The Voice of the Other: The Influence of Capitalism on The Representation of Gender and Race in Western Classical Music

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THE VOICE OF THE OTHER: 
THE INFLUENCE OF CAPITALISM ON THE REPRESENTATION OF 
GENDER AND RACE IN WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC 

A Thesis Presented 
by 
MARIE COMUZZO 

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 

MASTER OF MUSIC 
May 2021 

Department of Music and Dance
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I dedicate this thesis to Billa, Hannah and Zenobia.
ABSTRACT

THE VOICE OF THE OTHER:
THE INFLUENCE OF CAPITALISM ON THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER
AND RACE IN WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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This thesis argues that in order to understand the non-representation of women and BIPOC in the Western musical canon, the analysis of their cultural musical production and reception must start in early modern period, a time heavily influenced by the establishment of capitalism. Intertwining political feminist studies, critical race theory and musicology critique, I argue that the witch hunts and the inhumane colonial practices in Africa and the America (fundamental to establish capitalism as a global system), had an important role in shaping Western musical culture as homogeneous and monolithic. Thus, I first trace the change in female customs in the early modern period and show how poetry and then music reflected the newly imposed norm of chastity presenting as case study “I’ mi son giovinetta.” Here I discuss the importance of il concerto delle dame in Italy, their vital role in conserving women’s musical excellence as well as the restriction imposed on their lives based solely on their gender. Race and gender biases are protagonist of the following chapter, where I present a case study on Die Zauberflöte as mirror of the societal changes happening at the same time in Europe. Intersecting race, gender and class I demonstrate
the multiple ways in which this opera reiterates the victory of capitalistic patriarchy over
the previous way of organizing life. In the last chapter, I discuss the various conflicting
ideas that scholars brought forth regarding the Western canon formation. I argue that the
gendered and racist pseudo-scientific ideologies that relegated women and BIPOC to their
bodies (in connection to capitalist’s exploitation of “free labor”), were reaffirmed by
scholars in the following centuries. These ideologies fed into the elevation of “absolute
music” as the manifestation of the (white, male) intellectual genius, and contributed to
forging musical institution that today continue to uphold sexists and racist values.
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INTRODUCTION

**Initial Thoughts on Intersectionality**¹

This thesis argues that an assessment of the history of women’s participation in Western classical music must begin with an analysis of the changing social and economic conditions affecting women’s role and cultural contribution during the time this musical tradition was beginning to coalesce. My thesis has developed from a desire to understand the absence of women from the European Western musical canon, and as I began my research it quickly became clear that I needed to start much earlier, with a historical analysis of some of the ways early modern capitalism relied on the dehumanization of women. In examining some of the foundational texts of feminist musicology, I did not find any references to the correlation between capitalism and gender inequality in music. Curiosity and exuberant indignation led me to seek guidance by studying interventions from other fields, such as sociology, political science, feminist studies and critical race theory. I immersed myself in those fields, hoping to understand the economic and political maneuvers that caused the multilayered and ongoing disenfranchisement of women in musical production and systems of value. The result is a weaving of historic analysis from different fields that come together here, to give voice to a multifaceted analysis of women’s absence from the European Western musical canon.

¹ The term was coined by Black feminist lawyer and scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 to provide an analytical framework that considers how discrimination and privilege are related to specific forms of social and political identity, taking in account race, gender, class, religion, physical appearance, disability, etc. For the first article that uses this theory see: Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139-166.
I first examine the prehistory of the musical canon, looking at some of the cultural factors that contributed to women’s later exclusion from consideration as “geniuses;” then I offer a critique of canonical feminist musicology in order to reveal some lacunae in the field; and finally, I suggest ideas for a new kind of music criticism.

All of this requires a lengthy focus on the changes that emerging capitalism wrought on the social structure in Europe and consequentially in its colonies. As numerous critics of capitalism have shown, the system is built on the backs of multiple oppressed populations, whose disenfranchisement takes different forms and serves different ideological roles in upholding the capitalist hierarchy. Thus, the crushing of women’s rights that took place alongside the rise of modern capitalism is also entangled with – and complicated by – the contemporary enslavement and dehumanization of people in European colonies.

In what follows, I lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the radical changes in women’s rights that accompanied the rise of modern capitalism.² I pursue my arguments not only by presenting historical evidence, but also by offering examples of musical settings and narratives reinforcing those various historical changes. Specifically, I investigate the many ways in which society developed to favor men in building a musical culture that explicitly excludes women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) from being considered great composers.³ In fact, I seek to demonstrate how


³ A few exemptions are worth noting, for example women opera singers and the women who ran the great salons of the nineteenth century did contribute to shaping musical life; but the roles women generally were allowed to play were not roles considered to be within the realm of creative genius. It is this exclusion of
patriarchal values (such as meritocracy) set up women and BIPOC for failure and reinforced the gendered and racial gap already established through capitalism.

