuze?" in his *Diderot's Counterpoints: The Dynamics of Contrariety in His Major Works* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998), 205–7.

45. "C'est une petite fille naïve, fraîche, charmante, qui vient de casser sa cruche; elle la tient à son bras près de la fontaine où l'accident vient d'arriver; ses yeux ne sont pas trop ouverts, sa bouche est encore demi-béante; elle cherche à se rendre compte de l'événement et ne sais pas si c'est mal. Il ne se peut rien de plus piquant ni de plus joli. Toute la querelle qu'on pourrait intenter au peintre, c'est de ne pas l'avoir faite assez fâchée pour l'empêcher d'y retourner. Je le lui dis: la plaisanterie nous amusa" (Marianne Cornevin, *La Véritable Madame Roland* [Paris: Pygmalion/Watelet, 1989], 79). This French passage may be a not entirely literal transcription from the letter (Cornevin's book is a biography of Madame Roland written in the first person, as an "autobiography," on the basis of real documents). Yet it matches the English translations of the letter found in Ida M. Tarbell, *Madame Roland: A Biographical Study* (New York: Scribner, 1896), 57; and in Alys Eyre Macklin, *Greuze* (London: Jack, n.d.), 54–55. In translating the passage I drew freely from both English sources.

FIGARO: Ah! voilà notre imbécile, avec ses vieux proverbes! Eh bien! pédant! que dit la sagesse des nations? "Tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin . . ."
BAZILE: Elle s'emplit.
FIGARO, *en s'en allant:* Pas si bête, pourtant, pas si bête![46]

BAZILE [*to Chérubin*]: Be careful, young man, be careful! Her father is not happy: the girl has been slapped; she's not studying with you: Chérubin! Chérubin! You'll get her into trouble! "The jug goes so often to the well"! . . .
FIGARO: Ah! here is our idiot with his old proverbs! Well, you pedant, what does the wisdom of nations say? "The jug goes so often to the well, that eventually . . ."
BAZILE: It gets filled.
FIGARO, *while going away:* Not that stupid, though, not that stupid!

No French spectator would have missed the reference to the old saying, and Bazile's adaptation of it probably alludes to the risk of pregnancy.[47]

As for Barbarina, I remarked earlier that the emotional intensity of her scene may seem excessive for the dramatic context. Given its musical, literary, and visual connotations—without going as far as to ask, with Diderot, "Is it really the loss of this *pin* that makes you withdraw so firmly and sadly within yourself?"—we can surely appreciate the extent to which the impact of the scene relates to the often ambivalent portrayal of young women in the age of sensibility.[48]

The moment of the denouement in *Le nozze di Figaro* is serious in a different way. In the last scene of the French play, the Count's supposed repentance and plea for forgiveness take place, literally, within the space of half a sentence. After this, the text quickly turns to comedy: there is little room for a credible moral or for deeply felt sentiments. Da Ponte's corresponding passage is fairly laconic:

IL CONTE: [. . .]
Contessa perdono.
(*in tuon supplichevole*)
LA CONTESSA: Più docile io sono
E dico di sì.

46. Act 1, sc. 11 (*Œuvres,* 401).

47. In an earlier version of this passage, Beaumarchais dwelled on the joke ("BAZILE *le retourne:* Elle s'emplit. FIGARO: Elle s'emplit? BAZILE, *en s'en allant:* Elle s'emplit" [see *Œuvres,* 1390]), as if to ensure that Figaro (and the audience) would not miss the play on the proverb and its implications. The revision avoids the insistence on an indecent detail, perhaps perceived as a residue of the *boulevardier* style of the *parade.*

48. Wye J. Allanbrook describes Barbarina's aria as "an essay in the mock-tragic genre," its details suggesting "a parody of lament" (*Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: "Le nozze di Figaro" and "Don Giovanni"* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983], 158 and 355). For all the complexity of the context, I cannot bring myself to *hear* this piece as comic.

TUTTI: Ah tutti contenti
Saremo così.

THE COUNT: [. . .]
Countess, forgive me.
(*in a suppliant tone*)

THE COUNTESS: I am more compliant,
And consent.

ALL: Ah, thus
We shall all be happy.

Yet the arresting music Mozart wrote for this moment is heartfelt, moving, and devoid of any parodistic implications or skepticism about sentiments.[49] Here, as in other places, *Le nozze di Figaro* does not exclude a tearful response.

The dissonance Joseph Kerman hears between the libretto and the music at certain moments of *Le nozze di Figaro* may to some extent be due to the complex interplay of sentimentalism and anti-sentimentalism that I have begun to examine in this essay.[50] I would suggest, moreover, that similar dissonances are to be found *within* the libretto and *within* the music as well. On the one hand, much of the opera seems to reiterate a skeptical, even cynical message about humans and their feelings—a message generally inherited from the French source and often intertwining with the explicit parody of sentimental topoi. On the other hand, the opera contains passages in a more direct sentimental mode, and even presents deep, serious emotions such as those in the last scene. The tension can be disquieting: we are offered two irreconcilable views of things human, yet it is impossible to settle on either side, morally or emotionally, without feeling questioned by the other. As Julian Rushton reminds us, "*Figaro* is generally agreed to be the most perfect and least problematic of Mozart's great operas."[51] Needless to say, I feel more inclined to agree with the first of these descriptions than with the second. Indeed, this opera owes a great deal of its "perfection"—of its lasting appeal—to the very complexity of its meaning.

49. Virtually all commentators (including those who sense the precariousness of this moment of conjugal bliss) show themselves to have been moved by the beauty and emotional intensity of this music; its character is frequently described by such terms as "hymnlike" and "cathartic." Indeed, the passage is serious without making any direct reference to sentimental styles (or, for that matter, to opera seria; if there is any reference to the latter in the opera, it is obviously to be found in the moments of sincere expression of the noble characters, such as "Dove sono i bei momenti" and "Vedrò mentr'io sospiro").

50. Kerman, "Mozart," in *Opera as Drama* (1956; rev. ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 80–108, here esp. 90–91.

51. "Le nozze di Figaro," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992), 3:634.

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Abstract

The article explores the complex relationship between *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786) and aspects of eighteenth-century sentimental culture. On the one hand, the opera parodies recognizable elements of that culture, thus joining a well-established anti-sentimental trend (an attitude largely inherited from its literary source, Beaumarchais's comedy *Le Mariage de Figaro*). In other respects, however, *Le nozze di Figaro* can be seen to make a direct appeal to sentiment. The tension between the sentimental and the anti-sentimental is one of the driving forces behind this work, and one of the most fascinating aspects of an entire epoch in European culture.