

IN THE 1640s, every musical household in Italy had a copy of 'Ariadne's Lament', high-spot of Monteverdi's *Arianna* and his most famous song. The lament expressed the opera's theme: abandonment. Monteverdi called it *Arianna's* 'most fundamental part'. There have been many Ariadnes since. Cambert, Marcello, Porpora, Handel, Strauss: only Dido can challenge the number of times Ariadne magnetises 'abandoned' to her name. At the moment of the lament, Ariadne's abandonment is fourfold. Two past abandonments: she abandoned her home and herself, for and to Theseus. Two in the present: abandoned by him, she again abandons herself, this time to her feelings in song. Her self-abandoned expression of abandonment is a hieroglyph of all four abandonings.

It is a fundamental part of the male Western musical stage that the most large-scale, lavish, man-made performances should focus on one woman's self-abandoned, isolated voicing of pain. Dido, Ariadne, Butterfly abandoned – fine. Theseus, Heracles, Attila abandoned? No: Heracles mad, Prometheus bound, Don Carlos betrayed. Other bad things happen to men. They are blinded, tortured or exiled, like Philoctetes and Coriolanus, in a political, not a sexual, unselfing. So far, Western tragedy and opera have preferred to express the pain of sexual desertion through a woman's voice.

They have also made it the voice of universal solitude. Ariadne is the symbol of 'menschlichen Einsamkeit', 'mankind in solitude', the Composer-figure who created her says in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Poulenc's opera *La Voix humaine*, which is set to a Cocteau libretto, consists of one woman on the phone to a lover who has rejected her. She finally strangles herself with the line that connects her voice to his self-absenting voice, which the audience never hears. Her throat, 'la voix humaine', where the 'opera' takes place, is silenced.

The solo female expression of abandonment is crucial to opera's voicing of the human condition. In European music, the figure of Ariadne encapsulates this tradition. Her family, the first family of Crete – her father, King Minos, was one of Europa's children by Zeus – provided the prime material; and the first composer to use the image on stage was Euripides in the late fifth century BC. Euripides sent shockwaves through Athens by changing the stage image of women along with the way female characters

Putting the Words into Women's Mouths

Ruth Padel on the female role in opera

expressed themselves in music. In Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs* (the first documented response to Euripides), Aeschylus complains that Euripides 'picked up Cretan monodies' and dragged *gamous* ('marriages, fucking') into tragedy. 'Cretan monodies', whatever they are, go with sex. Neither belongs in tragedy's music or libretti as Aeschylus bequeathed them to his heirs.

That word *gamous* in *Frogs* shocks even Dionysus:

Aeschylus: You picker-up of Cretan monodies, bringing unholy *gamous* into the art of tragedy...

Dionysus: Sssh! most honoured Aeschylus!

Aeschylus parodies Euripides' 'Cretan' arias by imitating a kitchen girl lamenting her rooster in a song full of sexual double entendres:

Aeschylus: I want to show the way he does his monodies...

'O Mania, help! O mountain-born Nymphs: Glyce's gone, she's snatched away my cock! I, poor girl, was working within... He flew up flew up to the sky on the lightest tips of his wings and left me laments, laments. Tears tears fell fell from my eyes, unhappy me! O Cretans, children of Ida, take your bows: protect me!'

A good few Ariadne ingredients here, as opera would come to know them: sex (implicitly), desertion, musical extravagance (those repetitions) and emotionalism – all tied to Crete by the apostrophe 'Cretans... protect me!'

This passage must parody a Euripides play with Cretans in it. Euripides wrote at least two, and both are now lost. *Cretan Women*, which was probably written before any of his surviving plays, featured Aerope, Minos' granddaughter, and Ariadne's niece. Aerope married Atreus but went to bed with his brother Thyestes, igniting the spectacular family curse that led to Orestes' murder of his mother Clytemnestra. *Cretan Men* probably followed Hippolytus and starred Ariadne's mother Pasiphae, who had sex

with her husband's bull and produced the Minotaur. Both plays spot-lit wrong female desire. This was Athenian imagination playing tigers: orientalisising, making Crete a just-far-enough-distant locus of abandoned female sexuality. In the Athenian imagination, Crete becomes the cradle of Western women's ruinous sex lives. Cretan women betray husbands, fall in love with stepsons, brothers-in-law, bulls; abandon modesty, fathers, natural law, self-control. Athenian men lapped this up. Not just the stories but the songs, in which a single voice, designer-female, sings of a woman's pain in public.

European male scholars followed Athenian males in believing that Euripides had underlined a link between wrong female desire and Crete. Most, however, resisted the idea that Sophocles could have represented Cretan women in such a way. The arguments here depend on several more lost plays and a bundle of Edwardian male assumptions. Sophocles wrote a play about Ariadne's sister. His *Phaedra* (lost) was performed after Euripides' first shot at the same story in his play *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos* (also lost) – the surviving *Hippolytus*, the one Racine knew, was Euripides' second go at the story. The German scholar Welcker suggested that Sophocles' play contained a scene that is known to have existed somewhere, in which Phaedra made a direct approach to Hippolytus and then hanged herself when seduction failed. Other scholars said this scene must have been written by Euripides. In his 1917 edition of *The Fragments of Sophocles*, A.C. Pearson concluded that in assigning Sophocles' Phaedra a 'shameless hardness of character' Welcker is speculating. It might well be that Sophocles' portrait of Phaedra was 'free from grosser traits; and if that is so, her infatuation may have been excused as the consequence of her husband's desertion, who had abandoned her to assist his friend in a hopeless expedition.' Sophocles' Cretan women can be 'excused', are not 'gross'. So what is or was it about Euripides that made 19th-century European males, following Athenian ones, pick on the 'grossness' of his Cretan women? The reaction seems to have been based on original Athenian reactions to Euripides' music. Athenian playwrights composed the music as well as the words of their pieces: this is why Monteverdi, Verdi and Wagner saw themselves as re-inventing Greek tragedy. The tragic poets also sang in performances of their works. Sophocles supposedly had a lovely voice and sang the title role in his play *Thamyris* (lost), accompanying himself on the lyre; he later retired from the stage because his voice was too small.