These points will be explored in the first part of the thesis – a literature review – which addresses the foundational texts of feminist musicology and is then complicated by more recent works where capitalism, colonialism and the disciplining of the female body take the center stage.

**Literature Review**

The 1980s and 1990s represented a time of important change for the field of musicology as scholars began questioning many previously used methodologies of research, making room for a completely different way of pursuing musicological work. It is in these years – almost three decades after the American feminist movement became mainstream – that feminism entered the field of musicology and asked for a new approach, one bringing issues such as gender inequality, sexuality, desire, violence, misogyny, and the construction of femininity into the understanding of music. These new themes, previously overlooked and even viewed by some as taboo, enabled feminist scholars to offer thought-provoking critiques in articulating some of the issues women faced within society.

Before examining feminist musicology per se, I discuss some important earlier work by Joseph Kerman and Rose Subotnik, whose critiques were fundamental in opening the field to the kind of criticism that the New Musicology brought forward. Then, I analyze

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the work of Jane Bowers, Eugene Gates, Susan McClary, Marcia Citron and Paula Higgins to discuss the then-new study of gender within the field. In so doing, I will point to a major lacuna in the work of the early feminist musicologists, namely a lack of engagement with race and capitalism.

Following, I introduce the critiques of capitalism brought forward by Silvia Federici and Timothy Taylor. Federici re-reads Marx’s history of the transition to capitalism through the lens of gender, demonstrating some of the ways that Marx’s lack of serious engagement with women’s experience leads to several blind spots in his historical method. Timothy Taylor undertakes an analysis of capitalism with similar historical breadth, using music – specifically, the twinned development of opera and the system of tonality – as a case study for understanding some of the cultural changes the transition to capitalism wrought on early modern European culture.

Finally, I discuss the marginalization of the body and the gendered rhetoric around female musical education, using the work of Anna Bull and Ruth Solie. They describe the instrumentalization of music education for purposes beyond mere musical integrity, namely the relegation of women to their pianos. These interventions shine yet another light on women’s relentless exclusion from the “higher planes” of authentic musical creation.

**Critiques of Traditional Musicology**

In the 1980s Rose Subotnik and Joseph Kerman expressed a certain degree of dissatisfaction with the normative way of conducting musicological research. In *Developing Variations* (1991), Subotnik analyzes the different methodologies of musicological research that were then predominant in the field of Anglo-American
musicology, and explains how these methods, which favored empirical and material research over interpretation, do not allow any moral opinion and essentially preclude engagement with any music outside the Western musical canon. This critique is in response to the negative reception of her philosophical approach to music analysis and specifically of her use of the political work of Adorno.4

Similarly, in “How we Got into Analysis, and How to Get out,” (1980) Joseph Kerman criticizes musicologists for their reliance on so-called objective analytical methodologies that leave no room for the consideration of value or aesthetics.5 He argues that supposedly “objective” analysis is not based on science so much as on ideologies that first crystallized in the nineteenth century in order to elevate the German musical tradition.6 This “objective” methodology, Kerman clarifies, prevents musicologists from engaging with what he calls “criticism” (as opposed to mere “analysis”).

In this regard, Subotnik explains, music analysis was initially concerned almost exclusively with judging and determining the “value” of a piece of music through “universal reason.”7 Thanks to the destabilizing effects of the revolutions – both political and philosophical – that shook European life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reason itself became a matter of inquiry, and the idea of judging universal value

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4 Subotnik explains that social political critiques, such as Adorno’s, were seen as inadequate – even inappropriate – when engaging with serious scholarship. Rose Subotnik, Developing Variations (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 10.
6 Kerman also discusses how analysis evolved out of the idea of organicism, namely the ideology that each single part of the piece is a fundamental component of a much larger musical structure which unfolds in its greatness over time. This structuration of “pure” music not coincidentally developed along with the theorization of evolution and became the essential principle that elevated German musical tradition as the ultimate and most evolved one (see chapter three for a deep analysis of German musical imperialism).
7 Scholars and literates believed that art could be understood in its entirety (as long as part of the Western tradition) through a “universal reason,” which was a real standard for determining the validity and truth of a particular object of research. Subotnik, Developing Variations, 88-97.
became a fraught one. This intellectual change, along with the rise of empirical research, challenged and dismantled the Western abstract belief in universal certainty. Rather, a healthy skeptical attitude towards universal principles was established, which, Subotnik clarifies, led to the development of Positivism.\(^8\) This new methodology of research was, and still is, characterized “by a reduction of knowledge to the empirical sphere, keeping its alliance to an ideal of absolute scientific certainty.”\(^9\) These historical factors led musicologists to dismiss acts of interpretation or ‘reading-into’ music – what Kerman calls “criticism” – as insignificant.

