

THE PAGE PATTERN CHARACTERS AND CONTEXTS IN THE LYRIC THEATRE. THE CASE OF THE "CHERUBIN D'AMORE..."

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a foray into the variations of the PAGE pattern, as a quasi-present supporting character in the lyric theatre. Investing this generic character with multiple facets ranging from mere decorative, conventional presences to significant roles in the overturn of the dramatic action, opera composers and librettists have presented him as a positive satellite-element in the musical dramaturgical equation. The second part is a "case study" that offers a detailed analysis of Cherubino's character in Mozart's masterpiece *Le Nozze di Figaro*.

Keywords: page, character, opera, theatre, chivalry, Cherubino, Mozart, Beaumarchais

An essay-study about *the Page at Court* seems, at a first glance, an unconvincing choice, dwelling on a minor subject – and this is certainly not an allusion to the generic age of these characters, but ... playing with homonyms is amusing.

However, after going through hundreds of pages of musical and dramaturgical literature (and not by simply reading or browsing it, but by thoroughly assimilating the parts as an opera piano accompanist), I discovered the

ineffable and constant “ray of light” that these minor characters bring in various dramaturgical contexts of the lyric theatre.

The first part of this study aims to identify the PAGE characters in the opera literature, while the second part refers to the specific case of Cherubino – the symbol of being in love with love, whom Mozart defined through his music in a unique poetic image.

The PAGE. Origins, general information about the role of the page at Court

Etymologically, the word *page* is derived from the Greek word *paidion*, meaning *little boy*, or, possibly from the Latin word *pagius*, meaning *servant*.

The first testimonies of the pages’ existence date from the time of Alexander the Great, who had a personal retinue of Greek pages¹.

In Roman imperial society, pages were selected from slaves or freed slaves. Later, in the Muslim civilization, the *ghilman* (plural of *ghulam*) appeared, who were servants of foreign origin.

In the Middle Ages, a page's status was directly related to the accession to knighthood². There was a custom according to which, on reaching the age of 7, a noble-born boy was sent away to another noble or princely family to learn the art of courtly manners and good behaviours, the use of weapons and everything pertaining to the moral, religious, and especially physical education of a future knight. He was taught to write, read, play different musical instruments, play chess etc. In exchange for this privilege, he was expected to perform small

¹ [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paggio_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paggio_(Enciclopedia-Italiana))

² The formalization of the title of knight (Lat. *eques* = horseman or rider; Fr. *chevalier* / *cheval* - the root of the word means *horse*) emerged during the reign of Charlemagne (742-814), in northern France. It was consolidated around the year 1000 and became the fundamental basis of the feudal system that characterized Western Europe. A knight's title was not hereditary. The qualities required by this title included bravery, physical strength, faith in and obedience to the ecclesiastical and feudal-administrative hierarchy, sense of honour. The knight's title denoted a high position in the social hierarchy and implicit access to various privileges such as acquisition of property, tax exemptions etc. Later, beginning with the 11th - 12th centuries, and especially during the Baroque and Rococo periods, the knightly ideal was enriched with more refined elements of courtly lifestyle: elegance in clothing, deportment and speech, lyricism, a good command of the language and of the figures of style, a liberal mind. An important role in shaping the image of the ideal knight was played by the *chansons des gestes* (see the *Carolingian cycle*, later the *Breton cycle*), which celebrated the glorious deeds of their heroes. Invoking the passionate, idealized love for a noble, beautiful and inaccessible Lady gradually became another favourite theme that also inspired the troubadours, trouvères and minnesingers. One of the most impressive cultural myths about knighthood and love in the Middle Ages was *Tristan and Isolde*.

tasks related to the administration and good running of the household: sending different messages, letters, announcing visitors, holding his Lady's train etc.

The boy would serve as a page until the age of 14, when he would become a squire¹. Around the age of 22-23, after a lengthy and gruelling period of practice and training called *novitiate*, he would be invested as a knight, in a special ceremony². During the Renaissance, and later during the Baroque and Rococo periods, it was fashionable for the wealthy families to have a black African page, wearing fancy and exotic costumes.³ The noble rank was therefore no longer a condition.