Greek musical expression had clear moral dimensions. It seems that, in traditional tragic music, melody was led by metre with, probably, one syllable per note. Euripides seems to have changed things, bringing in slurs (two or three notes for a long vowel, for instance), repetition, sensuality, all the traffic of emotionalism. Aristophanes' roost-

er parody reflects what Athenians perceived Euripides to be doing both musically and morally. Sex plus music, the sexiness of music, was new to the masked and heavily robed tragic stage, though present elsewhere in Greek culture. The Athenian view of Euripides' revolution comes out in an exchange between older and younger composer in *Frogs*:

Aeschylus: I didn't make Phaedras prostitutes...

No one can say I made a woman in love.

Euripides: No. You had nothing to do with Aphrodite.

It would be ironic if Athenian responses to Euripides' music fed later European responses to his words, since we and the Edwardians would probably be pretty deaf to Euripides' musical innovations; but it is not odd when you think how close sex and music have been in opera.

Euripides won few competitions but his work was magnetic. *Frogs* shows Dionysus going to Hades to fetch him back after his death; Athenian prisoners-of-war in Sicily are said to have got food and water from their captors by singing his songs. *Frogs* suggests that his magic lay, at least partly, in emotionalism coupled with a new use of the fictional female voice.

BRONZE AGE GREECE could not escape Cretan sea-power, and classical Athenians could not escape Cretan myth and its effect on Greece. In Euripides, the boat carrying Phaedra from Crete 'flew ill-omened to glorious Athens'. Sinister Cretan boat, shining innocent Athens: it is a Jamesian image of Old World and New. In a 17th-century vision of barbaric intrusion that reflects Athenian images of Crete as bestial-cum-royal, Racine's *Hippolyte* says Greece changed when Phèdre landed there:

Tout a changé de face
Depuis que sur ces bords les dieux ont envoyé
La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë.

She is daughter of Minos: think Minotaur, the King's name in a monster. She is daughter of Pasiphae: think bestiality, a bull in a queen.

In a fragment from Euripides' *Cretan Men*, Phaedra's mother asks ironically:

Why should I have fallen for the bull?
For his dashing clothes and sexy glances?
No: Minos's daemon was at work in me,
filling me too with destruction.

This was a family filled with sexually destructive daemon. In *Hippolyte's* words, you get the whole exotic Cretan package in one girl. Phaedra is 'gross' because of her inheritance.

In Greek tragedy and in Racine, the idea of Crete crystallises the paradox of barbarism at the heart of civilisation, the monster in the bowels of a palace, cruelty in the codes of the ruling class. Directly behind Scarpa's claret-and-crystal assault on Tosca is the torture-chamber. During the 19th century, the emphasis in opera shifted towards the hidden cruelties of the bourgeoisie. 'Diangi, piangi, o misera,' Germont sings to Violetta, whom he can afford to pity now he has forced her into self-sacrifice for his own family's sake. Minos' palace is a prototypical place where art collaborates with power: Knossos sums up the decorated armature of violence incarnate in 19th-century opera.

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But another reason Fin-de-Siècle male scholars called Euripides' Cretan women gross, lay in their own very different experience of hearing women's voices sing abandonment. In the mid-1850s, 90 per cent of British popular songs were written by men. Women's songwriting grew at great speed in the 1860s and by 1870 women were responsible for most middle-class popular songs. When they were children, Edwardian classical scholars would have heard their mothers sing drawing-room songs composed by women, the words of which articulated the bourgeois value of self-veiling resignation through a soft-focus prism of working-class rural life.

Claribel's 'Mother Take the Wheel Away' is typical. 'Claribel' was the pen-name of Charlotte Alington Barnard, née Pye (1830-69), who probably took her name from Tennyson's poem. Like him, she came from Lincolnshire. She began composing after marrying a parson while still (probably) in love with a barrister she was engaged to before her father broke it up. She began to get her songs published in 1858 and was one of the first British songwriters to make a royalty deal with her publisher. The songs, like contemporary painting, express womanly consent to abandonment:

Oh mother take the wheel away and put it out
of sight,
For I am heavy hearted, and I cannot spin
tonight:
Come nearer, nearer yet, I have a story for your
ear,
So come and sit beside me, come and listen,
mother dear . . .
Mabel came among us, and her face was fair to
see,
What wonder was it, mother, that he thought
no more of me?
When first he said fair words to her, I know she
did not hear,
But in the end she listen'd, could she help it,
mother dear?
And afterwards we met, and we were friendly
all the same:
For ne'er a word I said to them of anger, or of
blame,
Till both believed I did not care, and maybe
they were right,
But mother, take the wheel away, I cannot spin
tonight.

Words, music, flow and rhyme all incarnate 'womanly' self-restraint and resignation. Not abandonment of convention, like Pasiphae; not self-abandoned delirium like Euripides' Phaedra, who is desperate to escape to the beach and woods where the man she wants is playing.

Women also wrote religious songs and farewells to soldier sons, but the most popular genre was the 'jilt song'. Sometimes these women composers wrote their own words; but often they used those of male poets, especially Tennyson. These songs, male text with female music, fit a general distinction between word as male and voice as female, music as woman and poetry as man: a division explored by Wagner in Opera and Drama. These women's musical settings served the sound of the female voice as it was imagined and blueprinted by men. As in Euripides and Monteverdi, this was a man's idea of how a woman feels and sounds, even though the music was written by a woman. The music gave legitimacy to the man-made message.

Tennyson's own voicings of abandoned women were avidly read by budding male scholars as well as women songwriters. He was familiar with Greek texts and modelled his idylls on Alexandrian poets, who had themselves been reworking Euripides' soliloquies for female characters. His imagination lunges out to Greek poetry and Shakespeare and heads for the unnoticed woman, abandoned by lover and mainstream narrative alike. Mariana is 'moated'. Rusty nails fall off walls, latches are unlifted. "He cometh not," she said, 'as the 'fruit drops unseen'. The sexual symbolism could hardly be clearer. 'She said, "I am awary, awary, would God that I were dead." How seductive and authoritative the rhythm and rhyme make this as a man's image of a woman's feeling.

