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## Commander in Opera: Contexts

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# Jadwiga Jęcz

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### Abstract

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The aim of this article is to analyse the presence of Commander in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as well as show the references to other opera depictions regarding the myth of Don Juan.

Commander, also known as the Stone Guest, is an animate tombstone figure, which appears in every classic-based version of the story about Don Juan Tenorio (Don Giovanni) in order to summon a rogue to conversion; when he fails to do so, he drags him to hell. The spectacular character of the final scene turned out to serve as an inspiration for numerous opera makers, from Mozart to Rimsky-Korsakov (*Mozart and Salieri*). This theme, which has not been the subject of research before, is definitely worth exploring.

### Keywords

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Commander, Stone Guest, Don Juan, opera, *Don Giovanni*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The aim of this work is to discuss the issue of the presence of Commander—the character known from the canonical version of the myth about Don Juan Tenorio—in the operatic work.<sup>1</sup> If the seducer himself has been discussed in the vast number of works and articles,<sup>2</sup> the animated gravestone statue, which in culminating moment arrives to call the sinner to convert for the last time, still remains in his shadow.<sup>3</sup> As it appears, wrongly: the Commander as a symbol of God's justice is an interesting topic to undertake in the academic consideration, and his spectacular intervention—the conversation with the Trickster, inviting the statue to the treat, collapse of the grave and bursting flames—was the important source of inspiration for the artists. In the research on this character, especially interesting seem to be the works which refer to the myth of Don Juan in their topic, but deviate from the scheme of the tale that is fixed in the culture. Also, the presentation of the Commander in the context of two motives returning in the history of the opera is precious. The first, more general plot is the motive of the penalty from behind the grave. For example in *Euryanthe* (1823)<sup>4</sup> by Carl Maria von Weber the ghost

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1 According to the canonical version of the myth, Don Juan insulted the grave of Commander, and then invited him for a treat. Surprising the libertine, the statue came to call the sinner to convert for the last time. When Don Juan rejected the possibility of improvement, the statue dragged him to hell. The tale originates from the Middle Ages and was popular in the Central and West Europe.

2 About Don Juan such authors have written as: Charles Russell, *The Don Juan Legend before Mozart: With a Collection of Eighteenth-Century Opera Librettos*, University of Michigan Press 1993; Ian Watt, *Myths of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe*, Cambridge 2009; Leo Weinstein, *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Stanford University Press 1959; Gendarme de Bévette, *La Légende de Don Juan*, Vol. 1–2, Berkely 2015; Stefan Kunze, *Don Giovanni vor Mozart: Die Tradition der Don-Giovanni-Opern im italienischen Buffa-Theater des 18. Jahrhunderts*, München 1972.

3 Among Polish researchers the character of Commander from *Don Giovanni* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was presented in the article of Jarosław Mianowski (*Don Giovanni między tekstami*) and Tomasz Cyz (*Komandor albo śmierć według Mozarta*) published in the book *Bliżej opery. Twórcy—Dzieła—Konteksty* (J. Mianowski, R.D. Golianek [eds.], Toruń 2010). However, it should be remembered that it is very little in comparison with the works on the topic of Don Juan. Moreover, there is a lack of publications on the topic of Commander's presence in other operas, not based on the traditional scheme of the myth.

4 Dates refer to the premieres of the operas.

of Emma chases the criminal Eglantina. In the opera-ballet *Le Villi* by Giacomo Puccini Anna, who died from longing, transformed into a vila gets revenge on the unfaithful lover, forcing him to dance until he dies from tiredness. On the contrary, in *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* (1934) by Dmitri Shostakovich, Katerina sees the bloody ghost of the murdered Boris. The second motive connected with the character of Commander: of the animated statue, should be discussed more scrupulously.

### Statue as a character of opera

Due to the topic of the work, the special attention should be paid to the opera characters, the ontology of which is somehow connected with stones. Mainly, the nuns from *Robert le diable* (1831) by Giacomo Meyerbeer could be indicated. In the third act, Bertram swears to the forces of Hell that until the midnight Robert will sell them his soul. He persuades him to break the evergreen olive branch from the grave of St Rosalie—a talisman which guarantees the victory over the hated Prince of Granada. When Robert comes to the derelict monastery, Bertram, using the devil's power, revives the statues of the dead nuns, which at once transform into the vulgar and licentious Meneads. Temptresses induce Robert to break the branch and just after it they disappear in the abyss of Hell. The act finishes with the triumphing Satan singing.<sup>5</sup>

