

Mi Tradi:

A Contemplation of Donna Elvira's Emotional Conflict in *Don Giovanni*

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Don Juan, Zerlina et Donna Elvira
By Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard (French, 1780–1850)

“The best people possess a feeling for beauty, the courage to take risks, the discipline to tell the truth, the capacity for sacrifice. Ironically, their virtues make them vulnerable; they are often wounded, sometimes destroyed.”

- Ernest Hemingway

The loud and sustained d minor chord that begins *Don Giovanni* is sure to shock any listener, instilling a sense of ominous foreboding as we cling to our seats. We are right to be affected this way, and that we are serves as a little joke for Mozart: right from the beginning of the opera, he forces us to know how the action will conclude. By then repeating the opening d minor chord to signal the entrance of the Commandatore in Act II, who then drags Don Giovanni to Hell, Mozart makes it all too obvious that the opening of the overture serves to spoil the plot's outcome. Mozart's musical choice must have been informed by knowing he was writing on a familiar story, one in which justice is served and thus moralizes against the libertine's lust and wrath.

Mozart's immediate acknowledgement of the plot's conclusion suggests that what is new and important about his opera is not about the libertine himself. Rather, Mozart wants us to notice and reflect on the adjacent characters' development in relation to the Don. For example, a prior work to Mozart's opera is Moliere's play *Don Juan*¹, which focuses more on the duality between Don Juan's lust and moments of virtue, making us question to what extent he could be condoned despite his sinful ways. Mozart's work instead gives no redeeming qualities to the libertine and, by presenting more fully developed female characters, forces us to confront the psychological effects his actions have on them. Don Giovanni's maxim is to be "faithful only to one [woman] is cruel to the others," but how do the women in the opera actually feel about this sentiment (67)²? Based on their reactions to Don Giovanni, there is certainly a discrepancy of ideals, and it is this conflict between Don Giovanni and the women in the opera I wish to explore.

This current exploration focuses particularly on Donna Elvira: the persona in the opera who is most conflicted in her feelings for Don Giovanni, and the character whose motivations are

¹First performed in 1665. *Don Giovanni* premiered 1787.

²Unless otherwise noted, citations come from the Libretto, Dover Edition, trans. Bleiler

therefore most difficult to firmly grasp. How does Donna Elvira navigate her emotional conflict between strong attraction for Don Giovanni while grappling with her disgust and anger at his foul deeds? Does she come to a resolution with this conflict, and if so, to what extent?³

To begin this investigation I will identify the mannerisms and peculiarities that make Donna Elvira distinct as a character. Then I will examine how the essence of her character influences the plot of the opera in her interaction with the other characters. Lastly, I will attempt to understand how she has changed at the end of the opera and ask what we are to understand about any potential change. I will proceed by analyzing the interplay between Da Ponte's libretto and Mozart's music.

When we are introduced to Donna Elvira with her aria "Ah! Chi mi dice mai," we do not know there has been a past history between her and Don Giovanni (Vocal Score 32)⁴. We only see her from Don Giovanni's perspective: another nameless woman who exists solely to sate his ravenous lust, as evidenced by his slimy comment "I seem to smell femininity!" (13). Thus, when she begins to lament the betrayal of the man she loved, we do not necessarily know this man is Don Giovanni. While a sensible onlooker would view her distress with pity, Don Giovanni relishes her hysteria as an easy target to "console," i.e. seduce (14). Donna Elvira's lament expresses a very strong objective, to "tear out his heart," but she will do this conditionally, on the basis that "he still does not come back to me" (14). Because she has yet to learn about Don Giovanni's "catalogue of beauties," Donna Elvira's frustration is reasonable, having no explanation why the man who declared himself her husband abruptly left her (18, 16). At this point in our introduction to her, the anger of her words expresses emotional hurt, but not total disavowal: her declaration of violence is

³I wish to offer a little spoiler of my own. The answer of whether this complex character comes to a resolution is both yes and no.

⁴Dover Vocal Score edition. "Vocal Score" will henceforth be abbreviated "VS"

still mixed with attachment to Don Giovanni. She is angry at him and his actions *because* she loves him⁵.