In “A Few Canonic Variations,” (1983) Kerman anticipates Subotnik’s critique of American musicologists’ scholarship, especially concerning their dedication to reconstructing authentic fixed editions of works by great composers. Subotnik points out that whereas those editions were intended to be the foundation for a broader kind of intellectual work, this never seemed to actually happen. Kerman criticizes these editions themselves, explaining that musical scores were never sacrosanct in the past (as editions imply) but rather were often rescored and recomposed, a fact that reveals a historical fluidity largely lost today. He points out that trying to use musical analysis to determine a fixed score does not necessarily offer the objective authenticity so sought after by those scholars.\(^{10}\)

Subotnik and Kerman are strong voices within musicology and their writing influenced and shaped the field towards a more inclusive and open way of creating

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\(^8\) The mainstream American musicology, Subotnik points out, was ruled by an uncritical and outmoded notion of science, grounded in Enlightenment ideologies of “absolutely verifiable laws” and equally dogmatic positivistic references to empirical facts.

\(^9\) Subotnik, “Musicology and Criticism,” in Developing Variations, 89-90.

scholarly work, laying the groundwork for a completely different kind of criticism that could expand to include historically and socially informed perspectives. Their innovative work opened up the field to feminist musicology, which through the work of many scholars, developed a new framework for writing and thinking about music.

**Feminist Musicology**

Just as the third wave of American feminism was taking ground, establishing itself by asking questions about how sexual differences are created and circulated in societies, how bodies are trained to fit in certain normative boundaries and how societal context creates specific categorization of gendered norms, musicology began opening up to feminist critique. At the cusp between the 1980s and 1990s, musicological scholars started interrogating themselves and the overall field by asking questions about the absence of women’s music from their curricula; in the following years this evolved into a groundbreaking new field within musicology.

In a 1990 article, “Feminist Scholarship and The Field of Musicology: II,” Jane Bowers (coeditor of *Women Making Music*) offered important directions for feminist scholarship within the field of musicology. She suggests that adding a body of work on women’s music is not satisfactory when it comes to developing a feminist critique; rather, there is a need, through the aid of other fields, to create new methodologies of research that include women and their music as subjects. Bowers also explains how feminist criticism

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should be analyzing music to determine how the construct of gender relates to the composer both in their compositional process and in relation to their own gender.

She calls for particular attention to the ways musical writing is gendered, especially in terms of style, themes, genres and structures. This, she points out, derives from the necessity of understanding women’s complex social, historical, psychological and political influence in their writing. She explains how connections could and should be drawn between women’s compositional techniques and their societal role. Bowers also invites us to look at feminist music – that is, she says, music that is not just written by women but rather specifically composed to convey women’s condition in society. In addition, she suggests bringing critical attention to compositions at the other end of the ideological spectrum (such as works that attack women or deliberately present women in an unfavorable light), to understand the ways in which female sexuality is exploited by the consumerism of the entertainment industry.\textsuperscript{12} One of the ways we might find this new direction, she states, is by engaging with work from different fields already doing this kind of research, namely anthropology, ethnomusicology, sociology and history.\textsuperscript{13}

In the 1990s, following Bowers’ work, a large body of feminist musicological scholarship emerged, characterized by a new approach to music analysis that is intertwined with societal and historical critique.\textsuperscript{14} The work of Susan McClary, for example, articulates a profound exploration of the gender construct in music, the rhetoric of misogynistic

\textsuperscript{12}Bowers, “Feminist Scholarship,” 4.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 5-12.
\textsuperscript{14} For additional reading see: Ruth A. Solie, Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). This collection of essays explores the condition of women, the construction of femininity of music and interrogates differences. Ruth Solie seeks to understand whether and under what circumstances human differences are to be taken seriously. In her introduction, Solie discusses both the risk of creating Others, and thereby a hierarchic of “normality;” or the risk of ignoring the differences which can result in a dominant and masculine norm.
violence within opera, and the use of narratives to explain instrumental music. In the introduction of *Feminine Endings* (1991), McClary shares how studies on women were generally discouraged when she was in graduate school, and notes that when such studies were brought out, they were often received with scorn; her work for this book, she confesses, was mostly done in isolation from others. This began to change in 1998-99 when the American Musicological Society asked for and accepted several papers of feminist critique, to be presented at its annual conference. This conference enabled scholars to get to know each other’s work and become familiar with a whole body of scholarship fueled by a similar purpose.