Oenone, Paris's abandoned fiancée, is also awary of life. She, too, appeals to mother, to 'mother Ida' (Aristophanes' parody is an appeal to Cretan not Asian Ida, but must have crept in somewhere here):

Heard me, for I will speak . . . for it may be
That while I speak of it, a little while,
My heart may wander from its deepest woe.

By voicing it, Tennyson's fictional woman eases the pain he makes her feel. Fabricating a woman's voice, making her sing (like a torturer, you might say) of her pain for men's pleasure, is one of the things men have done best. Tennyson's lyric monody lived indirectly off Euripidean monody but expressed through it something very different: the part-glimpsed, self-denying suffering that his age idealised. Like Euripides' songs, these Victorian songs gave pleasure, both to the singer and to the audience; and in this society (unlike Athens) they gave that pleasure to women as well as men. This enjoyment did not lie specifically in the songs' female impersonation of male ideas about female resignation and pain, but that was an essential part of them.

The extent of male control over the rise in women's songwriting is clear from the way the publishers, then and later, rejected orchestral scores by some of the same women. Alice Mary Smith, nine years Claribel's junior, was appointed Honorary Female Professional Associate of the Royal Academy of Music in the year of her death, 1884. She first attracted attention with a piano quartet at the London Musical Society, but was most famous for her duet 'Maying', published in 1870 and so popular that its copyright sold in 1883 for £663. Her orchestral works were occasionally performed: a symphony in 1863, a clarinet concerto in 1872. But no one would publish her symphonies – they may have been undistinguished, but hundreds of deeply undistinguished orchestral scores by men were published at the time. What British publishers, unsurprisingly, expected people to want from women's music was exactly what men wanted in a wife. Women were not supposed to produce supra-domestic structures with meaning beyond the personal.

THE FIFTH-CENTURY tragic stage, like Japanese Noh, used male actors to sing female parts. So, until the mid-19th century, did a lot of European opera, sometimes, in some roles. The castrato – voice of wound and loss ('Long live the

knife,' audiences would chant when they heard a good one), of variance between body and voice – who challenged social norms of desire, was essential to opera's sexuality. With castrati on the wane in the later 19th century, stage singing was the one area of music where women might be paid higher sums than men, because – apart from castrati – only they could produce a woman's voice. Women commanded a high price as medium, but had little control over the message. You can argue that a singer's control over interpretation, her power to ornament a line and shift emotional impact, was and is massive. Look at the battles between divas and those who ask them to sing. But the text, plot and melodic shape the singer is contracted to sing was almost always man-made.

Ariadne's opening phrase in Strauss's opera is impossible to sing. His sopranos told him they could not hold that long note without a breath. He knew this, but he stuck to his precisely marked tempo. He knew it was impossible, but they had to do it. Great interpreters of Ariadne have found different ways of tricking a breath in inaudibly. Strauss could have written it differently; but this was his vision of Ariadne and he wasn't going to change it for any singer. The composer has the upper hand, the hot-line to the fictional woman. The singer has to trail along behind.

THE 'CRETAN MONODY' that Euripides initiated for the entertainment and fury of the male Athenian establishment has a fictional woman singing a man-made song based on desire for an absent man. That song has to remind the listener of the

physical body from which the voice comes. Though he was not a musician, Ovid's fables of female love-lives were crucial to the development of post-Renaissance 'Cretan monody'. Like Tennyson, Ovid wrote about desiring and abandoned women. He introduces Pasiphae's story with teasing about who chats up whom:

Men like stolen love: so do women.
A man's bad at pretending. Woman hides
her wanting better. If it didn't suit us
to make the first move, she'd do it,
she's already won (apta). The heifer
lows to the bull in soft meadows,
mares neigh to the horny-hooved stallion.
Desire's weaker, not so frantic, in us males.
Our flame has a lawful end.

This mocks male ideas of female desire. It is natural (preparing readers for Pasiphae, the unnatural) for women to solicit. To prove it, look at cows (whom Pasiphae will envy). The 'male flame' has a 'lawful end'. 'End' blends 'boundary' and 'purpose' in many languages, and here fuses the 'goal' of approaching women with the physiological 'end' of men's desire.

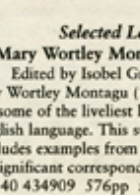
Ovid goes on to imagine Pasiphae's 'flame' of desire in dashing physical detail:

Once in the valleys of Ida was a white bull,
glory of the herd, marked by a splash of black
between his horns – his only blemish;
the rest of him white as milk.
Cretan heifers longed to feel his weight
on their backs. Pasiphae was glad
to be his lover: to be the adulterous mistress
of a bull. She envied the prettiest cows.
I'm singing what everyone knows.
Crete has a hundred cities. Though a liar
she can't deny this . . .

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The bull made Pasiphae pregnant, deceived by a maple-wood cow.

Epimenides and St Paul said that 'Cretans always lie.' But Ovid personifies Crete herself as the liar.

Crete, open to unnatural sex, expert at covering up, like Pasiphae when she deceives the bull, is the paradigmatic deceptive female. From Hesiod's Pandora this has been an image familiar in Greece: female beauty as deceiving mask. The Roman word for 'beautiful', *formosus*, comes from *forma*, 'form'. Images of rhetoric - the most beautiful linguistic form - depict it as a frame which invites the listener to enter and believe. Locke wrote in his Essay that 'eloquence, like the fair sex, has too many prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived.' Men enjoy being deceived about what's behind or under the mask. In Ovid what is under the woman's mask is errant desire.

Ovid interior-designs Pasiphae's jealous frustration:

Her hand wasn't used to it
but she'd pick the juiciest grass for the bull.
There she goes with the herd.
Thoughts of her husband won't stop her!
A bull cuckoldling Minos! What next? Your
purple frills

are no use now. Your lover doesn't bother
with designer labels. Why take a mirror with
you
looking for herds on the hill? Why plait your
hair?

Believe that mirror when it tells you you're no
heifer!
How you wish for horns - on your head!

If you must cheat on your husband, do it with a
man!
She'd leave her bedroom, rush to the glens like
a maenad,

glare at a cow and say, 'Why's he like her?
Look how she frisks before him on the grass!
I suppose she thinks she's attractive!
She'd get that innocent cow
cut out of the herd, forced under a yoke,
or up to the altar in fake sacrifice.