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5 It should be mentioned that the scene of animating the status of the nuns made a great impression on the Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki, who watched *Robert le diable* on stage of Paris Opera in 1831. In a letter to his mother he wrote: "The view of the colonnade in the moonlight is especially beautiful, done totally *à juor*—besides the columns the cemetery enlightened by the Moon is visible—from the graves between columns the blue glimmers appear and, dancing in the air, then separate and each of them animates one marble nun laying in the grave—and they fall slowly— it is funny, but pretty made" (orig. "Piękny iest nade wszystko widok kolumnady przy świetle księżycowym, zrobioney zupełnie *à juor*—za kolumnami widać cmentarz oświecony księżycem—z grobów między kolumnami wymykają się błękitne płomyki i te, tańcząc w powietrzu, potem rozchodzą się i kaźden ożywia jedną marmurową mniszkę leżącą na grobie—i te się z wolna podnoszą—z całego cmentarza schodzą się mniszki i zaczynają śliczny balet—w wybiciem zegara wszystkie upadają—jest to śmieszne, ale wykonane prześliczne". As cited in: *Listy Juliusza Słowackiego. Z autografów poety*, K. Méyet (ed.), Vol. 1, Lwów 1899, p. 71.

Transforming people into statues and statues into people is present in the whole history of opera, starting with Jean Baptiste Lully and finishing with Hans Werner Henze. Especially in the works from the 17th and 18th centuries, it is connected with the use of myths, legends and literary texts. In *Cadmus et Harmonie* (1673) by Lully, Pallada turns into statue of a giant Draco, and in *Persée* (1682) by the same author the enemies of the hero are petrified when he shows the head of Medusa. In drama eroicomico *Orlando Paladino* (1782) by Joseph Haydn—inspired by *Orlando Furioso* by Lodovico Ariosto—the witch Alcina transforms the paladin into a rock, but, persuaded by Angelica, restores his human body. Doubtless effectiveness of scenes including the animated statues (probably particularly appreciated by French people who were in love with ballet) was used by Jean-Philippe Rameau in *Zaïs* (1748) in a different way. The title character, desiring to put the faithfulness of Zelidia to the test, begs Cindor to pretend that he wants to win her heart. Cindor agrees and, wanting to impress the woman, organises the ballet of monuments for her.

In the later operas, characters-monuments often appear in the religious context and frequently have an important influence on the opera's plot. In *Joanna D'Arc* (1845) by Giuseppe Verdi the statue of Mary is seen by dreaming Carl. In Robert Schumann's *Genoveva* (1850) Margaret, a servant using black magic, prays in front of the stone figure of Mary, and then the brightness surrounds her, predicting calm and forgiveness. Due to the analogies with the legend of Don Juan and the Stone Guest, the opera *Le roi d'Ys* (1888) by Édouard Lalo appears to be the most interesting of all. The princess Margared, mad with envy and hatred, challenges the statue of Saint Corentin, watching over the castle, and, in spite of his warning, commits the crime—opens the lock, what leads to wrecking the city of Ys and death of many citizens. Animated statues appear several times in Jules Massenet's operas. In *Grisélidis* (1901) the statue of St Agnes disappears from the altar to return in the last act, holding the hand of the survived son of the title character, earlier kidnapped by the devil. In *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame* (1902) the whole plot, taking place in the Middle Ages is created around the statue of the Blessed Mary. When monks make gifts to the new sculpture, jongleur Jean decides to offer what is most

precious to him, and sings his songs to the statue. Disgusted monks want to accuse him of blasphemy, but then the magnificent light appears, the statue comes alive and blesses Jean.

Also in the 20th-century operas, the stone characters can be found, who influence the fate of mortals, but the religious context is less often. In *Ariane* (1906) by mentioned Massenet the statue of Adonis kills Fedra. In *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1919) by Richard Strauss the half-stone emperor appears, who finally manages to go down from the throne and, accompanied by the Unborn singing, gradually loses the stone shell. In *Das Verhör des Lukullus* (1951) by Paul Dessau the characters presented on the carving from the Lukullus' tomb are to testify in the court. In *König Hirsch* by Hans Werner Henze (1956) the palace's statues reveal the secret of subsequent incarnations of sinister Scolatella to the king.