The music of this opening aria is itself indicative of her continued attachment to Don Giovanni (VS 32). The orchestral introduction sets the stage for her anger, in the first four measures the *forte* quarter notes making indignant huffing sounds as the rising 16th notes placed on off-beats suggest the rising bile within Donna Elvira. The introduction also gives her time to contemplate why she is angry at Don Giovanni for the injustice he has done her. So far we might think Donna Elvira is ready to erase Don Giovanni from her heart, but her vocal entrance suggests she wants to keep him there. While the orchestra plays a twelve-measure introduction in Eb Major, Donna Elvira begins her singing centered around the note Bb. That is, even though she includes Ab in the musical lines of her opening, consistent with the established key of Eb, she begins on Bb and only uses the home key note of Eb for transitioning to other notes, including Bb (measures 13-19).

But why am I pointing out Donna Elvira's use of Bb? As it turns out, Bb is an important key and tonal center for Don Giovanni. For example, when Don Giovanni makes his first entrance in the opera pursued by Donna Anna, the key changes from F to Bb (VS 10). Also, Don Giovanni's signature aria, "Finch'han dal vino," in which he excitedly anticipates future conquests, is firmly rooted in Bb (VS 100). The fact that Donna Elvira's singing begins with an emphasis on Bb, especially when the accompaniment is centered on Eb, suggests that her inner desperation to be with Don Giovanni is masked by her outward emotion dictated by the orchestra, that of vengeful anger. This inner desperation is indeed masked, for the effect of centering on Bb is essentially imperceptible to the ear because she is technically still in the key of Eb for these first twenty

⁵A seemingly paradoxical state of being, except in the case of forsaken love. Consider also Dido and Aeneas in the *Aeneid*.

measures. Despite her subtle emphasis of Bb, her focus on this tonal center manifests into her outward character as well: the last note she sings in measure 21 is an A \natural , a leading tone accidental that allows her to resolve the phrase on Bb and pull the accompaniment into the key of Bb as well (measure 22). Now that the aria is in Bb, she begins to declare the specific torture she will enact on Don Giovanni, that of tearing out his heart. But by aligning herself to his key, she has aligned her heart to his. With this understanding, the meaning of tearing out his heart is a metaphor for causing him to be heartsick and feel guilty for leaving her; that is, he has already torn out her heart, so she will return the favor.

When she actually begins this declamatory text of heart tearing, the sense of key is lost entirely measures 31 through 34 with a series of secondary dominants in the accompaniment. Donna Elvira also goes wild here with octave leaps occurring on off-beats. The physical distance between the notes show her thoughts are scattered, while the off-beat rhythm suggests an irregular heartbeat. These two elements suggest that she is both mentally and physically unstable, due to her confusion by the abandonment of her lover resulting in conflicting emotions of attachment intertwined with anger. As if mentally grappling with this emotional conflict, she and the whole orchestra take an uncomfortably long pause between measures 34 and 35, dangling the anticipatory D dominant 7th chord into silence. Has she realized what a terrible thing she has just said about her lover, and is she about to change her mind? On the contrary, she reiterates her desire to tear out Don Giovanni's heart, as she and the orchestra enter strongly on beat 2 of measure 34⁶, and resolves the D dominant 7th chord into g minor, the ominous tonality adding gravity to her strengthened declaration. Along with her largest interval leap yet, a 9th from high G down to F between measures 35 and 36, these

⁶Notable because the second beat of a measure is often a weak beat, further suggesting her instability of mind.

elements fully confirm her wild state of mind. Later in the aria, as if she hasn't sufficiently convinced herself that she must punish Don Giovanni with heart tearing, she repeats the same phrase, but this time she fills what was previously awkward silence in measure 34 with the declarative "si!" in measure 50, affirming her decision even further. By filling the silence and allowing us to follow along with the beat more easily, Elvira also causes us to feel energized by her desire for vengeance, making us more sympathetic to her motive.