Then she'd hold her rival's entrails
in triumphant hands, appease gods with the
carcass
and scream to the liver and lights: 'Now try
and get off with my lover!' She longs to be
Europa
transported by a bull, or Io who turned into
a cow.

From Pasiphae longing to be Europa, as featured in Euripides' *Cretan Women*, Ovid jumps to the female lead of Euripides' *Cretan Men*:

If another Cretan woman, *Aerope*, had pulled back from passion for *Thyestes* - and is it such a big deal to do without one man? - the sun wouldn't have stopped
mid-run,
wouldn't have wrenched his chariot round
and turned his horses back to face the dawn.

If *Aerope* hadn't gone to bed with *Thyestes*, there would have been no disaster at *Mycenae*. 'And is it so big a deal to do without one man?' Ovid is *Catullus*' heir. He knows exactly how big a deal, poetically, 'doing without' a particular love can be. Ovid suggests that for a woman not to act on lust is as unnatural as the sun running backwards.

Ovid prefaces his own version of the story of *Ariadne* with that of a Greek girl who came to grief through Cretan sexual glam-

our. One of *Ariadne*'s brothers was killed in Greece and her father *Minos* attacked *Attica* in revenge. He besieged a city whose king had a purple lock of hair on his head. As long as it stayed there, the city would be safe. The King's daughter, *Scylla*, watched the siege and fell in love with *Minos*. *Minos* is *Europa*'s son: his mother was a non-Greek princess, carried off to Crete, as this girl longs to be; and as *Ariadne* will be carried away from Crete by a future lover.

When *Minos* rode his white stallion, wearing
purple,
pulling the frothing bit, the girl was hardly
sane.

She longed to leap from her tower to the
Cretan camp,
open the city's gates to the enemy, anything
Minos wanted ...

'If he had me as hostage, he'd give up the war!
I'd be in his company, a pledge of peace ...
Oh, if your mother *Europa* looked like you,
of course *Zeus* burned for her!

... May all my hopes of marriage vanish
before I use treachery to do it! Yet many have
liked
being conquered ... He's fighting a just war
for his dead son ...

He'll certainly beat us! Better let it happen
with no massacre ... I'll give myself up,
my country as my dowry, and so end the war!
My father has the city keys. I'm only afraid
of him ... I wish I had no father ... All I need's
his lock of hair, more precious to me than
gold.'

She cuts off her father's lock and runs to
Minos with it:

'Love made me do it. I'm *Nisus*' daughter,
Scylla.
I deliver to you my country and my house.
I ask no reward save you yourself! Take this
lock
as pledge of love. Not just a lock of hair.

I'm giving you my father's life!
In her sin-stained hand she offered him the
prize.

Minos fell back in horror at the unnatural act:
'You foulness! you blot on our whole age!
May gods banish you for ever from their
world!'

Minos' name here is enclosed by porrect ('she offered') and porrecta ('that which is offered'). *Scylla*'s action and the thing she holds unfold him. He *refugit* - flees, recoils. Ovid never says *Minos* takes the lock. He implies it, however, and then calls *Minos* 'most just' when he imposes laws on the sacked city and 'orders' the fleet to leave without *Scylla*. He also orders her not to 'touch' Crete:

May land and sea be blocked to you!
I'll not allow so vile a monster (*monstrum*)
to touch my world: Crete, cradle of *Jove*.

Minos benefits from the barbarous act he disowns:

When this most just law-giver (*iustissimus*
auter)
had imposed laws on his conquered enemies,
he ordered (*iussit*) his men to loose the hawsers
to drive the bronze-hulled ships on with the
oars.

The words 'order' and 'just' chime. Both have *ius*, 'law', in them. *Scylla* holds out her arms to *Minos* twice. Once to offer him something he takes; once reaching after him, as he rushes back to the world he won't let her, whom he calls *monstrum*, touch.

Stretching out her hands, furious with
streaming hair,
she shouted 'Where are you fleeing to,

leaving the author [author] of your success?
Deserted, where shall I go? Back to my
country?

It's in ruins. Even if it weren't it's closed to me
by my treachery. Should I approach my father?
I handed him to you... I'm banished from the
world

for Crete alone. Does my voice reach your ears?
or do the same winds that fill your sails
blow all my words to emptiness, ungrateful
king?

Yet Crete is true monster land: the country
of monster adultery and a monster child.
Minos calls it 'cradle of Jove' and 'my world'.
Jove is Minos' father, divine prototype of
the pattern to which Minos and Theseus,
Ariadne's lover and abductor, both belong:
the male who leaves the woman who opened
herself and her home to him; who is also the
guardian of law and justice. 'Justice' goes
with abandoning the woman who helped
you, as 'pious' Aeneas does in Virgil. Dido
does not accompany Aeneas to his new world
of Rome.

Scylla becomes Cretan by longing for the
place, clinging to Minos' boat. 'Deserted,
where shall I go? ... I'm banished from the
world for Crete alone.' Ovid makes her his
lead-in to Ariadne, later in the same book of
Metamorphoses. Minos' daughter will cling to
a Greek boat sailing from Crete, and wind
up *deserta*. Theseus treats her much as her
father treated Scylla.

Governed Crete, with its monsters, hypo-
crisies and rejections, is, as the male voice
pronounces it, 'mine'. But the island is re-
presented, in her monstrosity and hypo-
crisy, as female. The island amalgamates
male rule and female desire. The tokens of
female desire in Cretan contexts are mon-
strousness, rejection and betrayal. Political
betrayal for sexual needs on the woman's
side; sexual betrayal for political need on the
man's.

WHEN MEN write female laments,
do they explore how they would
feel, entered and then emptied,
without saying or realising this is what they
are doing? Do they refigure an abandon-
ing which every male child in the West must
enact, and alchemise guilt at having once
abandoned their mother to the grief they
think their departure entailed for her? When
a man leaves a woman he has loved, is he
re-enacting the experience on which his
adult self is built?

When a boy's voice breaks, when he be-
comes a man, he abandons his mother's way
of speaking and singing. Singing was an im-
portant aspect of mothering in most West-
ern societies until the advent of recorded
music. A man composing, for example, an
Ariadne lament, could be seen to be revoic-
ing, for a voice he once had and left, the pain
he imagines a woman felt when he left her—
pain on which he might feel his own man-
hood to be based.