**Gendering Composers**

Among the different directions that Bowers suggests for feminist musicological criticism, she offers a controversial idea, namely that examining a composition through the lens of gender theory might enable the scholar to determine the gender of the composer just by listening to their music. By contrast, in “The Female Voice: Sexual Aesthetics Revisited” (1988) and “Why Have There Been No Great Women Composers? Psychological Theories, Past and Present” (1994) Eugene Gates explains why determining the gender of the composer just by listening is not possible.

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16 Two sessions of the conference were specifically designed to discuss feminist issues, one organized by Jane M. Bowers and the other by Susan Cook. In addition, many feminist papers written by scholars such as Susanne Cusick, Linda Austern, and Marcia Citron were presented throughout the conference. See also the earlier conference report in 1991 by Ruth Solie and Gary Tomlinson “Women’s Studies,” the first major conference devoted to feminist theory and music at the University of Minnesota.
Gates opens the first of these articles by acknowledging the misleading and misogynistic ideologies concerning women’s inability to create art, which were perpetuated for the entirety of the nineteenth century and beyond. This anti-woman orientation, he explains, was expressed through the continuous belittling of women’s work, constructed by philosophers, critics and historians.\textsuperscript{18} Gates notes that whereas the achievements of women were mostly excluded from the historical record, feminist literary scholars and musicologists reversed this tendency by reclaiming a whole body of cultural heritage previously disregarded.\textsuperscript{19}

Gates continues by criticizing a recurring theme that he saw emerging in feminist scholarship, namely the belief that women’s writing, art, and music is intrinsically different because of their gender.\textsuperscript{20} This line of thought implies that all investigation of art has therefore to be thoroughly gendered, in other words that the sex of the artist must be taken into account at every level of analysis. He writes, “music is the most abstract and autonomous of the arts” yet “some feminist critics claim that the music of women composers is recognizably different from that of their male counterparts.” This appears to embody a conflict: on the one hand music is supposedly transcendental and beyond such material specificities as gender and the body, which would theoretically prevent the listener or scholar from detecting the gender of the composer just from listening to their music; on

\textsuperscript{19} Many scholars have dedicated their lives to retrieving works of women lost in time. Here are some of the anthologies that offer a vast body of work by women. Sofie Drinker’s book is somewhat controversial because written from the prospective of a historian, rather than a musicologist, but offers many insights on women’s role in musical culture across the globe. Sophie H. Drinker, \textit{Music and Women: The Story of Women in Their Relation to Music} (New York: Coward-McCann, 1948). For more recent work on women’s music see: Karin Pendle and Melinda Boyd, \textit{Women in Music: A Research and Information Guide} (New York: Routledge, 2010); Julie C. Dunbar, \textit{Women, Music, Culture: An Introduction} (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).
\textsuperscript{20} Gates, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Composers?”, 27-29.
the other hand, by reconsidering this idealization of “absolute” music, some feminist musicologists exerted their critique from the opposite standpoint, advancing the idea that music cannot transcend the body and therefore contains in its expression the gender of the composer.\textsuperscript{21}

Subsequently, Gates explains that since musical compositions are created solely from musical components, such as melody, rhythm, harmony, etc. it would be necessary to empirically prove the different ways in which female and male composers combine these elements, which he asserts to be impossible. To support his argument, he offers two examples: first he talks about the Mendelssohns; notoriously both Fanny and Felix were prolific composers, but due to sexism her father forbade Fanny to publish music under her own name. Felix, in an attempt to encourage her and show his support of her music, published some of Fanny’s songs under his name. These always received deep praise from critics, who (unknowingly) often selected Fanny’s works out of Felix’s collections and praised them as the most beautiful. Gates argues that if the ear alone can discern that a piece of music was written by a woman, these chauvinistic critics would certainly not have picked those pieces as the superior ones. Second, Gates explains how Clara J. Wieck and Robert Schumann composed and published a collection of twelve songs, some of which written by Clara and others by Robert, without attributing authorship for each song. This omission caused a great confusion among contemporary critics, who found themselves unable to determine which pieces were written by Clara and which ones by Robert.\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, Gates explains “theories that reinforce the notion of biologically determined sex differences in cognitive abilities” end up reinforcing the ostracization of