Her opening aria thus allows us to comprehend the extremity of her passion. Even though her migration to Bb displays a fixation on Don Giovanni, we see from her prodigious vivacity that while Don Giovanni may have a hold over her heart, he does not have a hold on her ability to react productively against the hurt he has done her. The aria introduces to us a character with a strong sense of self, and this is seen when she finishes the aria back in Eb, suggesting the indignant anger the orchestra began with has come full circle. But not only is Don Giovanni present in her mind, he physically invades her aria as he sarcastically laments her state of anguish (measures 46-48) and prevents her from having the final word of her aria, calling to her on his signature Bb (VS 37).

In the recitative immediately following this aria, we finally learn that the man she was referring to all along was Don Giovanni himself (VS 37). This reversal where Don Giovanni realizes he has run into the last person he wants to meet forces him to lay all his cards on the table. By proxy of Leporello's aria "Madamina" (VS 42), Don Giovanni reveals that any affection he at one time gave her was but part of his appetitive game to seduce any and all women, giving Leporello the go ahead with "yes, yes, tell her everything" (17). But why does he use this tactic just to get away from Elvira? At the beginning of the opera, Don Giovanni fears Donna Anna will reveal his identity, recognizing that "this desperate fury will be my undoing" (6). While we know of his lascivious ways,

we may suspect that his murder of the Commandatore is his first sin of violence or wrath, which shows how desperate he is to keep his life of lust a secret, otherwise he would have simply fled the scene. Killing the Commandatore is one catalyst for his eventual downfall as Donna Anna becomes resolved Don Giovanni was the perpetrator after Donna Elvira's warning later in Act I. Thus, the fact Don Giovanni so easily and readily divulges his secret to Donna Elvira is very surprising. It is therefore unsurprising that his choice becomes another fatal mistake since Donna Elvira is able to use the knowledge of his lustful tendencies to sabotage his later motives. Even though Don Giovanni only receives retribution in the end by means of divine power, the fact he is apprehended by the mortal characters at the end of Act I shows his carelessness is responsible for his inability to sleep with a single woman in the opera, something that was apparently all too easy for him prior to the opera's events.

Leporello's aria, which explains why Don Giovanni has disregarded his marriage vows to Elvira, is likely the most unholy information she has ever heard (VS 42). Now her silence is not due to madness; she is dumbstruck by the number of women Leporello gleefully categorizes, and by grouping these women according to their country of origin, Leporello mocks the special place Donna Elvira thought she held in Don Giovanni's heart. As Elvira is from the Spanish city of Burgos, Leporello's insistent repetition of "mille e tre" adds injury to insult. He essentially tells her that because Spanish women are the most common and easily susceptible to Don Giovanni, she is therefore farthest from special to him (17, 19)⁷. How then is Donna Elvira to act after hearing this

⁷In comparison to Elvira's previous aria, Leporello's aria does move to the dominant like Elvira's does, in his case from D to A, but the occurrence is brief and for the sake of developing Leporello's story, and does not set up a tension between singer and orchestra. I say this to emphasize Elvira's extensive use of the dominant is more a character choice on Mozart's part rather than a musical choice.

news? She is still angry at Don Giovanni for his betrayal, but Leporello's information appears to have confounded her; she is unable to lend the same forcefulness to her anger in her following recitative (VS 50). Here her interval jumps are also lessened, showing she has gained composure, and chooses to express her anger simply through the harsh sounding tritone interval on "rabbia," or "rage." Now that she knows the reason Don Giovanni left her, she appears willing to remove him from her heart, and to do so by getting "revenge" (20).

She begins to carry out this agenda in her next entrance, acting as a kind of *deus ex machina* for the helplessly ensnared Zerlina. Elvira's spiritedness is here restored, instantly interrupting the quaint musette⁸ between Don Giovanni and Zerlina of "La ci darem la mano" with piercing admonition. Here we begin to see Donna Elvira's connection to religious piety, stating, "heaven made me overhear your lies" (29). Donna Elvira now acts as the Commandatore does in the opera's finale: there is a cosmic imbalance of sin perpetuated by Don Giovanni, and she is an outside power who has come to correct it. Don Giovanni, crafty as ever, tries to dismiss Elvira as a woman blinded by love, but Donna Elvira is prepared to oppose Don Giovanni with a more convincing counterargument. As Don Giovanni finishes the recitative that leads into Donna Elvira's aria "Ah fuggi il traditor," he sings the exact same notes with a nearly identical rhythm that Leporello sang just prior to "Madamina" (VS 69, 41). While Leporello's anticipatory notes previously led into an aria that is a slap in the face for Donna Elvira, this time she follows Don Giovanni's leading notes with her own rebuttal. As Don Giovanni seduced Zerlina with a slow, entrancing dance, Donna Elvira intuits that singing a raucous, upbeat dance will restore Zerlina's sensibility. The aria is in $\frac{3}{4}$,