You might think that one thing men got
from using a woman's voice as image of uni-
versal abandonment was a wonderful self-
image. A woman singing her desire glosses
the desired male. ('He'll be big and strong,
the man I love.') The woman's voice must
sing, above all, of missing him. The image
of woman abandoned depends on a man
who abandons, and he usually has the help
of technology, of a vehicle—a 'Knossian
boat', for instance. Ideally, the man has

a decent supra-female purpose too, such
as founding Rome, becoming king in Ath-
ens or governing Crete. Women don't build
symphonies or cities. Opera demonises Sem-
iramide, the queen who built the Babylon
gardens. (There is an unfinished painting
of her by Degas with blueprints, surveying
her site.) Dido's building project at Carth-
age is doomed: her city will be ploughed with
salt, and she herself, whom Venus makes
fall in love with Aeneas simply so she will
offer him suitable hospitality, ends on the
pyre. Male sexuality is political, architectural,
controlling; it is also potentially tragic,
anarchic, impulsive, unconsented. The men
who abandon Cretan women are sexual ad-
venturers and founders of civilisation.

These early Western myths of female
desire depend on men ordering the world.
Minos is both sexually promiscuous (in many
myths other than Scylla's) and the archetyp-
ical judge, author of the first Greek law code.
These men and their ships are 'birds on the
wing', like Bonnie Prince Charlie's boat escap-
ing to Skye, or Aristophanes' rooster. They
have important things to do. The ability to
enter and leave cities, islands, labyrinths or
women expresses male political power.

The Olympia Press produced a porno-
graphic *Odyssey* with women on every is-
land. The *Odyssey* was perfect for this, since
male sexual mobility has been summed up
for centuries by sailors. In 18th-century Brit-
ish pornography *limen*, 'harbour', meant 'vagi-
na'. Calypso, on whose island Homer's
readers first see Odysseus, means 'coverer'.
Odysseus is in a sexual paradise that nets
him back from his true home, his govern-
ment. The gods must free him for 'his world',
as they free Aeneas from Dido for Rome.
Men must free themselves from 'covering',
from the isolate place of women's desire,
and get away from Calypso or Circe to an-
other 'harbour'. The woman sometimes
travels some way on the boat before being
left, like Ariadne, or gets home and is later
dumped, like Medea. Or she stays at home
watching the sail disappear, like Dido.

In an essay on Greek perception of space,
the French scholar Jean-Pierre Vernant sug-
gests that Western culture has always di-
vided space by gender, so that interiority,
inner fixedness, is female: it is summed
up by Hestia, goddess of the hearth. Mobil-
ity is male, incarnated by Hermes, the lord
of messages and roads. This division flick-
ers through endless Western love scenes.
On the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet* or *West Side
Story*, for instance; or in Jane Austen.

There are not many love scenes in Greek
tragedy, but the most famous one supports
Vernant. In about 450 BC, Sophocles staged
an *Andromeda* (lost) which showed Andro-
meda tied up on stage. Perseus, winging his
way back on sandals borrowed from Her-
mes after killing the Gorgon, sees, falls in
love with and rescues her by killing the sea-
monster. Contemporary vase paintings of
the play show *Andromeda*, arms outstretch-
ed, totally still, available, vulnerable, fet-
tered, Perseus free to look at and rescue
her. Fettered woman, mobile man: this fifth-
century image reflects economic and social
reality in male-female relations in countless
societies. Renaissance paintings of Ariadne
put Theseus' sail on the horizon: its move-
ment counterpoints her prone position on
the beach. In Titian she is surrounded by

male movement, visited by a new male as the
old one goes: Dionysus, all motion, swirl
and leopards.

Woman is good, Ovid says, at hiding
desire in stillness and self-veiling. In the
Ariadne story, the woman helps the man by
tethering his thread to a fixed point outside
the labyrinth. Using this he can enter and
leave; as he will enter and leave her. Her
move away from home is made on his boat:
he immobilises her when he leaves her on
Naxos. She facilitates his mobility, then she's
left stranded on an island, a deserted coast.

This distinction underpins the irony of
the seducer's song in *Rigoletto*: 'La donna
è mobile/qual piume al vento.' Winds side
with men, not women. 'Does my voice reach
your ears?' Scylla shouts to Minos. 'Or do
the same winds that fill your sails/blow all
my words to emptiness?' Women are voices
on islands. Odysseus, finding Circe and Cal-
ypso on their islands, hears them singing
before he sees them. Female island voices
are dangerous, as the Sirens show, for un-
less you know how to handle them, they
keep you there. The man has to enter, en-
joy and leave; begin and end; like the Duke,
singer of that song, in *Rigoletto*.

Sophocles' use of mobility and stillness
must have been potent enough in his *Andro-
meda*, but Euripides' version thirty years later
contained antiquity's most powerful love
scene. Fragments survive of his *Andromeda*,
which opened with the girl already chain-
ed, waiting for the sea-monster. She is im-
mobile but her voice moves (in one of Eur-
ipides' innovative monodies) and is answer-
ed, brilliantly, by Echo in a cave behind her.

This is probably Echo's first appearance in
the abandoned woman trope, but the con-
nection was soon established and much re-
peated: Echo is one of Ariadne's compan-
ions on Naxos in Strauss's opera. Echo re-
minds listeners that a woman on stage can be
an echo-chamber to the male imagination,
to male ideas of longing, solitude, internal
emptiness. Echo could have had any story but
Greek imagination chose to mythologise her
as a woman forever voicing unfulfillable de-
sire for a man.

Greek paintings of Euripides' *Andromeda*
show Perseus arriving with Gorgon-killing
equipment (head in a bag, sickle in hand,
winged cap), and falling in love with Andro-
meda. They mark the love by personifica-
tions. Either of *ixus*, the Greek love-charm in
which a bird was tied, beak and wings, to a
wheel and spun (which itself combines feath-
ered mobility fettered, whirled into movement
by that prime icon of male technology, the
wheel), or of *erotes*, flying humanoid icons of
desire. They personify his desire for her as
he sees her immobile.

Perseus thinks she's a statue:

What is this cliff I see?
A cliff washed round by sea-foam.
There's the image of a girl
carved from the very rock,
sculpture of an expert hand.