### **Don Juan and Commander in music**

Commander, as a character who is permanently connected to the legend of Don Juan, appeared in opera yet in the 17th century. It is confirmed by *L'Empio punito* (1669) by Alessandro Melani and *The Libertine Destroyed* by Henry Purcell (1692). This topic gained much popularity in the 18th-century Italian opera. Stefan Künze in the book *Don Giovanni vor Mozart* mentions the following works of composers who are widely unknown today: *La Pravità castigata* (1730) by Eustachio Bambini, *Convitato de pietra* (1777) by Giuseppe Calegari, *Convitato di pietra* (1777) by Vincenzo Righini, *Il Convitato di pietra* (1783) by Giacomo Tritto, *Il Don Giovanni* (1784) by Gioacchino Albertini, *Il Nuovo convitato di pietra* (1787) by Francesco Gardi and *Il Convitato di pietra* (1787) by Vincenzo Fabrizi.<sup>6</sup> Don Juan and Commander also appeared in the 18th-century stage compositions of other genres. Yet in 1713 the vaudeville *Le Festin de Pierre* was performed, the music for which consisted of anonymous songs. These characters were presented in the ballet *Il Convitato di pietra* (1766) by Giuseppe Antonio Le Messier as well.

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6 As cited in: S. Künze, *Don Giovanni vor Mozart*, München 1972.

The legend of Don Juan, best known to the contemporary listener as in *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, had its position in the music of the 19th and 20th centuries too. Alexander Dargomyzhsky composed the opera *The Stone Guest* to the libretto based on Pushkin's drama (who, by the way, wrote *The Stone Guest* after seeing Mozart's masterpiece), and Giovanni Pacini—farce-like work *Don Giovanni ossia il convitato di pietra* (1832). In 1932 the Czech composer Erwin Schulhoff premiered the opera *Flammen*, translating the myth of Don Juan into the language of surrealism and Freud's psychoanalysis. Igor Stravinsky composed *The Rake's Progress* (1951) based on the cycle of William Hogarth's pictures with the same title, but perhaps referring to the legendary seducer, made famous by Mozart's opera. What is interesting, in the last two decades of the century this legend crossed the borders of stage music. Pyotr Tchaikovsky composed the song *Don Juan's Serenade* (1876), the topic also appears in two songs of Gustav Mahler: *Serenade aus Don Juan* and *Phantasie aus Don Juan* (both written between 1880 and 1887). Among instrumental works, there are such known compositions as variation of the theme from Mozart's opera (*Là ci darem la mano*, 1827–1828) by Fryderyk Chopin and Richard Strauss's tone poem *Don Juan* (1889).

### **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni***

In the second half of the 18th century, the operatic work started freeing itself from the rigour of the laws of nature and the rule of probability governing the world. The spirit of fantasy and marvel, seemingly free, but in the theoretical-philosophical assumptions oriented towards Horatius' term "possible", substituting earlier "real". Johann Georg Sulzer distinguished the physical probability, connected with what is audible, visible and touchable, and metaphysical—subordinating the logic of action and the development of characters in the work.<sup>7</sup> According to Jakob Bodmer and Johann Jakob Breitinger, the illusion of the truth was possible only thanks to imitating the possible. Also, joining the elements of probability

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7 E. Nowicka, *Omamienie—cudowność—afekt. Dramat w kręgu dziewiętnastowiecznych wyobrażeń i pojęć*, Poznań 2003, pp. 205–207

and—earlier regarded as a factor destroying illusion—marvel were suggested (Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, Jean-Baptiste Dubos).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the desire to loosen the rigour of probability was stated (Charles Batteux), and in the extreme form there was striving for granting opera the status of art with the frames of probability marked only by the world of feelings and music (Jean-François Marmontel).<sup>9</sup>

In such prepared by theoreticians sphere of marvel, the Trickster and the Stone Visitor triumphantly entered—in the circle of music best known from Mozart's opera from 1787 to the libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte: *Don Giovanni*. It should be emphasized here that the work represents the type of *dramma giocoso*, from the border of the opera *seria* and *buffa*, which was also indicated in its subtitle.<sup>10</sup> The creator of this genre, Carlo Goldoni (by the way the author of the drama *Don Giovanni Tenorio* from 1735), combined serious and comic parts, he also introduced characters of a nature between these two types. In *dramma giocoso*, parts originating from *opera seria* are often included in the context of parody. It also influences the language of the characters, in which incompatible affects are mixed in the way which is unknown to the “pure” opera *seria* or *buffa* as well as juxtaposed in the new vocabulary. Such an approach towards language and characters was used several years later by Da Ponte in his librettos written for Mozart. And although in some cases (e.g. in the aria of revenge written for the part of Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*) there is no humorous element, in general the blending of affects is aimed at achieving the effect close to the parody.<sup>11</sup>

An important role in *dramma giocoso* was also played by the choice of voice disposition. As Hanna Winiszewska wrote:

The voice disposition in *dramma giocoso* is always very important. The high male voice is proper for the character associated with the *seria* sphere. This is very clearly seen on the example of various operatic works arranging the plot of Don Juan, written in the genre of *dramma giocoso*. In the Giuseppe Gazzaniga's version Don Giovanni sings with

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8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Compare: W.A. Mozart, *Don Giovanni. Dramma giocoso in zwei Akten* KV 527.