⁸ "The contredanse, gigue, and gavotte, if accompanied by a 'drone' or bagpipe bass... take on an even more of a pastoral air, and are called *musettes* (after the French version of the bagpipe) – W. J. Allanbrook, *Sophomore Music Manual*, pp. 71

suggesting it could be a waltz⁹, and the harshly accented notes suggest a Baroque style¹⁰. But this assertion of the dance style is simply a visual one, for when listening to the aria it is clear that it is anything but a waltz. With the exception of occasional cadences, the strong emphasis in both her line and the orchestra occurs on beat two, normally the weakest beat in triple meter, and especially in waltz. This oddly punctuated rhythm breaks Zerlina away from the pulsating, trance-like rhythm in which she finally succumbed to Don Giovanni's seduction.

Another musical device Elvira utilizes in this aria is that, similar to her first, the second aria begins in D major and quickly moves to the dominant key, A major. Where before Leporello anticipated D major and delivered his aria "Madamina" in the key, Donna Elvira takes this key Don Giovanni establishes, and by measure 9 makes the key her own by changing it to A major. Since A major is also the same key Don Giovanni uses to seduce Zerlina in "La chi darem la mano," Donna Elvira's rebuttal is a direct contrast to his argument by framing hers in the same tonal register. But more than just the argumentative aspect, the quick change of key is a continued exemplification of her mental instability, for even after changing to A, she very quickly changes to b minor, the relative minor of the original D major key (measure 22). Doing so lends severity to her next advice to Zerlina of her personal pain incurred at the hands of Don Giovanni: "Learn from my suffering to believe my heart" (29). The aria then begins to migrate back to D major as she repeats her warnings. If Zerlina has yet to be convinced, Donna Elvira explodes into full force beginning with her G octave leap in measures 33 to 34. This is immediately followed by a dazzling 16th note run up to

⁹ "Exuberant dance in quick tempo with strong downbeat and light, lilting upbeat. (Allanbrook 68).

¹⁰ The "Baroque tonality" is inferred in part by the harsh accented notes, compare with "Gebt mir meinen Jesum wieder" from the *Matthäuspasion*. Also, Elvira's half step drop from C# to C is characteristic of Baroque arias, compare to the violin and alto lines in "Erbarme dich," also from the *Matthäuspasion*.

high A, all on the word “deceitful” to really drive home the idea of Don Giovanni’s character to Zerlina (30). The orchestra also helps intensify this moment with dotted rhythms underneath her sustained high A, increasing the *θυμός* we feel in listening to her. Lastly, Donna Elvira uses the same emphatic technique she used in her previous aria, exclaiming “si!” in measure 38 before repeating the phrase to close the aria, back in D major as though to mock Don Giovanni’s futile attempt to discredit her in the same key.

This aria is an important development for Donna Elvira. There are still elements of emotional instability in the misaligned beat emphasis, quickly changing keys, and large interval leaps. But this could be attributed to the trauma she feels being in Don Giovanni’s presence. The fact that she still feels attached to him but also knows he does not care for her produces conflicting emotions that would tie anyone’s stomach in knots. We should not blame her for her anxiety, but praise her bravery for resisting Don Giovanni to help her fellow woman with fierce defiance. So far we have seen her to be a strong force for action in the opera, and this strength of character becomes even more evident with her next interaction with the Don.