She seems an image, yet her musical mobil-
ity began the opera. It is as if physical im-
mobility were a condition of musical mobil-
ity, as if female figures sing most 'mov-
ingly' of pain when unable to move, when
the only movement left to them is their

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voice. Poulenc's *La Voix humaine*, in the end, deprives its solo female voice even of this.

IF FEMALE ABANDONMENT does not turn to grief it turns, like Scylla's, to rage. Medea's story begins in a similar way to Ariadne's. In Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, Jason seduces Medea by telling her how Ariadne helped Theseus. In Racine, when Ariadne's sister Phèdre learns that Hippolyte loves someone else, she is suffused with Medea-like 'jalouse rage'. She wants revenge, and calls on the destructive exemplars of male power in her ancestry, those sexual adventurers-cum-upholders of justice, Minos and Zeus.

Rage and man-killing revenge have almost as much musical mileage in them as lament. Opera asks women to raise their voices, over large orchestras, in rage and pain. The woman's voice, hurt by brutality within convention, can be vehicle as well as sign of that brutality. Sopranos can be heard above an orchestra more easily than any other voice. But male literary tradition interacts fruitfully with acoustics. In the male imagination, women are good for signifying and expressing pain or rage.

From Greek tragedy onwards the pain is specifically that of attachment. The Nurse in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, suffering for Phaedra, says that

We ought to be bound to each other
by medium-strength ties,
not to the soul's marrow, the extreme edge.
Our loves should be easily loosed from our
mind,
easy to push off, easy to tighten.

Attachment, according to tradition, fetters the woman as securely as Andromeda's father chained her to the rock; and most tragic opera deals with the implications of immobility and fettering. In *Antigone*, Creon's wife kills herself when she hears her son is dead. In *Oedipus Rex*, before killing herself, Jocasta tries for Oedipus' sake to stop him seeing what she's already seen:

For the gods' sake, Oedipus,
don't go on with this search
if you care for your own life.
Enough that I'm suffering.

Few men in Greek tragedy try to stop someone else suffering or say anything quite like 'Enough that I'm suffering.' In the male tragic tradition, those who try to earth pain and limit it to themselves are mostly women: hurt because they are 'attached'.

A song attributed to the one really famous Greek woman poet sums up the way the female voice, when it speaks out ('But I say'), is expected to favour attachment:

Some say the loveliest thing
on black earth is a cavalry squad,
others an infantry troop,
others a naval fleet. But I say
it's whatever a person loves.

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Male scholars preserved this fragment of Sappho. They decided what survived. Sappho's work plays into the horizon of male expectations. Women's voices were expected to express a bias towards the singular, to domestic attachment as against public, political, regimented male values serviced by the technology of mobility. The army, navy, barrack-room, gambling game (*Guis and Dolls*), crime (*Carousel*) and politics.

Verdi and Mozart, like Shakespeare, put pain caused by attachment to others at the heart of the female inwardness they voice so convincingly. Some of the world's best music was written by men imagining the pain women feel because of them. When women sang these parts, men directed them, told them how to do it. Verdi created the role of Desdemona for Romilda Pantaleoni, but in one letter he calls her voice 'a bit too harsh'. His fictional Desdemona is 'unconscious of her own ego, made to suffer for others'. He tells the real woman how to portray the fictional one, and refers to Antigone, who (as he read her) suffered for others.

In *Mozart the Dramatist*, Brigid Brophy describes opera as the exploitation of female pain, and Mozart, too, finds women his best vehicle for grief. It is true that Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* embodies other-related attachment and its pain, but although he has some lovely songs they often seem to be like the least passionate parts of a passionate opera. The music of *Rigoletto* searching for Gilda in the Duke's palace and laughed at by courtiers who know where she is, or finding her dying body in the sack, is heart-rending, almost unbearable. But is he moving because of his own feeling rather than his feelings for her? She dies, like Alcestis, for her lover.

THE HEART of *The Marriage of Figaro* is the Countess's pain, expressed in her central aria 'Dove Sono'. Deserted and spied on, trapped in the double-bind of the Count's jealousy and infidelity, she must borrow her servant's clothes to meet her own husband as a lover. At this point, other people's lives (with the exception of the Count's) are sorted out. Figaro's parentage and his parents' marriage make his secure. Barbarina is taking care of Cherubino. They all echo ('Io! Io!') Susanna's rapturous cry: 'Who's as happy as me?' But the Countess is alone. In recitative she wonders why her servant Susanna has not come. She is worried about what she's doing, but what's wrong with changing clothes with Susanna? How 'low' her 'cruel consort' has brought her. He loved, then ignored, now betrays her, wants sex with her servant. The final phrase of recitative stresses her humiliating dependence on that very servant, whose sexual initiation is the opera's ostensible subject, whose marriage bed is measured in the opening scene.

The soprano's opening tune is a gilded cage, pinning the voice to the note on which it begins: C, Doh in Sol-fa, which asks, 'Dove?' 'Where?' Her key-word and keynote. Where should she go in melody, act or feeling? From the orchestra the woodwind answer: up. She follows their lead once but refuses the second time, avoiding their lead to top G and descending briefly instead before rising to top F and then swinging back to her original Doh.

In analytic terms, it does not mean anything that she goes down after the initial phrase. Technically, she goes down so she can launch the florid stuff in the same tonality. But if you listen from the point of view of where things are in her voice, you get a different picture: a sense of imprisonment, a voice that cannot escape its starting-note.

When she repeats her opening melody again the path up to F is more tremulous: her husband's lips lie ('labbro menzogner'). But verbal repetition leads her formally back to Doh. The rise to top G is soon suggested again by the woodwind. It is a formally conventional escape route, a note and a tonality above her captivity, a window to beyond. But she will not dare it. The suggestion of G provokes her, verbally, to a new question, 'perche?' and, musically, into pointing out that the orchestra's key can modulate to minor. Its way of looking and hearing may also lead to sorrow. She turns the offer of G major to G minor, by bringing in G minor's minor third, B flat. In reply, the orchestra shifts her tonality, C, to the minor. Now for the first time she touches the top G it asked for, but only in a semi-quaver, then drops to low F for 'tutto si cangio', 'all so changed'. 'Change' can mean bad to good as well as good to bad. As she goes down, the harmony suggests that she (or the music) can 'change' minor to major, wave away the darkness. On the first syllable of 'cangio' the orchestra introduces the new major key of B flat. It holds the change with the triad of B flat major. But she, and it, cannot stay there.