At Versailles, a page's status was difficult to earn. The pages of the Royal Chamber were appointed by the four First Gentlemen of His Majesty's Chamber. The pages' age was higher than in the Middle Ages: 14 - 15 years. According to an interesting excerpt from the *Règlement Signé par le Roi* on September 18, 1734, during King Louis 15's reign (1710-1774), to have the right to become a page, one had to prove with original documents their noble descent on the paternal side, attested since at least 1550. There was a phrase in those days, *Noblesse d'épée* – descendants of medieval knights, which distinguished the true nobility from the so called *noblesse de robe* – the new aristocracy of the recently ennobled lawyers and civil servants.

The same documentary source speaks of one of their duties: “[...] *Lorsque le roi devait se déplacer à la nuit tombée à Versailles dans le château ou les jardins, il revenait avec six pages de sa grande écurie, portant chacun flambeau, afin de le précéder, lui ouvrant la route et lui éclairant le chemin*”⁴.

The Wallachian equivalent of the page was the *house-boy*, who, as in Western Europe, “was a young boy of noble origin who served as a page at a Royal Court or for a high nobleman.”⁵ An illustrative example is Cătălin's character in Eminescu's poem the *Evening Star*; a brief but expressive description portrays him,

¹ Squire = a young nobleman serving his lord by carrying his arms/shield, taking care of horses, accompanying him into battles and during hunting. (Examples from the lyric theatre: Normanno in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*; Dandini, *Cenerentola* “*amo suo it Scudiero*” (Rossini); Sherasmin in *Oberon*; Delmonte in *Un giorno di regono* by Verdi; Pirro in Verdi's *I Lombardi*; Don Ricardo in *Ernani* by Verdi; Orlik in Tchaikovsky's *Mazeppa*; the four squires in Wagner's *Parsifal* etc.)

² 792 A.D. is the year of the first attested investiture ceremony during which Charlemagne bestowed the title of knight upon the noble Roland.

³ In the historical film *A Royal affair* (directed by Nikolay Arcel, 2012), King Christian VII of Denmark and Norway has an African page boy named Moranti.

⁴ “Whenever the king would take evening walks around the Versailles castle or gardens, it was the duty of the 6 pages from *La Grande Ecurie* to accompany him, each holding a torch in his hand, leading and lighting the king's way.” *Histoire de la littérature française*,

http://www.la-litterature.com/dsp/dsp_display.asp?NomPage=1_ma_010b_Courtoisied/168601.

⁵ <http://www.dex.ro/text/curte+domneasca>.

by contrast, in a simple, realistic light, devoid of the metaphysics of impossible love:

“[...] *Meanwhile, the house-boy, Cătălin, / Sly, and who often jests / When he’s filling with wine the cups / Of the banqueting guests / A page that carries step by step / The trail of the Queen’s gown, / His little cheek - a peony / That under the sun stew; / Watchful, just like a thief, he sneaks / In Cătălina’s views [...]*”¹.

In the East, in a radically different world from the Western one – that of medieval Japan, with a completely different philosophy and culture, the presence of the courtly page was – surprisingly.... present. Here is a definition of the qualities that a page should have, quoted from a diary dating from the 10th century (~ 900): “[...] *The page. To be as delightful as possible, the page should be smaller in stature, and have clean, shiny and beautifully combed hair. His voice should be sweet and his manner of speaking, courteous*”²

In the lyric theatre, the page appears as a minor character dressed as a *transvestite* and usually having a soprano or mezzo voice, or, in more recent castings of certain opera houses – a countertenor voice. His role in the dramaturgical economy of the play is generally limited to a mere ornamental presence, making short announcements about the appearance of someone important at the Court, or acting as a messenger. We often see him endowed with artistic qualities: he sings or plays accompaniments on the **Chitarra, Mandoline** or **Harp**, creating small incisions of *theatre within theatre*.

There are also cases in which, whether knowingly or not, he becomes a catalyst of the dramatic action.

We will make a brief foray into the constellation of these characters, from which we have identified a few examples.

Gaetano Donizetti, ANNA BOLENA³

✧ **Smeaton**, *paggio e musico della regina* (contralto).