11 J. Mianowski, *Afekt w operach Mozarta i Rossiniego*, Poznań 2004, p. 148.



a tenor, which, combined with the aria forms assigned to him, allows to qualify him for the sphere of life. Mozart wrote the Don Giovanni part for a baritone voice, which meant that this figure fell to a lower position in the hierarchy of heroes of *dramma giocoso*—Mozart's Don Giovanni is *mezzo carattere*. According to Daniel Haertz, it emphasizes the role of this character—between the world of high and low spheres—Don Giovanni seduces both the high-born Anna and Elvira as well as the peasant Zerlina.<sup>12</sup>

It was not Mozart's ambition to create works that were new in every respect. Writing *Don Giovanni*, in addition to other music devoted to the Trickster, he was influenced by the ballet *Die belebten Statuen* by Emanuel Schikaneder, which Mozart watched in October 1780. The similarities between Donna Anna and Don Juan duet from *Don Giovanni* and *Convitato di pietra* by Giuseppe Gazzanigi also draw attention, as well between the ghostly voice of the Commander and the voice of the oracle from *Alceste* (1767) by Christoph Willibald Gluck.<sup>13</sup> The biography of Mozart could have also influenced composing *Don Giovanni*. According to the artist's own relation, he met two hundred women, and he could treat the arrival of a stone statue as an emanation of remorse—he did not find time to pay the last visit before his father's death.<sup>14</sup>

Tracing Søren Kierkegaard (who saw *Don Giovanni* in Berlin in the years 1841–1842) it is worth noticing that the title character is the central persona of the work and he is linked by the relation of influence with all characters—except the Commander. In another words, as Kierkegaard writes, voices of all characters harmonise in the character of the Trickster, but:

The only figure that seems to be an exception is, of course, the Commander, but that is why it is so wisely thought that he stands somewhat beyond the work, or sets its limits; the more the Commander would

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12 H. Winiszewska, *Dramma giocoso. Między opera seria a opera buffa*, Toruń 2013, pp. 160–161. On the topic of *dramma giocoso* vide also: S. Durante, S. Rohringer et al., *Dramma giocoso: Four Contemporary Perspectives on the Mozart / Da Ponte operas*, D. Crispin (ed.), Leuven 2012.

13 A. Einstein, *Mozart. Człowiek i dzieło*, trans. into Polish by A. Rieger, Kraków 1983, p. 129.

14 L. Czapliński, „Don Giovanni”, czyli muzyczne oblicze erotyzmu, [in:] *idem, W kręgu operowych mitów*, Kraków 2003, p. 20.

be in the foreground, the more the opera would cease to be absolutely musical. So he must stay in the background, he must be as vague as possible. The Commander is a strong introduction and a bold finale, but between them lies the intermezzo: Don Juan, the whole content of the opera. The commander only appears twice. For the first time in the night, he cannot be seen, he is only heard when falls down, hit by Don Juan's sword. Here we come across his seriousness, which is the more emphatic that juxtaposed with Don Juan's parodying sneer (Mozart expressed it perfectly in his music) and here his seriousness is so deep that it goes beyond what is human; he is already a phantom before he dies. For the second time he appears as a ghost, and the thunder reverberates in the solemn dignity of his voice; like himself, his voice is now transformed, he seems not to belong to man: he does not speak, he judges.<sup>15</sup>

The scene of meeting at the cemetery, preceding the finale confrontation of the Commander and Don Giovanni, was written in the key of D minor, similarly to the scene from the third act of the opera *Gustaf Wasa* by Johann Gottlieb Naumann, in which Christjern sees the ghosts of his ancestors. Jarosław Mianowski saw the use of the key of D minor by Naumann as absorbing and being the proof of the direct analogy with Mozart's work. It seems even more interesting as in the scenes *ombra* the key of E $\flat$  major was usually used. Mozart knew it, what is proved by the operas *Idomeneo*, *Re di Creta* (the voice of the oracle) and *Lucio Silla* (scene at the cemetery). Considering the versatile education of Naumann, it is doubtless that he was aware about this assumption. Mianowski puts into question the concept according to which Mozart knew *Gustaf Wasa* and suggests that another opera could have existed, the author of which decided to use such an unconventional key. He also denies the assumption that Mozart and Naumann had the same idea independently.<sup>16</sup>

In *Don Giovanni* Leporello mentions thousands of seduced women—the famous catalogue aria is a type of an indirect manifesto of the seducer's activity. The audacious Leporello starts from the words to Donna Elvira:

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15 S. Kierkegaard, *Albo-albo*, trans. into Polish and ed. by J. Iwaszkiewicz, Vol. 1, Warszawa 1976, pp. 141–142.