For even after rescuing Zerlina, Donna Elvira has yet to reveal to all Don Giovanni’s sinful ways, which prompts her almost immediate return to the stage. Don Ottavio and the distraught Donna Anna have arrived on the scene, whereupon Anna expresses her need for “friendship” to Don Giovanni, a man she currently thinks of as no more than a fellow noble. Relieved not to be recognized as her attacker, the sly Don offers to them “this hand, this sword, this wealth” (30). But again, as if called to the scene by the injustice at hand¹¹, Donna Elvira returns to undo the dramatic irony incurred from Donna Anna asking the very man who hurt her for help. This begins the quartet

¹¹An important question to consider is the extent to which Donna Elvira can herself be considered a divine force, especially due to her religious ardor.

“Non ti fidar, o misera” (VS 73). The complexity of competing vocal lines in this quartet disorients the listener, serving to emphasize conflict between the characters, just as with the opening scene in which the Commandatore is murdered.

Donna Elvira begins the quartet *andante*, a calm and leisurely tempo uncharacteristic of her previously high energy *allegro* arias. This more relaxed tempo allows her to clearly articulate her warning to Donna Anna to not “place [her] trust in that evil heart!” (31). Even though the tempo is slow, Donna Elvira’s characteristic singing patterns are still evident: large interval jumps and acutely long pauses in both her and the orchestra’s parts (measures 1-9). While her explosive energy is more contained here, her musical style continues to suggest her emotional and mental state are unstable, further evidenced by the key.

That is, this quartet begins in Don Giovanni’s key of Bb Major, but unlike in her first aria when she did not know the extent of his evil and was drawn to Bb, Donna Elvira now appears to avoid this note. She instead gravitates to opposite extremes away from it. Her most notable interval leaps in her opening five measures are a near-octave leap and then a full leap between F, the note physically farthest from Bb. Then, in measures six and seven, she begins on D, relatively close to Bb, but builds tension in the line by moving up and away to G while she says “that cruel man has betrayed me” (31). All these examples suggest a need to distance herself from him, thereby suggesting her mental instability is not intrinsic, but linked to the trauma Don Giovanni has caused her. Because Donna Elvira knows Don Giovanni well, having been his lover for three days, singing about him in his presence forces her to recollect his essence, his appearance, his individual scent, hence her beginning in the key Bb (17). But the fact she avoids this note as she begins to sing displays a careful avoidance of him: she is distancing herself from the painful emotions she feels in

connection to him. This avoidance reaches its most extreme later in the movement when, fed up with Don Giovanni characterizing her as a mad girl, she loses her “prudence” and loudly exclaims “liar, liar, liar!” purely on F octaves (34, measures 64-65). While she does cadence with Bb at measure nine, there is a specific purpose for her choice.

The words that accompany the musical phrase when she cadences on Bb in measure 9 provide a description to Donna Anna of how Don Giovanni will affect her the way he affected Elvira: “he wants to betray you too” (31). By previously avoiding Bb, Donna Elvira creates a negative association with the note, so that when she sings the note while insinuating the danger in store for Donna Anna, Donna *Anna* then internalizes the note’s implications for herself in relation to Don Giovanni. Along with the arguments between Donna Elvira and Don Giovanni in this quartet, this act of note association, placing it and the person associated with it in a negative light, helps explain why Donna Anna becomes so convinced Don Giovanni was her attacker and the murderer of her father, even though the murder is a sin Donna *Elvira* presumably has no knowledge of. In this sense, Donna Elvira makes a connection with Donna Anna that was not even intended, at least in relation to the murder, but necessary for the furthering of the divine balancing of justice to become manifest.

The connection Donna Elvira attempts to establish between herself and the miserable couple becomes apparent in the couple’s musical response, lamenting Donna Elvira’s doleful appearance by echoing her lines with similar rhythmic gestures and pauses, although they lack the expansive interval leaps characteristic of Elvira. This connection is especially solidified in measure 15, where Donna Anna and Don Ottavio exactly repeat Donna Elvira’s cadence from measure 8, saying, “her tears fill me with pity” (31). The fact the couple reciprocates Elvira’s attempt to connect

with them becomes important for her for two reasons. First, by forming a bond with them, she is no longer a lone actor, allowing them to work as a team to bring down Don Giovanni at the end of Act I. Second, the connection is important on a psychological level, as we will later see the concept of pity become an important feature of Donna Elvira's development in connection with Don Giovanni. Additionally, the fact Anna and Ottavio sing "pieta" on Bb emphasizes the connection of the word to the man with whom Elvira has conflicting emotions.