Given that this is a little-known opera, we will detail a few aspects related to the subject.

Act 1, Scene 1. Page Smeaton, accompanying himself on the harp, sings a short and melancholy song for Queen Ann, showing his admiration and

¹ English version by Petre Grimm.

² Sei Shonagon, *Cartea pernei, Confesiunile unei doamne de onoare de la Curtea imperială japoneză*, Editura MintRight Inc, 2015.

³ 1830, Milan, libretto by Felice Romani, inspired by a true event in the history of England (the reign of Henry VIII).

compassion for her suffering. (Scene / *Romanza, Andantino, E flat*, with a florid introduction on the harp, long arpeggios built on the dominant seventh chord)

Oh! amor, mi inspira [...]. Deh! non voler costringere a finta gioia il viso: bella è la tua mestizia, siccome il tuo sorriso. [...].

A significant and decisive moment in the evolution of this character and implicitly of the dramatic action is Scene 3, which begins with an ample accompanied recitative.

Smeaton: *“Tutto è deserto...[...] Questa da me rapita... (si cava dal seno un ritratto) Cara immagine sua, ripor degg'io pria che si scopra l'ardimento mio, un bacio ancora, un bacio, adorate sembianze... Addio, beltade che sul mio cor posavi e col mio core palpar sembravi”.*

Cavatina, (*Moderato, A flat major, 4/4*) a monologue expression of the page's love for the Queen which, together with the previous Recitative, creates a spectacular solo moment. Secretly in love with the Queen, he carries her portrait in his breast pocket. *“Ah! pareva che per incanto rispondessi al tuo soffrir: ogni stilla del mio pianto risvegliava un tuo sospir! A tal vista il core audace pien di speme e di desir, ti scopria l'ardor vorace che non oso altrui scoprir”.*

Scene 3. Lord Percy, the Queen's great love from before her marriage to Henry VIII, deeply frustrated by Anna's refusal to have any contact with him, threatens to commit suicide. At that moment, the page, who happened to be in the palace hallway, stops him: *Arresta! Che dir, che far? O, mio spavento... [...].* The locket containing the Queen's portrait falls from Smeaton's pocket. The King's coming seals their fate. All appearances are against the Queen, who is accused of adultery. All of them are imprisoned, and Smeaton, in the dungeon, falsely confesses, under threat of torture, to having an affair with the Queen.

The Queen's words at the finale of the opera reconfirm Smeaton being a musician.

Anna: *Smeton, ti appresa!...Sorgi che fai?... Che l' harpa tua non tempri? Chi ne spezzo le corde?*

✧ The **Page**, as a generic name (contralto), also appears in another one of Donizetti's lyric tragedies, *Roberto Devereux*. However, his role is quite insignificant. The subject and period in which the love story and Courtly intrigues take place are similar. (England, 1601, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I).

Giuseppe Verdi, *RIGOLETTO*¹

✧ The generic, nameless **page** from *Rigoletto* is the reduced form of Viscount of Vaugadron from the original play by Victor Hugo, but with the same episodic, intervening role in the dramatic scene between the courtiers and Rigoletto (Act II, Scene ed Aria).

The page announces the Duchess's desire to meet her husband, without knowing or understanding anything of the courtiers' complicit signs. He insists, but is brushed off quickly. "*Al suo sposo parlar vuol la duchessa [...] Qui or or con voi non era? [...] alla caccia? senza paggi! senz'armi!*" (G major, C).

He is the character who indirectly confirms Rigoletto's somber forebodings. The composer's stage directions complete the theatrical image of this moment: *Rigoletto, il quale sarà stato attentissimo al dialogo, balzando improvviso tra loro prorompe: "Ell' è qui dunque, ell'è col Duca!"*

Transvestite role for soprano voice.

Giuseppe Verdi, *UN BALLO IN MASCHERA*²

✧ **Oscar**, (soprano) Governor Riccardo's page.