16 J. Mianowski, *Afekt w operach...*, *op. cit.*, p. 148, footnote 108.

My lady, this is a catalogue  
Of beautiful women my Master loved  
A catalogue that I prepared myself  
Observe, read with me.<sup>17</sup>

In connection to the cited fragment, in the sketch *Żywioł i zatracenie. Mit Don Juana w operze Mozarta* Alina Borkowska-Rychlewska wrote:

In the outlandish catalogue of Don Giovanni's positive features, there is also what earthy moralists would call as a betrayal—because in the view of the seducer from Seville the love to all women excludes betrayal. The betrayal would be loving only one woman as all others, not loved, would feel hurt and betrayed.<sup>18</sup>

Kierkegaard perceived the inseparable servant of the seducer as his *alter ego*, what, according to the philosopher, was reflected in the musical structure of Don Giovanni, where Don Juan is heard in every part of Leporello and Leporello's voice is heard in every part of Don Juan.<sup>19</sup> In the “catalogue of women” Leporello does not tell anything about the bothersome issue of persuading them to lay in with a dissolute noble. Don Juan essentially does not use violence, which is indirectly demonstrated by his conversations with the servant. Unscrupulously, however, he uses his personal charm, constant lies and the habit of perjury. Leporello does not talk, but his master speaks when it comes to proving his conversation talents—not in conversation with a woman anymore, but

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17 Orig. “Madamina, il catalogo è questo | Delle belle che amò il padron mio, | un catalogo egli è che ho fatt'io | Osservate, leggete con me”.

18 Orig. “W przedziwnym katalogu pozytywnych wartości Don Giovanniego mieści się również to, co, co ziemscy moralści nazwaliby zdradą—w pojęciu bowiem uwodziciela z Sewilli miłość do wszystkich kobiet wyklucza zdradę. Zdradą byłoby kochanie tylko jednej kobiety, gdyż wszystkie inne, niekochane, czułyby się wówczas dotknięte i zdradzone”. A. Borkowska-Rychlewska, *Żywioł i zatracenie. Mit Don Juana w operze Mozarta*, [in:] *Bliżej opery. Twórcy – dzieła – konteksty*, J. Mianowski, R.D. Golianek (eds.), Toruń 2010, p. 65.

19 S. Kierkegaard, *Stadia erotyki bezpośredniej, czyli erotyka muzyczna*, trans. into Polish by A. Buchner, “Res Facta” 1970, No. 40, p. 78.

with the Commander. And when the Stone Visitor arrives, *dissoluto spavaldo* becomes *dissoluto punito*. Don Giovanni can only listen to the sinister words of the animated statue: “Don Giovanni, you invited me for your dinner, so I came”.

Several times the researchers underlined the unconscious suffering of the Trickster. According to Monika Szczot,<sup>20</sup> remaining influenced by the concept of Kierkegaard, the cause of Don Juan’s pain is the constant striving to be someone else, to determine who he really is, the hunger, the desire to change and be happy. At the same time, it is accompanied by fear of achieving the aim; it would mean the need to look for another, even stronger, boost. The Trickster is devoid of consciousness, continues Monika Szczot, and therefore has no power over those who have it. Referring to Don Giovanni, the researcher concludes:

In Mozart’s opera, Elvira becomes dangerous because, by seduction, she has acquired consciousness that the seducer is lacking. The Commander is also a consciousness. Don Juan feels that he has no power over him, that he has no power over the spirit! He can face everything but to the “reproduction” of a life that has a spiritual form; his activity concerns corporality.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth recalling that the authors of *Il Ritratto dell’arte*, who in the first sentence of the book included a fragment of the libretto to *Don Giovanni*, indicated the arrival of the Stone Guest for the turning moment of the work, and—what in the context of the studies on painting is more important—considered this scene as a starting point to analyse the problem of character mapping. And although it is impossible to agree with the proposed term “melodrama” to determine the genre to which *Don Giovanni* belongs, the authors’ observations deserve to be quoted:

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20 M. Szczot, *Jeszcze raz o motywie Don Juana (Refleksje nad „Pogrzebem Don Żuana” Bolesława Leśmiana)*, “Topos” 2000, No. 1.