Despite the initial emphasis on Bb, the key changes very often in the quartet, creating further chaos between the characters as a tonal center becomes more difficult to establish. For example, when Don Ottavio and Donna Anna stop questioning whom to believe, Don Giovanni or Donna Elvira, and begin to make their own assessments, the key changes to F major with Don Ottavio and then c minor with Donna Anna (measures 49 and 52, respectively). It is curious then, that Donna Anna's statement in this phrase is optimistic, saying of Donna Elvira "she does not have the appearance of madness in her bearing, in her speech," yet the fact Anna sings in the dark key of c minor suggests she is hiding her true inclination (33). Thus, the conflict between her words and the way she sings them should be interpreted as Anna's concern for Elvira's state of distress.

More disorienting key changes occur when Don Giovanni sings in G major after Anna, followed by a change back to Bb by Elvira (measures 54 and 57 respectively). Another discrepancy between words and music occurs with Elvira's new statement, where she sings a simple melodic line despite speaking her most directive insult to Don Giovanni: "one ought to recognize your black soul by your ugly face" (33, measures 57-59). By keeping the melody attached to these words simple, she protects herself from bringing out anger in him, but the fact that her words are demeaning continues a negative association between Don Giovanni and his key of Bb. Seen this way, her subtly delivered

insult conveys a secret message to the other two characters to negatively associate his musical aura with his character.

But while Donna Elvira appears to have taken a firm stance against Don Giovanni, and the relationship she forges with Anna and Ottavio strengthens her resolve to see him brought to justice at the end of Act I, in Act II we see she still is conflicted in her feelings for him beginning with the trio “Ah, taci, injusto core” (VS 164). We see this conflict when she soliloquizes from her balcony “Ah, be still unreasonable heart! ... he is a betrayer, it is wrong to have pity” (68). The unwarranted emotion instilled in her by her “unreasonable heart” is connected to the orchestra’s use of A major with a 6/8 time signature, the exact characteristics of “La chi darem la mano” in which Don Giovanni seduces Zerlina (VS 164 and 66). Here we see again that there is “no talent more versatile” than Don Giovanni’s, as he appears to have discovered the formula that hypnotizes his victims, and Elvira’s corruption is evidence that the effect has remained with her even after her affair with him. We see the emotive effect of the key on her as, by the use of her rational mind, she avoids the note A. That is, until measure 13 when almost all her notes are As while she says “it is wrong to have pity” (68). Even though her words are a strong admonition of him, the notes she sings them on shows her emotional sympathy is beginning to conquer her rational force, and Don Giovanni capitalizes on this with his most depraved action yet of falsely seducing her¹².

¹² I argue this is his most cruel act with consideration of his philosophy being to love all women so as not to deprive any woman of his love. The only way I could possibly condone this sentiment is if his “love” comes from a need to give compassion or charity to all women. But Don Giovanni falsely seduces Elvira simply to displace her in order to pursue her chambermaid. This shows there is no compassion in his philosophy, only lust, and his lust is a drive that disregards the emotional well being of the women who cross his path.

Even though Donna Elvira's heart pines for Don Giovanni, so far in the opera her rational mind has resisted such feelings by recalling Don Giovanni's evil. We know her to be a strong-willed character, so why does she succumb so easily to his new seduction? When Don Giovanni calls to her beginning in measure 20, he changes the key to E major as he sings "Elvira, my idol," and "I plead for your mercy." This sudden change of key startles her, and asks herself, "Gods, what a strange sensation is awaking in my breast!" (69). Here we see the awareness of her heart, or emotive force, with which she began this trio is connected to her trust in divine power, suggesting if she perceives Giovanni's intentions to be pious, she will be persuaded by him.