He delivers letters (*V'è Oscarre che porta un invito del Conte; Ignota donna questo foglio diemmi. E per Conte diss'ella. A lui lo reca e di celato*), guest lists and announces Count Riccardo's arrival. Examples: "*Leggere vi piaccio! Della danze l'invito*"; "*Eccovi i nomi*"; "*S' avanza il Conte!*").

Verdi composed two arias for this character, which is quite relevant in the dramaturgical economy of the work. The aria from Act I, *Volta la terra* (B flat major, 2/4) presents Oscar as a defence lawyer: he intervenes by his master, the governor, in favour of Ulrica, accused of witchcraft and condemned to exile: "*Difenderla vogl'io!*"³

A fatidic role when, in the end, he naively describes his master's costume. In the aria from Act III, *Saper vorreste* (G major, 3/4), Oscar cleverly and playfully avoids giving in to the insistence of the conspiring Renato, letting himself

¹ 1851, Venice, libretto by Francesco Maria Piave after the drama *Le Roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo.

² 1859, Rome, libretto by Antonio Somma, after *Gustav III* by Eugène Scribe.

³ It. = I want to defend her! Translation of the aria text: When she turns her dusky brow to the stars/ how her eyes flash, like lightning/ as she foretells the course of their loves/to the belles of the town/be it happy or sad!/With Lucifer himself she has a pact!/Whoever touches her prophetic gown/ whether he plans to cross the sea or go off to war/ his future, his fortunes, his doubting heart will learn from her. It is with Lucifer himself she has a pact!

immersed into the courtly atmosphere of secrets and intrigues, while at the same time serenely and innocently staying out of it. *Oscar lo sa, ma nol dira, Tra-la-la* [...]¹.

Despite his part in the tragic denouement, Oscar is a positive character.

Giuseppe Verdi, DON CARLO²

✧ **Tebaldo** (soprano)

A role of lesser importance than in the *Ballo in Maschera*. Formal, conventional.

In Act I, tableau 2, the page Tebaldo appears in the group of ladies-in-waiting of the Queen and of Princess Eboli, who sings a Moorish romance about love – *Canzone del velo* (A Major, *Allegro brillante*, 6/8).

Verdi's stage directions: *Le dame sono assise sulle zolle intorno alle fonte. I Paggi sono intorno ad esse. Un Paggio temprà una mandolina. [...] Il Paggio l'accompagna sulla mandolina.*

Eboli: "A me recate la mandolina e cantiam tutte insiem"

The melodic line of the Refrain raises him to a higher musical status than that of Princess Eboli, who merely "accompanies" him, at the lower third: "Ah, tessete il veli vaghe donzelle..." (*Allegro giusto*, 4/4, *Leggero*)

Tebaldo's two announcement-interventions are: "IL Re !" and "Il marchese di Posa, grande di Spagna!" (Act I, Tableau II)

Giacomo Meyerbeer, LES HUGUENOTS³,

✧ **The page Urbain**, Queen Margaret of Valois's page (soprano)

Short, conventional part.

In Act I, (Cavatina, B flat major, 9/8), "Nobles Seigneurs, salut!", the page brings a letter from the Queen, addressed to Raoul, to Nevers? "Une dame noble et sage dont les rois seraient jaloux, m'a chargé de ce message, Chevaliers, pour l' un de vous.". Just like Oscar or Smeaton, he induces the element of secrecy, though in a playful key.

The scene ends with a quintet that also includes the page.

¹ Oscar knows, but he won't tell!

² 1867, Paris, libretto by J. Mery,/Camille du Locle, after the play with the same title by Friedrich Schiller.

³ 1836, Paris, libretto by Eugene Scribe, Emile Deschamps.

Richard Strauss, *DER ROSENKAVALIER*¹,

✧ The page Mohammed

The cast also includes a little black page named Mohammed, who has a silent part and who, at the beginning of Act I, brings breakfast to his mistress, the Marschallin, in her bedroom.

✧ Although the character of Octavian is not a page, I have allowed myself the liberty to include him in this category, given his psychological and physical profile, his playful, passionate and romantic behaviour, his 17-year-old age and his erotic passion for the Marschallin.