Working through the conventional, formal imperative of returning to the tonic, Mozart hints that the Countess cannot forget the Doh-'Dove?', the note of entrapment where she began. When she repeats 'per me tutto si cangio' the orchestral response uses B flat again. The second half of the bar that brings her in starts on low G, the dominant, whose key it offered her, whose top note they invited her to rise to. But its upper notes make this G minor: the key the Countess earlier used.

It was usual to begin in the same key you ended in and to have a middle section which escaped into the dominant. There is a case for saying that in this aria at least (especially in this opera, with its images of culture-specific hierarchy and convention, where letters of sexual intrigue are pricked by pins at a public celebration of the ending of droit du seigneur intrigue, and where nothing is said openly about what the man at the top gets up to) Mozart is using this musical convention to suggest personal entrapment within social convention.

The orchestra accompanies the Countess in a series of small suggestions for reharmonising her line, as if trying to re-settle her in a major key, ending up (at 'cangio' again) with an enticing major triad of D. She has top D, and obeys the orchestral cue, as in the plot she obeys cues from Susanna and Figaro. Her D on the last syllable of 'cangio' becomes the dominant, the fifth, to their G major: the key the orchestra has been suggesting to her. It has pulled her into the dominant at last.

In this mode of taking suggestions, she does what it has been asking and soars up to top G, displaying the full power of her voice for a controlled first half of a new word, 'memoria'. A new word, not a new

thought. 'Memoria' was behind her opening question: 'Dove sono i bei momenti?' 'Where have the good times gone?' She is talking about the memory of 'good', not good itself. After several key changes she ends her statement that she cannot 'trapassare', 'go beyond', almost self-refutingly in the key it has offered all along, G major, but this is a false ending, incomplete. One pause, and she reverts to 'Dove' on her Doh. All the 'wheres' and key changes have brought her back, as the audience's ears expect, to her beginning.

The orchestra and the Countess now repeat the opening of the aria, with a difference. Mozart uses the convention that the voice will sing its note unchanged, but reharmonises that note, making it express something new, which contains within it all she has thought and sung in the aria so far. There is a sadder, softer tonality on the second half of 'Dove?' with the orchestra in D minor. The opening is repeated according to convention up to the mouvementé passage ('labbro menzogner') where she breaks off on the brink, on top E.

In the faster passage the noun is not 'memoria' but 'costanza': not backward but forward-looking. But what will 'costanza' consist in? 'Languire amando ognor'. Languishing in love, for ever. Spelling this out tips her finally into what was hinted at earlier, that which is always present within the tonic, the minor within the tonic itself. In this case, C minor.

This is an unusual move. Mozart works through the conventional; his surprises express what is latent. The Countess accepts the E flat, C minor's signature, the sadness of her constancy. The orchestra reminds her of another possibility: again, G major, the escape to the dominant they have suggested all along. The possibility encourages her, not to accept G major, but to press on with her own view of things in the tonality she started from: C major. She shakes off E flat, staking her faith and identity ('mi') on repeated E natural. Everything is suddenly an excited, resolute C major. She's leading up to a new noun to mirror 'costanza': 'speranza'. From memory through constancy to hope. Her own line flows now, flexibly and strong, leading up, down and up on a rising fourth for 'speranza'.

As if encouraged by the sound she generates, she repeats her magical E naturals, but changing their words, self-referentially, to 'cangiar': again Mozart reharmonises a note in an already heard melody. He gives the orchestra B flat. So far, B flat has suggested G minor and C minor, the minors of dominant and tonic, shadow versions of the keys preferred by orchestra and soprano. But this B flat darkens the tonic C towards the subdominant F, an entirely new key and a far less straightforward accompaniment to those optimistic repeated Es. The orchestra's reharmonisation seems to question these optimistic Es and the Countess's 'speranza'. The phrase on which we first heard those Es was 'perhaps I have a hope.' Now the same musical phrase is accompanied by the words, 'of changing an ungrateful heart'. In reharmonising the Es the orchestra, a pragmatic servant, is being realistic - like Figaro and Susanna. This hope will end in tears: signalled here by B flat. But the Countess brushes darkness aside, soars up

to the G it always asked of her. The orchestra gives her tranquil quavers in C major. Is this sympathy, or is it mockingly in control of her tonality just as the servants are in control in the plot? Her 'costanza' and 'speranza' end in the tonic, the major key of her opening question.

So where has 'Dove?' led? Has the emotional journey of her song truly 'changed' that 'ingrato cor', and returned her secure to Doh, still in the major? The orchestra now seems sympathetic to her project: there are no flats, no hint of minor, while she works her thought calmly round her Doh, ending, as always, on C. Together she and they repeat this vision of calm control achieved through 'costanza'.

But darkness closes in second time round. She has C's minor third, E flat, on the words that upset things last time: 'nel languire amando ognor', but she wrests her thought out of the minor, rises in a slur to E natural, her previous note of optimism. Her calm flowing line ends in her original C major. Calm, the absence of change, is part of the Countess's predicament. Could Mozart be ironising that? The Countess does not have the Doh at the end of this phrase: her orchestral servant has it instead. Her phrase ends incompletely: on the top of the triad, the G it always offered her, but in her tonic key of C. There is a sense of dejection which denies the hopeful words about changing ungrateful hearts. Here the music seems to work against rather than with the text, challenging the overt message.

The Countess, however, rises again twice, on both occasions on the word 'portasse', 'perhaps' things will get better. These moves are encouraged by the orchestra. Again, remembering the concepts and contracts of service highlighted in the opera, you could ask here whether her orchestral servant is mirroring her optimism or mocking it. Either way, she rises up again on 'speranza'. The orchestra echoes her again. Still bolder, she soars up further to top A, a tone above the escape note it offered. She sustains this note, held back so long, for more than a bar. But she's chosen 'cangiar', the darkness word, for her moment of light, and comes down chromatically, touching Doh and then rising, ladder up, to her hope-and-escape note, A, again holding it for more than a bar. These As are her longest notes in the piece. But she falls away again, down to the cage-key, Doh: first on the middle syllable of 'ingrato', then on 'cor'.