Giovanni continues to draw on her religious sentiments by coupling the phrase "I am repentant!" with one of the most potent musical moments in the opera (measures 35-45). This moment begins with another abrupt key change to C major, a key of purity due to the lack of sharps or flats, suggesting to Elvira that he has cleansed his heart of wrongdoing. Don Giovanni then teases Elvira by oscillating between the leading tone (B) and fleeting resolution on the tonic (C) (measures 40 and 42). The orchestra further contributes to the feeling of longing with G-dominant chords that, while stable, seek resolution. But when the orchestra reaches the home chord of C in measure 44, Don Giovanni counters the motion by moving up the scale *away* from the tonic. This musical "pulling apart" engenders simultaneous satisfaction and desire for resolution, and the fact he speaks of repentance on this ascent causes Elvira to both to be at peace with his past actions and desire him. At first, she appears resistant to his seduction, interrupting his resolution in measure 46 with "I do not believe you, o cruel man!" in a disdainful and serious tone in A minor as a parallel contrast to the "seducing key" of A Major. But Don Giovanni's poison has already been administered, and his

continued amorous cooing causes her to give into her emotions, indeed having faith that Don Giovanni's change appears to align with her religious ideals of mercy and repentance.

From her perspective, a higher being is supposedly responsible for Don Giovanni's change, prompting Donna Elvira to place trust in her faith while hoping Don Giovanni's supplication is legitimate: "Gods... protect ye my trust, trust!" (70). But as Donna Elvira previously rescued Donna Anna from a situation of dramatic irony, she now falls into such a situation herself, since the figure she believes to be her repentant husband is really Leporello being puppeted by Giovanni, who sings the false seduction. This tension in the discrepancy between who she thinks he is and who he really is comes to a head in the following sextet "Sola, sola in bujo loco," a defining movement in the opera in which all the characters save Don Giovanni are involved (187 VS).

When the group apprehends Leporello and threaten to kill him, Donna Elvira's passion fully overwhelms her previous rational conclusion that "it is wrong to have pity" for Don Giovanni, as she now begs the others to "have pity" (68, 82). The incompatibility of her switching sides is especially emphasized by the other characters emphatically declaring "no!" in response to her pleas (VS 195). Considering that Elvira made a similar motific call to arms of "no" that allied herself with Ottavio and Anna in "Non ti fidar" highlights that Elvira has completely reversed the direction of her actions¹³. Why has she changed now? Her words that begin the sextet offer a partial explanation: "Alone in a dark place, I feel my heart pounding, and such fear overwhelms me that I think I'm dying" (80). From these words, we see that Donna Elvira is so attached to Don Giovanni, the very

¹³ Mozart uses "no" both comically and dramatically throughout this opera. Some other notable examples include Leporello at the beginning of Acts I and II, Masetto's aria "Ho Capito," and Don Giovanni refusing to repent with the Commandatore. In the last example, Don Giovanni's uses of "no" and the Commandatore's use of "si" alternate in intervals of tritones: by being the most dissonant interval, "no" is thus used in the most defiant way possible.

thought of losing him induces the terror of dying. After all, she is the one woman in the opera who does not have another man to return to other than Don Giovanni. At least in the context of the opera, Don Giovanni is her only hope for matrimonial love with a partner, so to be with him carries personal stakes for her aside from Don Giovanni as a person.

Despite the other's refusal to pardon the presumed Don Giovanni, because he turns out to be Leporello, no action can be taken. Elvira must now contemplate her stance with Don Giovanni, having now acted passionately against her rational mind which desires to have justice served according to her religious morals. This prompts her recitative "In quali eccessi, o Numi" and subsequent aria "Mi tradi quel'alma ingrata" (VS 234, 235). This is the defining moment for Donna Elvira: either she will be able to resolve her conflicting emotions for Don Giovanni, or she will not and run the risk of being forever dragged down by his spectre in her memory.

In listening to her recitative, I am immensely reminded of "Und von der sechsten Stunde an," from the *Matthäuspasion* in which the Evangelist describes Jesus' final moments. Like with Elvira's recitative, the sung words are interspersed with accompaniment, creating a hushed and tense atmosphere. By considering this intertextual connection, Elvira's recitative in minor modes takes on an air of religiosity. She knows Don Giovanni has undertaken "tremendous misdeeds" and senses his impending doom, and asks herself, why then "these sighs? And these pangs?" (95). Again and again throughout the opera she acknowledges his foul character, but her rational mind cannot rid her heart of feeling for him. If she cannot become apathetic to him, how can she change her emotions for him in a way that is not destructive to herself? When she imploringly asks "and these pangs?," she ends the recitative on Bb, the note of pain for her in its relation to Don Giovanni, symbolizing the moment of her deepest despair (measure 36).