Octavian, Count of Rofrano (transvestite role, mezzo) is handsome and bears a striking resemblance to Mariandl, the maid; he disguises himself by putting on the maid's dress and bonnet and engages in a comic game with the disgraceful baron Ochs, who loads him with compliments and romantic proposals.

The opera begins with young Octavian's passionate declarations of love to the Marschallin (Maria Theresa von Werdenberg). Their erotic relationship fills the Marschallin with both joy and sadness. A certain parallel may be drawn with the much vaguer, undeclared, but present *en air* relationship between the Countess and Cherubino.

Pages are generically mentioned also in other operas based on historical subjects such as *The Puritans* by Bellini, *Luisa Miller* by Verdi, *La Périchole* by Offenbach, *Le Roi malgré lui* by A. E. Chabrier, *Elektra* by Richard Strauss etc.

Case study – "Cherubin d'amore ..."²

Cherubino, etymology = *angel* (Fr. cherubin = *angel*, *cherub*)

Count Almaviva's page (transvestite role, soprano), about 14 years of age.

This is an original character, not only in Beaumarchais's comedy (1784), but also in the literature/dramaturgy of the 18th century. It is for the first time that we see the enamoured teenager on "stage", beautiful, shy and bold at the same time, spontaneous in his reactions, dishevelled and distraught, liked by women and vaguely disliked by men.

A perfect reason for the Count's jealousy and unexplainable outbursts of temper, Cherubino is an atypical character, who does not fully understand the

¹ 1911, Dresden, libretto by Hugo von Hofmannstahl. The action of this comic opera takes place in Vienna, in the 18th century.

² W.A. Mozart, *Le Nozze di Figaro, ossia La folle giornata* [The Marriage of Figaro or the Day of Madness], Vienna, May 1, 1786, libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte, after the play with the same title by Pierre Caron de Beaumarchais.

meaning of the social and moral order and conventions of adults. His actions revolve solely around ... love.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, fascinated with Mozart's music and especially with the opera *Don Giovanni*, wrote an extensive study dedicated to the eroticism of Mozart's music – *L' Érotisme musical* or *Les Etapes érotiques spontanées* (1843).

He distinguishes three successive aesthetic phases/stages of eroticism, symbolized by three of Mozart's operas, or more exactly by three characters: Cherubino, Papageno and Don Giovanni.

In Cherubino's case, the thrill of sensuality awakens diffusely, in a mixture of anxiety, emotion and melancholy, without a precise object of Desire. More exactly, the object of desire is always present, being one with desire itself. “[...] Le desir se n'est pas encore éveillé – il est sombrement soupçonné. L' objet du desir se trouve toujours dans le desir – il monte de lui et se revèle dans une lueur faible et tremblante”.

Mozart – da Ponte – Cherubino: “*Un desio, un desio ch'io non posso spiegar*”¹ (see the Aria *Non so piu cosa son, cosa faccio*, Act I, Scene 5)

Kierkegaard also alludes to Cherubino's androgynous nature, both musically and psychologically: the contradiction between the diffusely oriented desire and the vaguely defined object that he gives to desire, just as, in certain plants, both male and female parts occur within the same flower...

Mozart dedicated him two solo arias that are most illustrative of his nature: “*Non so piu cosa son, cosa faccio...*” (Act I, No. 6) and “*Voi che sapete che cosa e amor*” (Act II, No. 11).

Their ethos is different, depending on the addressee: a frank, excited, informal and familiar tone with the young and jovial maid Susanna (see the play, the kiss, the attempt to steal the Countess's ribbon as an erotic fetish, in the Recitative preceding the Aria); a warm and shy tone with the Countess, whom he secretly adores. In Act II, after the *buffooneries* of the travesty – (*Quante buffonerie!* ...), claiming his imminent departure from the palace and irresistibly drawn by the Countess's beauty and distinction, Cherubino, melted with love and pain, dares (!) to want to kiss her: “*Forse vicino all' ultimo momento....questa bocca oseria...*”

Cherubino?... a permanent oscillation between security and insecurity, reflected constantly in the subsidiary layers of the harmonic element. Whenever he speaks about himself, about what he feels, he does it in a minor, nostalgic, hesitating tone. Musically, this is represented both by recitatives and by solo moments: inflections, melodic turns/notes (anticipation, retardation), cadences.