This 'cor' answers her 'Dove?' Its note is her trap, her marriage. Her end is her beginning. 'Change', modulation, happens only circumscribedly, within her formal journey from 'where' to 'ungrateful heart'. She pins her hope to 'change', sinking to lower G, and rising to upper G, beating her wings round the cage-note of C. But the top note is no longer 'cangiar'. Now the even worse 'ingrato' rises above it. These are the two words that win out, repeated, in the end. 'Ingrato cor'. Not 'change'.

The Count with his 'ingrato cor' will head into the dark ('You don't need a candle') with the woman he thinks is Susanna. He praises her soft hand. The Countess and the real Susanna comment, 'Blind bias deludes his reason,' for this is his own wife's hand, which he knows as well as his own. When he thinks the Countess has a lover, every-

one asks him ('Perdono!') to pardon her. Rhythmically and morally isolated, he refuses, taking only one syllable of what they offer. 'No!' he answers. 'No! No! No! No! No!' When he realises that the woman with a lover really was Susanna (whom he thought he'd been making love to); when he understands who he was with, the Countess asks his pardon for that illusory wife. Her words at this point, 'perdono otterro', soften and cover his earlier 'no'. A few bars later, he's asking 'perdono' for himself. The Countess saves him: 'Più docile sono e dico di sì'.

The only change the Countess produces in the Count is a verbal one. From 'No!' to 'perdono': adding to 'no' the two syllables 'perdo' with their tang in Italian of loss and treachery. She ends 'più docile'. There will always be imbalance here. Her 'hope' lies in temporary victories, like her temporary triumph in retaining C major in the aria, in 'constancy' to one tonality, one love. In the aria the question 'Dove?' takes her only to 'ingrato cor'. The tune incarnates her captivity inside the Count's desire and his projection of his own infidelities. In Beaumarchais, the source, she is unfaithful. Da Ponte and Mozart deny it.

A director can make the Count's 'perdono' at the end a real change of heart, but that plays against the text, against the spirit of the whole. The whole thing, outward calm and inward pain, hope despite the minor modulations, will recur. Despite all the rules and conventions of form, Mozart did not have to make the Countess return to Doh with quite the frequency he does. He is suggesting passion and resignation, captivity and inner grief, in the whole shape of the aria she sings; his music locks her voice within the castle-like security of the most basic major key.

The song-shape, a snake with its tail in its mouth, tours the emotionally pinned position identified in Western drama first by Euripides' Medea. A man can look outside; a woman can only 'look to' her husband's cor (in Da Ponte) or psuche (in Euripides):

If a woman works well at being married,
if her husband doesn't resent his yoke,
co-habiting: then that's a life worth envying.
If not, the only help is death.
The man, when he can't bear things
as they are indoors, goes out.
Eases his heart. Sees a friend. Finds company.
But we must look to one soul only - his.

In contemporary performances, Mozart's singer would have ornamented his line, but only within a secure set of conventions: the modulations and shape, the formal message - 'costanza' to Doh, and to her husband's heart - are Mozart's. This opera uses publicity and convention to trap individuals and frustrate their desires. All a singer can really do with the Countess's entrapment is celebrate the rules that convention uses to express pain by covering it up.

Many formal and sexual relationships underlie the relation of music and words, vocal line and voice, in opera. On my reading, melody and harmony contradict the Countess's hope for change. You might argue that the authority of musical performance tilts the balance of power towards the singer. Still, Mozart makes her first deny, then accept the orchestra's minor modulations. How convincing is the denial on which she ends?

'DOVE SONO' displays contained abandonment, like Claribel's song, though voice and words do try, unlike Claribel's, to escape hurt. Even Euripidean 'Cretan monody' can express this emotion as well as self-abandonment. Euripides shows the delirious Phaedra taking her imagination where her body longs to be, to the wild places where the man she longs for exercises his:

May I drink deep of clear waters ...
and lie on the soft-cut grass ...

But Euripides also shows her trying, when not delirious, to contain desire. In the surviving Hippolytus, Phaedra's aim is to conceal her passion:

When eros wounded me
I thought how best to bear myself
and hide the pain in silence.

Both types of song - one displaying self-abandonment to feeling, and the other the abandonment whose expression contains that feeling - were male creations in whose formation Euripides led the way. Both became staples of male opera. In 'Dove Sono' Mozart uses sensual grammar which Western composers had used since at least the Renaissance, but which was pioneered, if we can trust Frogs, by Euripides. Male composers use the musical possibilities of the day (in Europe, melodic shape and harmony, in ancient Greece, pitch, metre and response) and socio-cultural resonances to create a specific male sound for what a woman does with sexual grief.

'Cretan monodies' isolate a female character on stage. Putting Echo herself there, as Euripides does for Andromeda, as Strauss does for Ariadne, spells out the aim: to locate the woman in a speaking silence, a place where she cannot look to or hear anyone but herself. The Cretan monody gives sexual grief voice and body in front of the silence and immobility of the audience.

The multiple echoes of abandonment (of home for a man, to a man, by a man, of self to passion, of self and voice to song) have been a basic operatic tool for men to use - a way of thinking, primarily, about themselves. Male dramatists and composers could explore how they would feel, desiring, entered, left; could form their own imaginings of emptiness and isolation, of being out of sexual and musical control. They could use their own experience of desire, rejection and loss, without saying this was what they were doing, and project them into an alien body, throat and sensibility.

From this comes the intense erotic energy of opera, expressed in its frequent cross-gendering: a male-female account of desire and loss is tucked into a story which is often focused on a woman's experience, feelings and voice, but is scripted, composed for, choreographed, designed, financially backed and conventionally directed until now by men.

'Women' on the tragic and operatic stage stand for women, of course. But they also stand for men. Strauss's Composer (a 'trouser role', a male character sung by a woman) says that Ariadne stands for 'human solitude'. Poulenc's woman hanging on to her lover's last lies on the phone is 'the' human voice as male Western culture decided, two millennia ago, to represent it. □



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