\textsuperscript{21} Gates, “The Female Voice,” 63. See also: Battersby, \textit{Gender and Genius}, 33-34.
\textsuperscript{22} Gates, The Female Voice,” 63-67.
women as the “other.” He shows, for example, how critics fabricated their own idea of “feminine” music, imposing upon women the need to compose delicate, graceful and melodic music, usually in the form of songs or piano pieces, meanwhile categorizing operas and symphonies as “masculine music.” Any argument – even an ostensibly feminist one – that reiterates the notion that women compose differently from men and that this difference is somehow biological, ends up lending credence to sexist arguments that women should not compose in certain genres that are less receptive to that supposedly innate style. Indeed, such arguments imposed further limitations on women, he writes, as female composers were often accused, for example, of aspiring to virility when engaging with “masculine” music and thereby betraying their own gender.  

I have lingered at length on Eugene Gates’s work because it dismantles very thoughtfully some ideas that were, to varying degrees, taken as givens by early feminist musicologists. In the following section I discuss yet another perspective on the same issues, here presented through the work of Marcia Citron in *Gender and the Musical Canon* (1993) and “Feminist Approaches to Musicology” in *Cecilia Reclaimed* (1994) and Susan McClary in *Feminine Endings* (1991).

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The Rhetoric of Domination in the Sonata Form

In “Feminist Approaches to Musicology,” Marcia Citron acknowledges, similarly to Gates, the difficulties one faces when trying to identify a vocabulary specifically attributable to a female composer.\(^\text{25}\) In fact, she states that although it is possible to isolate certain tendencies that might arguably be part of a female aesthetic, it is impossible to define a specific language or style that every woman uses.

Nevertheless, Citron suggests that the sonata form, central to the Euro-Western musical aesthetic, involved a gendered discourse, adding that this gendered rhetoric may have played a major role in discouraging women from composing symphonies and sonatas. In order to demonstrate this gendered tendency, she emphasizes how the sonata form was praised by nineteenth-century theorists and critics as the highest musical ambition, and thereby generally discouraging women from engaging with it. Moreover, she suggests that women might have preferred to refrain from composing in sonata form because the form was generally described via a gendered rhetoric of male domination. The work of nineteenth-century music critic A.B. Marx gives us an insight into how the notion of “female” and “male” permeated society. Marx describes the first theme, which establishes the tonic key, as “masculine,” and the second theme as “feminine” (a more lyrical tune which presents a new key in strong contrast to the first).\(^\text{26}\)

Susan McClary describes sonata form as a musical narrative in which both themes strive to maintain their tonal and thematic identities. She argues that the antagonism between the two thematic characters is fundamental for the furthering of the “plot” inherent in a sonata structure; whereas the development allows for both voices to explore their

\(^{25}\) Citron, “Feminist Approaches to Musicology,” 17.
\(^{26}\) Adolf B. Marx, Die Lehre von der Musikalischen Komposition (Leipzig, 1837-63), 273.
identities, the recapitulation represents the original themes, this time both are in the tonic key of the first theme. In this way, McClary argues, the second theme loses its identity, and is dominated and absorbed by the “masculine” theme.\textsuperscript{27} Citron shares McClary’s understanding of sonata form, and further argues that this rhetoric was not accidental but rather a reflection of social norms and evidence of the need of a newly emerging bourgeois society to validate itself through maintaining control over women.

In \textit{Gender and the Musical Canon}, Citron continues to expand this discourse by offering a detailed musical analysis of Cecile Chaminade’s Sonata no. 21 (1895).\textsuperscript{28} Here she uses Chaminade’s music example to justify her larger argument about the apparent reluctance of women to engage with the sonata form because of its gendered rhetoric of domination. Citron does that by pointing out the uncharacteristic harmonic construction of this particular sonata. First, Chaminade presents the second theme in the tonal key of the first theme; then, in the recapitulation that same theme is represented with tonal ambiguity. Citron suggests that her way is somewhat more neutral because it does not comply with the gendered rhetoric of the form but, she argues, it still contains as much of the hierarchical structure as the traditional sonata form procedure. This might imply that taking women’s music seriously may require us to reconsider the “objectivity” and transcendence of absolute music.\textsuperscript{29}

In addition to feeling alienated by the most prestigious forms of absolute music, Citron explains that another obstacle women faced was the belief that the creation of high-