¹ A desire that I can't explain.

Semi-phrases, long phrases, incisions in recitatives on long major/minor chords with minor seventh, or ending in a minor chord.

Example 1: Recitative, Act I, Scene 5

✧ *Ah, che troppo rispetto ella m' ispira!* (D minor)

Cherubino

Ah, che trop-po ri-spet-to el-la m'i-spi-ra!

Example 2: Canzonetta

✧ *Voi, che sapete che cosa è amor* (Act II, Scene 3)

The melodic idea follows the contour of a modulation from A flat major (the previous cadence) through C minor (the 4th scale degree) to the G minor tonic.

Ri - cer - co un be - ne fuo - ri di me, non so ch'il tie - ne, non so cos' è.

Example 3: Recitative, Act II, Scene 3

- ◇ *Madama scherza ed io frattanto parto. Oh, me infelice!* (Diminished seventh chord [...])
O, ciel, perche morir no lice! (F minor) *Forse vicino...questa bocca oseria* (E flat m7)

The musical score for Example 3 consists of two systems. The first system features three vocal parts: Cherubino (soprano), Gräfin (alto), and another Cherubino (tenor). The lyrics are: "Ma-da-ma scher-za, ed io frat-tan-do par-to! Po-ve-rin, che sven-tu-ra! Oh me in-fe-li-ce! Or". The piano accompaniment is in F minor. The second system features a single vocal part for Cherubino with the lyrics: "pian-ge... Oh ciel, per-chè mo-rir non li-ce! For-se vi-ci-no all'ul-ti-mo mo-men-to... ques-ta boc-ca o-se-ri-a!". The piano accompaniment continues with sustained chords.

Example 4: Recitative, Act II, Scene 3

- ◇ Duettino Susanna-Cherubino *Aprite presto, aprite* (Act II, No. 14, *Allegro assai*). The words referring to the Countess: *abbraccio te per lei* are marked by an ascending melodic passage containing a short modulating inflection towards the C minor tonic.¹

The musical score for Example 4 is a duettino for Susanna (Cherubino) and the Countess. It features six staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cherubino (soprano), Violoncello, and Contrabasso. The lyrics for Cherubino are: "ab-brac-cio te per lei". The score shows a complex orchestration with various melodic and harmonic lines for each instrument.

In this quick *Duettino*, Cherubino appears horrified by the Count's reaction, but brave for the sake of the Countess, in order not to compromise her. He

¹ I embrace you for her.

therefore jumps out of the window. We thus discover another facet of the character, i.e. chivalry *in nuce*.

The Aria “*Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio*”¹ (Act I, No. 6, E flat, C, *Allegro vivace*) is a confessional monologue about the mysterious thrill and uncertainties of being in love, the vague, undefined longing for the love of ... being in love. The structure of the musical material combines tempo and short, sequential motifs with “sigh” endings. The last parts of the basic melodic motifs of this aria quasi invariably involve both anticipation and retardation.

Example 5: “*Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio* (Act I, No. 6, E flat, C, *Allegro vivace*)

The second theme introduces melodic chromaticism, while preserving the same “sigh” ending that culminates with the moment of “desire” - *un desio*, with the upper neighbouring tone a semitone apart (see Examples 6, 7).

Example 6: “*Solo ai nomi d’amor, di diletto mi si turba, mi s’ altera il petto, E a parlare mi sforza d’amore, un desio ch’ io non posso spiegar*”²

¹ I don't know any more what I am, what I'm doing...

² Just the name of love, of delight / Upsets me, and makes my heart flutter / And I find myself talking of love / From a need I can't explain.

Example 7:

The musical score for Example 7 consists of two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in G-flat major (one flat) and 2/4 time, with a treble clef. It contains the lyrics "un de - si - o,". The bottom staff is a string accompaniment, labeled "Str.", in the same key and time signature, with a bass clef. The accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests, with some notes beamed together.