21 Orig. “W operze Mozarta Elwira staje się niebezpieczna, ponieważ przez uwiedzenie uzyskała świadomość, której brak uwodzicielowi. Świadomością jest również Komandor. Don Juan czuje, że nie ma nad nim władzy, że nie ma władzy nad duchem! Wszystkiemu może stawić czoła tylko nie „reprodukcji” życia, która ma formę duchową; jego działalność dotyczy cielesności”. *Ibid.*, p. 155. *Vide also: ibid.*, pp. 153–158.

“He seems alive, he seems to hear and he will say something quickly”. The Commander’s posthumous image frightened Leporello and roused Don Juan; his appearance means a turn in Mozart’s opera—the joke will soon turn into a tragedy. Lorenzo Da Ponte, the author of the libretto of this melodrama, undertakes and develops a special theme, eternally vivid in the history: the magic of the image. A “talking” image that lives by its own life, a vague phantom of neither truth nor illusion. The reconstruction of a human figure is assumed to be something simple and direct; in the process of being transformed, becoming one of the most disturbing areas of artistic creation.<sup>22</sup>

In an erroneously forgotten short story *Mozart’s Journey to Prague*, Eduard Mörike described the story of Mozart’s departure for the premiere of *Don Giovanni*.<sup>23</sup> It is worth recalling a fragment of the individual vision of Mörike describing Mozart’s work on the scene of the confrontation of the Trickster with the Commander. This is probably the only attempt in the literature to embody the character of Mozart and illustrate the subject from the perspective of the composer. For such a small volume of work, the moment of the Commander’s meeting is relatively widely described. In Mozart’s monologue from the work of Mörike we read:

I never have the habit of rushing certain parts in the composition, even if it was the most appealing; it is a bad habit and it can lead to very bad consequences. There are, however, exceptions and, in short, a violent scene at the statue of the rider-governor, a threat which, from the grave of the murdered, at once and terribly interrupts the laughter of the night dreamer, all of this I created at once. I grabbed a chord and felt that here I was knocking at the right gate, behind which the whole legion of fears is standing next to each other, which should be let out in the finale. And so at first *Adagio* was born—in D minor, four bars only, then the next part with five—it will, I suppose, be something peculiar in a theatre when the strongest brass instruments will start accompanying the voice.<sup>24</sup>

22 M. Battistini, L. Impelluso, S. Zuffi, *Historia portretu. Przez sztukę do wieczności*, trans. into Polish by H. Cieśla, Warszawa 2001, p. 7.

23 What seems ironical, During the premiere of *Don Giovanni* famous Giacomo Casanova was present, yet in his lifetime symbolising the luxuriant eroticism.

24 E. Mörike, *Podróż Mozarta do Pragi*, trans. into Polish by M. Kurecka, Warszawa 1956, pp. 176–177.

In the following part, Mozart from the story of Mörrike emphasises the metaphysical context of Don Juan's confrontation with the Stone Visitor: "Now this long, terrible dialogue has occurred, which lifts up the man to the end of human's imaginations, and even further, where we perceive and hear oversensitive and passive things in the hearts of our own we wander from one extreme to the other".<sup>25</sup> Although the quotation does not come from the composer's notes, but is a literary vision of Mörrike, fragments of *Mozart's Journey to Prague* suggest that the German author may have understood the depth of myth as one of the few writers. Thanks to the "compositional sight" and the visibility of the supernatural character of the meeting with the Commander—who already belonged to the extraterrestrial sphere, he spurned the dishes prepared by the Trickster—in a special way he focused on metaphysical meaning.

### **The Stone Visitor after Mozart**

Repeating after Maurycy Karasowski that "Mozart wrote a universal opera", Alina Borkowska-Rychlewska concluded: "the work that was beforehand for decades with its epoch, combining grotesque and tragedy, seriousness and joke, austerity and eroticism, structurally diverse and surprising by novelty of the composition, could not have been framed in the schemes existing by then [i.e. in Romanticism—J.J.]"<sup>26</sup> The statement can be risked that the genius of this work also grows out of the universality which is not only strictly formal, but also thematic, dating back to the Middle Ages and affecting later times—to the *The Stone Guest* of Dargomyzhsky, *Mozart and Salieri* of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and *Flammen* of Erwin Schulhoff. The work *The Rake's Progress* (1951) by Igor Stravinsky is also closely related to the myth of Don Juan and the Stone Guest; the scene from the third act of it is summarised by Piotr Kamiński:

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>26</sup> A. Borkowska-Rychlewska, *U progu zmian. Don Giovanni w przekładzie Kazimierza Brodzińskiego*, [in:] *eadem, Poema muzyczne. Studia o operze w Polsce w okresie romantyzmu*, Kraków 2006, p. 82.