\textsuperscript{27} McClary, \textit{Feminine Endings}, 68-70.
\textsuperscript{28} Marcia J. Citron, \textit{Gender and the Musical Canon}, 145-64.
\textsuperscript{29} For a more in-depth examination of sonata form and gender, see: Sock Siang Thia, “Piano Trios of Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann,” \textit{International Journal of the Arts in Society} 6, no. 6 (December 2012): 117–39; for an extensive examination of the gendered construction of “genius” in Western culture see Battersby, \textit{Gender and Genius}, 100, 160-161.
art—in this case “absolute music”—was exclusively achieved through intellectual powers, which were unequivocally seen as a male characteristic and were not supposed to be readily available to women. This formulation of creativity, Citron argues, relegated female composers to the lower “natural” sphere and reserved higher levels of “culture” to men.

Citron explains women’s societal exclusion by blaming it on men’s fear of “being crowded out by women” and their “fear of the mysterious powers of the womb.”\(^{30}\) Citron seems to claim that fear of women is simply a natural phenomenon in men. But this does not make sense in the context of human history, which has seen many cultural forms in which men’s fear of women has not been a given.\(^{31}\) Citron’s argumentation is thus not entirely convincing, especially when juxtaposed to feminist historical analysis such as Federici’s. When compared to the broader body of feminist scholarship, her work seems a bit thin, as it fails to engage the much broader spectrum of issues that plagued women and inhibited their participation in culture during the long period in which the canon was forming.

**The Absence of Women Composers from Euro-Western Musical Institutions**

In her article “Of Patriarchs... and Matriarchs, Too” Susan McClary briefly discusses autobiographically the complete absence of women’s music in her training.\(^{32}\) She muses at the incredible revelation caused by the discovery of composers such as Hildegard

\(^{30}\) Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 50-52.


von Bingen, Francesca Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, Elizabeth-Claude Jaquet de la Guerre, Clara Schumann, Lili Boulanger, and Ruth Crawford Seeger, and at the impact that the retrieval of these works has had on contemporary society. In fact, she states that these discoveries played a major role in empowering contemporary female composers and promulgated a need for change in scholarly curricula, towards a more inclusive and diverse training.

McClary also uncovers one recurring problem in traditional musicology, which is its tendency to avoid or deny the “content” (here mainly represented by the words) of music in favor of formal description (a common practice in positivist scholarship). This tendency, she argues, downplays the importance of music written by women because often (as in Hildegard’s music for example) it contains clear reference to their cultural concerns around gender. McClary asks, can “music in general be understood as a cultural practice – a practice that bears traces of many aspects of social experience, including gender ideologies?” She notes that these new revelations about women in music history have given rise to an impulse to reframe traditional musicology’s tendency to elevate certain kinds of Western music as transcendental, and instead incorporate a critical, interpretive approach to musical works that also engages with issues such as sexuality and representations of gender.

Furthermore, McClary explains how feminist musicology aims to dismantle the general aura of inaccessibility surrounding Western classical music and instead open music

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criticism to other fields. These new forms of scholarship, she explains, are accessible, for example, to opera fans or others who are generally listening to opera for pleasure. Pleasure, or more specifically listening for pleasure, was previously unmentionable in serious scholarship, as music needed to be “understood” purely through the intellect. Allowing the body and pleasure to become part of the discourse, McClary argues, enables feminist musicology to open the study of the musical construction of pleasure not only in opera but also in instrumental music, a concept previously seen as taboo.\textsuperscript{34}

As previously seen, McClary also denounces the unwillingness of academic musical institutions to engage with issues around sexuality and gender and she denounces the gendered rhetoric of “feminine” and “masculine” that is used by theorists when writing about musical episodes, especially when talking about cadences. In many instances, with nonchalance, analysts such as Willi Apel refer to the “masculine” as strong, normal and objective and the “feminine” as weak, abnormal and subjective.\textsuperscript{35} In this regard, the work of Schoenberg is particularly interesting; in \textit{Theory of Harmony} he attempted to imagine a musical language beyond binaries, whether it be minor/major, feminine/masculine, attraction/repulsion or consonance/dissonance.\textsuperscript{36} He longs rather for a musical discourse that is, in his own words “asexual” and “like the angels.” McClary points out that whereas these gendered ways of describing music episodes today no doubt feel outdated, they are not exactly part of “ancient history,” and in fact were still very common in criticism and pedagogy as recently as the 1970s.