The diffuse and contradictory emotional states of love had been poetically expressed centuries before, in a passage from the text by Chretien de Troyes, author of the *Arthurian Romances* (1155-1180). There is a surprising similarity with Cherubino's words: "[...] My illness is different from all others; it causes me both joy and pain, so happy I am in my distress. And if it can be that sickness brings delight, then my trouble and joy are one, and in my illness consists my health. So I do not know why I complain, for I know not whence my trouble comes, unless it is caused by my desire [...] but I find so much joy in it that the suffering it causes me is grateful, and there is so much contentment in my pain that it is sweet to suffer so." Passionate love was also featured in the philosophy/dramaturgy of the ancient Greeks: love is a frenzy. "Some have believed it was a madness ... thus, those who are in love must be forgiven as though ill." (Menander). Plato – platonic love is a divine delirium, a transport of the soul, a madness and a supreme sanity both. Eros is complete desire, luminous aspiration, religious zeal. By extrapolation, the maid Berta in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* offers her own philosophical reflection: "[...] *Ma che cosa e questo amore che fa tutti delirar? Egli e un male universale, una smania, un pizzicore, un solletico, un tormento*".

The *Canzonetta* "*Voi, che sapete che cosa è l'amor*", composed by Cherubino for the Countess, is a veiled, yet clear declaration of love¹.

A brief moment of *theatre within theatre*, the melody is inspired by a fashionable French song, "Malborough s'en va-t-en guerre". Beyond Mozart's irony, whose model for Cherubino was the sad story of the Duke who died in war, and beyond the apparent banality of the melody, accompanied by the pizzicato strings imitating the guitar (Countess: *Prend la mia chitarra e l'accompagna!*), this solo moment expresses a strong emotion, otherwise prefigured by the words in the Recitative preceding the *Canzonetta*: "*io sono sì tremante...ma se madama vuole...*"

The orchestration of this *Canzonetta* (Act II, No.11, B flat major, 2/4, *Andante*) presents a new and unique element compared to all the solo moments in

¹ Susanna: "Look madam, see how he blushes!" (Beaumarchais, Scene 25).

The Marriage of Figaro: the use of the entire woodwind section: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet (B), Bassoon, complemented by the somber, nostalgic timbre of the horns (E flat). These appear like short inserts that highlight the sincerity of Cherubino's feelings.

Example 8:

In Beaumarchais's play (Scene 25), the Countess's reaction betrays her feelings for Cherubino, in a short monologue: *How innocent he looks, and how bashful! ... short monologue: "[...] Dear ribbon!—oh lovely, oh happy, happy ribbon! I almost forgot you (she takes it from the armchair and cuddles it) Never will I give thee back. You will remind me of the moment when that poor child ...*". In Mozart's opera, the Countess's reaction is more discreet, barely perceptible, insinuated in the direct dialogue with Cherubino (see Ex. 3, Recitative).

Both Figaro and Susanna make a frank and vivid portrait-characterization of Cherubino:

Figaro, ironical and amused, in the famous Aria at the end of the act "*Non piu andrai, farfallone amoroso notte e giorno d'intorno girando..*", refers not only to his manner and how it will change radically with the Count's decision to send him to *nuovo regimento*, but also to his clothing, hairstyle and general physical appearance: "*[...] Non avrai quei penacchini, non avrai quella chioma, quel aria brillante*".

Susanna – in the Aria "*Venite, inginocchiatevi*", admiring the youth and beauty of his body, his annoying yet ... charming restlessness, his courage (Act II, No. 12).

Cherubino is a constant trigger of comic-erotic *imbroglio*.

From the very first scene, he appears “embarrassed”, dishevelled and miserable in Susanna's room, telling her how the Count had caught him visiting Barbarina, the gardener's daughter, and fired him. (Recitative, Act I, Scene 5). Right after this confession, the Count, retelling the story himself, discovers Cherubino in Susanna's room (!). The dichotomous play between appearance/reality (see Act I, Trio, No.7)

Act II. Susanna, in connivance with the Countess, dresses him as a woman, but the Count's unexpected arrival triggers a new and comical/violent scene of jealousy (Finale No. 15) “*Esci omai, garzon malnato, sciagurato non tardar !*” (E flat major, Allegro) The quiproquo play.