Nick dragged Tom to the cemetery (*How dark and dreadful*); in this gloomy scenery, he intends to enforce an easy-to-predict payment: the soul of a wretch. He shows him a dug grave and lets him choose a tool: iron, rope, poison or bullet, all the same. It is only then that Tom begins to meditate on his sinister life, while the clock measures the first of twelve strokes. At the last moment, however, Nick pauses the course of time again (*Very well, then*), proposing his student a card game. Tom's fate will be the stake, and he must guess three cards in succession. The first of them is the Queen of Hearts, so Anna: Tom won. The second one is the Two of Spades, a happy twist of fate: Tom won again. Angry Nick, aware that Tom hates nothing more than repetition, draws the Queen of Hearts for the second time—then Anna's voice, however, gives Tom the right answer, tearing him away from the hell, at the twelfth hitting of the clock. Nick sinks into the abyss (*I burn, I burn!*), cursing the perpetrator of his defeat, to whom he can send the last punishment, madness. As the day rises, Tom wakes up on his green-covered grave: he has lost his mind.<sup>27</sup>

Although in *The Rake's Progress* the Guest Stone is absent (Stravinsky's source of inspiration was not Don Juan's myth, but the series of William Hogarth's paintings *A Rake's Progress*), the opera remains in the dialogue with *Don Giovanni*. It is worth pointing out four common elements: the main character, seducing women without inhibitions; the character of Anna, who still loves the lecherous Tom; a characteristic cry: "I am burning!"; and—or maybe: first of all—meeting at the cemetery.

Allusion to the character of the stone Guest appears in the second part of *Mozart and Salieri* (1898) by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. In the tavern "Under the Golden Lion" Mozart experiences the vision of black-dressed man's arrival, who made a commission for *Requiem*. The mysterious guest, demanding composing the funeral work, can be seen as a prediction of forthcoming death; the recipient should answer the question whether the unexpected visit of a quasi-Commander is linked in any way with the prediction of the revenge on Salieri, Mozart's murderer. Indeed, although

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27 P. Kamiński, *Żywot rozpustnika*, [in:] *idem, Tysiąc i jedna opera*, Vol. 2, Kraków 2008, p. 479. The opera finishes with the death of Tom, who stays at the mental asylum; Anna visited him, listened to his story and forgave his guilt. In the epilogue the characters of the opera sing the moral together.

Salieri was not—like Don Giovanni—punished by death, he had another punishment: doubts whether the genius of the artist and murder can go hand in hand.

*Mozart and Salieri* was composed by Rimsky-Korsakov based on Pushkin's drama, what shows the influence which the author of *Eugene Onegin* had on Russian music of the 19th and 20th centuries. Another example of inspiration by Pushkin's work is Dargomyzhsky's opera *The Stone Guest* (1872).<sup>28</sup> Libretto consists mainly of the story of Don Juan, who, against the prohibition of the king, after murdering the Commander returns to Madrid. He starts a brief affair with Laura and kills her lover, Don Carlos, in a duel. Forced to hide—for a double crime—the Trickster stays in the Commander's mausoleum, where in the monk's frock he sees Donna Anna, mourning her husband, every day. When a woman discovers Don Juan's true identity, he initially faints, but against the hypocrite incentives of the seducer, she does not want to avenge the death of the Commander, and even sets Don Juan the date of the next meeting. The Trickster desires to leave her apartment, but faces a revived statue, which he has arrogantly asked to look after the door while he meets his own widowed wife. The Commander does not stand the offense and came to the meeting, and giving Don Juan his hand he drags him into the infernal abyss.