\textsuperscript{34} McClary, “Of Patriarchs... and Matriarchs,” 366-369; and \textit{Feminine Endings}, 9-26.
She explains that the most damaging consequence of the erasure of “matriarchs” such as Hildegard is its effect on contemporary culture, as the absence of women composers in concert programming and curricula inhibits generations of women from considering composition as an attainable career. In this regard, McClary notes that the same generation that is responsible for creating and bringing to life a feminist method, has also produced several acclaimed women composers. This statement is quite problematic, and I will discuss it in depth through Paula Higgins’s criticism later (p.21). Historical work then serves a purpose far beyond retrieving forgotten work, rather it enables transcendence of limiting ideologies and helps create a more gender inclusive present and future.

**Opera and the Gender Construct**

McClary engages deeply with the characterization of gender and sexuality in opera as well as in so-called “absolute music;” she explains how this characterization develops in correlation with the rise of opera in the seventeenth century and that it is specifically linked to the need for the composer to distinguish different gendered characters musically. In this regard, she is interested in understanding how sexuality and desire are channeled through music and more specifically through particular use of harmonies and melodic intervals. This, she points out, can allow us to use musical insights to study how the gender construct changed across time; she points out that music serves as a public forum within various models of gender organization and thereby reflects societal customs.\(^{37}\)

Arguably central to *Feminine Endings* is the critique McClary brings forward regarding the general narrative played out in standard eighteenth-and nineteenth-century

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\(^{37}\) McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 14-17, 53-55.
opera, which is characterized by a hero (always male) getting in contact with, and eventually subjugating the “other” (usually the female character), through which his masculinity and identity are reinforced. This gendered narrative, she explains, is played out very explicitly in the plots of operas and more implicitly in symphonic repertoire, as both are products of the tonal system, with its hierarchical order of scale degrees and functional harmony.

In “Sexual Politics in Classical Music” McClary offers a groundbreaking analysis of Bizet’s Carmen which she uses to demonstrate the societal organization of sexuality, the construction of gender and the arousal and channeling of desire. For instance, Micaëla, Don Jose’s childhood girlfriend who in the story represents the sexless submissive female ideal of the bourgeois, has a musical representation characterized by simple, linear diatonic melodies. In dramatic contrast, Carmen, the exotic “other,” is musically described through a gypsy dance, rhythmically pressing and arguably demanding lower body movement, so fundamental in dances such as the “Habañera” and the “Seguilla.” McClary argues that those rhythms are so contagious that they make José and the audience very aware not only of her body but also of their own. Her melodic lines are far from the “diatonic innocence” of Micaëla, rather her music is marked by an alluring chromatic excess. Bizet’s use of a descending chromatic tetrachord from D to A, and his use of what should be just a passing tone, the B♭, in correspondence to the word “re-belle,” adds an alluring punctuation to the text. Furthermore, the tetrachord never actually resolves, leaving José and the audience in a state of suspense, revealing, McClary points out, Carmen’s seductive mastery.

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39 Ibid., 56-67.
The dichotomy *Carmen* presents, between bad and good women, would arguably not exist, however, without the protagonist character Don José, whose fate hangs between these two women. His musical rhetoric implies the universality and transcendence of Western classical music. Bizet’s musical construction represents the continuous attempts of José to dominate and absorb Carmen’s exotic freedom, but she fiercely resists his pressure. The opera, of course, does not have a happy ending for Carmen, rather the final scene is characterized by the ostentatious musical demands for a tonal closure, represented in the plot by Carmen’s death.

This musical discourse, McClary explains, characterized by a flood of chromaticism, makes the listeners long for a tonal stability and for order to be reestablished. In this way, Bizet’s musical setting not only characterizes Carmen’s death as natural (simply the resolution of the chromaticism into a tonal landscape) but also leads the audience to *desire* her death, because her death is narratively mapped onto the desire to hear all the dissonances purged from the prevailing final major triad.⁴⁰ In this way the opera’s tragic conclusion nonetheless has a *musically* “happy ending” which provides a self-congratulatory aura of patriarchal euro-centric dominance over the “other.”⁴¹ McClary points out that the ultimate issue within classical music is the rhetoric still so widely used which frames women’s eroticism and sexual desire as evil and manipulative and depicts male desire as transcendental and part of the “high culture.”⁴²

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⁴⁰ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 62-64.
⁴² McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 68.
One of the most revolutionary aspects of McClary’s work is that she centers her musical analysis around the body, attempting to resolve the mind/body split, which still dominates the Euro-Western culture. Particularly, she points out the importance of considering the body’s experience when analyzing music, an argument previously considered taboo within a field so dominated by Hanslickian formalism.\(^4\) Just as Subotnik and Kerman challenged the objectivity of pseudo-scientific methodologies, McClary disputes the ideology that the mind is objective, and the body is the holder of subjectivity. In fact, she points out that true objectivity is not attainable and that by bringing body awareness into the picture, a whole new set of musical observations are possible.