At the wedding celebration in Act III, the Count, helped by Antonio, exposes little Cupid again, who this time is disguised as a peasant girl (double disguise).

In Act IV (Finale Nr. 28), the Count catches him again flirting with the Countess, disguised in Susanna's clothes (*quiproquo*).

Cherubino's epithets:

- ✧ BASILIO: “*Cherubin d' amore*”...*E quella canzonetta e per voi, per Madama? Io mi credea che preferir doveste per amante, come fan tutte quante, un signor liberal, prudente e saggio, a un giovinastro, a un paggio!*” – malicious allusions to Cherubino's qualities as a lover (Act I, scene 7)
- ✧ COUNT: “*restate qui, picciol serpente*” (Recitative, Act I, Scene 7)
[...] *tosto andate e scacciate il sedutor, parta il damerino* (Act I, Trio No. 7) “[...] *Esci omai, garzon malnato, sciagurato...*” (Act II, Finale No. 15)
- ✧ COUNTESS: “*Bravo, che bella voce* (Recitative, Act II, Scene 3)
“*arditelo, sfacciatelo, temerario*” (Susanna, Countess, Count) (Act IV, Finale 28)
- ✧ FIGARO: *picciolo Cherubino* (Recitative, Scene 8); *farfallone amoroso* (lustful butterfly), *delle belle turbando il riposo, non piu avrai questi bei pennachini, quel cappelo, quel aria brillante* (Act I, Scene 8, Figaro's Aria, No.9, C major, C, Vivace)
- ✧ SUSANNA “*povero Cherubin, siete voi pazzo!*” (Recitative, Act I, Scene 5)
Presto a noi, bel soldato (Act II, Scene 3); “*Mirate il bricconcello, mirate quanto e bello, che furba guardatura, che vezzo, che figura*” (Aria No. 12) Recitative: “*Ha due braccio di rossor sulla faccia [...] Cospetto! ha il braccio piu candido del mio...qualche ragazza*”. Her conclusion: *Se l' amano le femmine, han certo il lor perch *¹.
- ✧ BARBARINA “*Andiam, bel paggio ...le piu belle ragazze del castello, di tutte sarai tu certo il piu bello*” (Recitative, Act III, Scene 7)

¹ If all the women love him, they've certainly got their reasons.

- ✧ ANTONIO, the gardener, speaks suspiciously about Cherubino, not knowing yet who he is (Act II Finale 15)

A precursory of Don Giovanni's behavioural typology, as Kierkegaard argues (see the Recitative, Scene 5 *Leggila a ogni donna del palazzo*), Cherubino could just as well become, as Hoquard¹ explains, a Tamino, a young man who assumes the responsibility of maturity, fighting for true love and sincerity. Actually, Beaumarchais continued Cherubino's story in his last play, *La mere coupable* or *L'autre Tartuffe* (drame moral en 5 actes). The action takes place 20 years after the action in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Cherubino has a child with the Countess – Léon. When the Countess tells Cherubino in a letter that what they did was wrong and that there will be no more future for them, he goes away to war and intentionally lets himself be mortally wounded on the field.

Darius Milhaud composed a three-act opera inspired by this subject (Geneva, 1966). *L'amour coupable* by Thierry Pecou (Rouen, 2010) is also based on the same subject.

As an interesting fact, in connection with Cherubino's character and, certainly, with the generic character of the PAGE, we should also mention *Cherubin ou Le Page de Napoleon*, vaudeville-comedy in two acts by Charles Desnoyers/Adrien Pain, 1835, Paris and *La Corbeille d'oranges ou le Page de Schonbrunn*, one-act comedy by Merle/Brazier (no first names), 1812, Paris.

This analytical study was intended as been an attempt to bring back to light a luminous pattern – and here the metaphor is implied, i.e. that of the generic character of the PAGE, sometimes unfairly minimized/ignored both in the strictly theoretical analyses and in the act of performance.

¹ Hoquard, J.V., *La pensée de Mozart*, Paris, Seuil, 1958, apud Georges Durand, *Arte si arhetipuri*, Editura Meridiane, Bucharest, 2003.

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