The idea of including the elements of aesthetics from the *commedia dell'arte* in the Don Juan's topic was initiated by the composer Erwin Schulhoff and the author of the libretto to his *Flammen*—Karel Josef Beneš, *notabene* the creator of the drama *Don Juan* from 1922. The protagonist of the two-act opera is Don Juan, who, tormented by La Morte (the spirit of death) who is in love with him, begs God for release from her insatiable lust. Prayer is not heard, and even the nun Anna succumbs to the charm of the Trickster. In the fourth scene, Don Juan climbs a steep rock over the naked women's bodies. When at the peak he sees, as it turns out, the fading light, Don Juan goes down the same way. In the second act, the Commander meets him twice: for the first time, when the Commander arrives and dies, fighting with the Trickster in a duel, and for the second time when in the form of an

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<sup>28</sup> Dargomyzhsky was not able to finish the work; he died in 1869, having given the score to Rimsky-Korsakov and César Cui.



animated statue he announces how Don Juan will be punished. In opposition to the tradition, it will not be death, but on the contrary—the inability to know death. In addition to the two scenes of the meeting with the Commander in *Flammen*, there is another allusion to the motive of the statue. In the fifth scene of the first act, Don Juan visits the gallery of men's statues—his predecessors who (just like him) climbed, trampling on women's bodies. The Trickster sees empty pedestals and guesses that one of them is certainly intended for him.

*Flammen* is an innovative attempt to reinterpret the myth of Don Juan and the Stone Guest. Schulhoff cut himself off from the operatic tradition, which reached the most complete shape in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and according to which Don Juan, the seducer and impostor, invited the statue of the Commander to the feast and was dragged into Hell by him. The very construction of the Stone Guest indicates the originality of Schulhoff's concept. First, the composer gave him the role of an enforcer, but the Commander's punishment did not open the gates of Hell. Secondly, while in the canonical version of history the statue arrived in response to the ironic "I invite you for a treat", in *Flammen* he appears announced only by Anna and—indirectly—by Harlequin. Finally, there is a new concept that the arrival of the Commander is not completely shocking for Don Juan, because he saw himself a luminous statue appearing in the place of the nobleman killed in the duel.

### ***Don Juan and Don Giovanni—first Polish premieres***

At the end, it is worth investigating the premiere of the first Polish realisation of the opera about the Trickster's adventures and the Commander's intervention, namely *Don Juan* by Gioacchino Albertini translated by Wojciech Bogusławski, the premiere of which took place on the 23 of February 1783. As Zbigniew Raszewski writes, the scene of the meeting of Don Juan with the Commander at the cemetery was presented in the following way:

In the second act the scenery presents the street, then the apartment of Don Alfonso, and then “great square” with many “gravestones, colossuses and statues”. Between gravestones, there is a “chivalrous statue of the Commander sitting on the horse, in the Roman dress, made from the white marble”. We know that during the performance there was a “huge horse with the inscription” indeed, and on the horse the actor sat, dressed in the costume from the white canvas.<sup>29</sup>

Analysing the example of the theatre machines from that time, described by Nicola Sabbatini,<sup>30</sup> we can imagine how huge impression the scene of overthrowing Don Juan by the stone statue, but also the death of the Trickster must have made on people. It is known that the “tomb” collapsed and the flames erupted on stage.

The character of the Commander created many opportunities to show the marvel and magic of the operatic world on stage. It is not surprising that Albertini’s work was acclaimed enthusiastically. The positive opinion, however, was not given about the Polish premiere of *Don Giovanni* from the 7th of March 1817 with Karolina Elsnerowa as Donna Anna, Ludwik Dmuszewski as Don Juan and Ignacy Werowski as a Commander. Viewers could see *Don Giovanni* only twice, negative reviews additionally shaped the audience’s opinion, already bored and unsatisfied in the lengthy, as it was called a plot. Only the “igneous” finale of the performance gained recognition—similarly to Albertini’s *Don Juan*, the element of fantasy evoked real enthusiasm among the publicity. The second realisation of *Don Giovanni* on Warsaw’s stage (in 1822) had a greater recognition, although the performer of the role of Commander—Jastrzębski—was criticised.

## Conclusion

The presence of the Commander in the opera theatre, although is not rare, has not been seen as worth specific, wider analyses so far. What seems obvious, the best situation concerns the Commander

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<sup>29</sup> Z. Raszewski, *Bogusławski*, Warszawa 1982, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> N. Sabbatini, *Praktyka budowania scen i machin teatralnych*, trans. into Polish by A. Kasprzak, Gdańsk 2008.

from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. However, the role of the state remains unappreciated in Dargomyzhsky's opera *The Stone Guest*, Schulhoff's *Flammen* and Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. Meanwhile, the investigation of the mentioned works broadens the area of interpretation of the motive of the animated gravestone statue, being the supplement to the analysis of the most popular musical representation of the Commander—*Don Giovanni*. I hope that this work is a good introduction to present the way of functioning this character in the operatic world in the wider context.

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