As if a divine force senses her pain and intervenes to relieve her suffering, she launches into her aria in Eb, changing the feeling of her music in this subdominant shift above Bb (measure 37). The new key helps give her and the flowing line of accompaniment mirroring her a light quality, as though a voice from heaven has descended to provide her insight into her condition and progress away from the note that has caused her so much suffering (VS 235). The assertion that a divine force is present is also supported by the prominence of wind instruments with uplifting legato lines that take on the quality of angelic instruments – specifically flute, clarinet, and bassoon. Here she first presents the emotive side of her conflict: “betrayed and abandoned, I still feel pity for him” (95). As the music shifts to Eb minor (measure 95, VS 237), her anger relating to her rational desire for his punishment comes out: “When I feel my torment... my heart speaks of revenge” (96). She has now isolated her conflicting emotions, pity and anger; how is she to make a compromise between the two?

The answer is signaled by another divine influence, that of the orchestra playing an upbeat Bourree¹⁴ (measure 133, VS 238). It is as though the divine force has drawn her into this uplifting dance, a communion with a divine spirit that calms her “throbbing” heart with a joyful air, giving her an all too simple answer¹⁵. This answer for her is to repeat the opening words of the aria, but now she knows how to direct her emotion of pity as she then repeats again and again “I still feel pity for him” (96). But why does she now feel at ease in feeling pity for him, this being the third time she has changed her mind in the opera?

¹⁴ “More artful version of the brisk walk, characterized by an upbeat and frequent syncopated measures” (Allanbrook 69)

¹⁵ I have been hesitant to determine whether her religion is Pagan or Christian because she uses both “gods” and “God,” although the fact she uses the singular God in the aria where she achieves understanding may be Mozart suggesting which is the right one.

Prior to this moment of epiphany, her pity and anger were in conflict with each other, but ultimately *both* emotions have been rooted in her undying affection for Don Giovanni: pity for the sake of his well being, and indignant anger for his vile deeds and failing to return her virtuous love. Now she realizes, in sensing his impending doom should he not repent, she no longer needs to feel anger because divine judgment will create balance in the end. Instead, she can allow both her frustration with his inability to love her and her concern for his well being fuse into one pity: pity that Don Giovanni is a person unable to understand how to alter his fate.

This is the resolution Donna Elvira arrives at herself, and it is important to keep this in mind when considering her next interaction with Don Giovanni. She interrupts his feast to exclaim to him “I want to prove my love for you one last time. I no longer remember your deceits... I feel pity!” (108). Here we see how her epiphany has altered her: she still feels affection for him, but she has removed her anger. She now gives Don Giovanni the opportunity to see her with pure love for him, and a chance to repent his ways by likewise pitying her for the hurt he has caused her, joining with her permanently. But the Don is firm in his beliefs, mocking Elvira for her helpless devotion. The closest he budges is when he offers her the food from his table, remaining rooted to his lascivious nature by exclaiming “long live women, long live good wine!” (109-110).

Realizing she fails to change him, Elvira’s anger comes back, insulting Don Giovanni before running offstage and into the spectre of the Commandatore. In this way, she as a character is ultimately left unresolved, ruined by Don Giovanni as she opts for social death in a cloister after he is dragged to Hell (119). There is a discrepancy between what she wants Don Giovanni to be and what he ends up being, but what is important to remember is that she made peace for herself. If we always had the ability to change people into what we wanted them to be, there would be no need for

stoic detachment. Donna Elvira is thus a model for how we can find solace when no action can solve a difficult situation. Her strong spirit teaches us that we must confront dire situations with courage, and if our emotions produce conflicting actions, we must believe in our own ability to reach emotional resolution, striving to choose optimism and compassion in the face of strife.