**Paula Higgins’s Critique of *Feminine Endings***

McClary’s work sparked a firestorm of debate in the field, finding passionate approval in some quarters and facing furious repudiation in others. Regardless, it certainly represented a major breakthrough within musicology. While it may seem easy today to write off all past criticism of McClary’s work as being influenced solely by sexist attitudes amongst traditional musicologists, it’s important to acknowledge that she also faced sustained criticism from other feminists. For example, Paula Higgins responded to the publication of *Feminine Endings* with a reasoned and careful critique calling McClary out for reinforcing patriarchal values and for not acknowledging the women scholars – particularly other women musicologists – and musicians whose work was fundamental in establishing a path for this kind of work.

Higgins criticizes McClary and other scholars for reinforcing the belief that women’s musical invisibility was caused by their lack of formal institutional training; she points out that hardly any great male composer before the twentieth century could claim to be fully and institutionally trained either. The assumption that women’s invisibility was caused by their lack of publication is also an insufficient explanation, Higgins argues, especially when compared to the incredible body of work composed – by females and males – before the standardization of music publishing – work which was retrieved and is currently often available in modern editions. For example, she cites Barbara Strozzi, the most prolific female composer of seventeenth-century Italy and someone whose works were widely published, and yet we primarily remember her male contemporaries, who have since then been canonized and made available to the public as representatives of the specific art forms of their era.

Most importantly, Higgins argues, McClary advocates for a hierarchical organization of scholarship, with a pinnacle represented by the “feminist criticism of music” over any other historical, contextual or interpretative feminist musical analysis, which is in itself very antifeminist. Higgins also points out how in her acknowledgments McClary seems unconsciously to emphasize a gendered dichotomy in thanking her community for supporting her work: the scholars she thanks for giving her critical feedback on the work itself are almost all men; whereas the people she thanks for “moral support and community” are exclusively women. Higgins notes that this paradoxically puts some of the most brilliant (feminist and women) scholars into the more typical role of “nurturer, sustainer or idea-giver.”

Finally Higgins wonders why, in a book of “feminist” music

\[\text{\footnote{Higgins, “Women in music,” 176.}}\]
criticism, there is such a strong lack of female representation. She writes: besides a “handful of late twentieth-century composers, actual musical women – composers, musicians, musicologists and critics – are as invisible here as in any sexist text McClary would inveigh against.” Moreover, although McClary is aware of the uncovering of important female artists of the past, she writes that only through the feminist movements of the 1960s there was finally an explosion of women’s music which she claims, might now allow serious women musicians to flourish.

In many ways, Higgins explains why Feminine Endings obtained the international fame it has and what enabled McClary’s work to be so popular – that is, being only tangentially feminist criticism and failing to really embody some of the core values of the larger movement. Indeed, Higgins invites us to not be satisfied with what has been achieved in important work like McClary’s, but rather to keep moving forward and express deeper and more thoughtful critique, one that really is done in solidarity with other women and in acknowledgment of their work.46

Moving Forward

Reading Higgins’ work has substantially contributed to framing my own critical engagement with feminist musicology and to really understand what I am so unsatisfied about. It is evident that the work brought forth by these outstanding scholars in the 1980s and 1990s was a breakthrough from the previous ways of doing scholarly work, and that asking for more from them – from my privileged position decades into the future – would

46 See also: Elaine Barkin, "either/other," Perspectives of New Music 30, no. 2 (Summer, 1992): 206-233; and Jann Pasler, "Some Thoughts on Susan McClary's Feminine Endings," Perspectives of New Music 30 (1992): 202-10.
be inconsiderate of their efforts. Looking back on this work, I see many places where grappling with political, economic and critical race theory would have deepened the interventions of Marcia Citron, for example, and might have led to quite different conclusions on why women were excluded from the Western canon. The work of McClary and Citron was and still is hugely influential in framing how we as a field even approach gender in the first place. It deserves rigorous criticism, both because it is so worthy and intelligent and because it continues to exert so much sway over how we think about gender and music.

Contemporary scholars such as Timothy Taylor and James Currie have criticized the New Musicology for the ways it failed to engage with capitalism – indeed, this failure was a signal feature of many self-consciously “postmodern” interventions in the 1990s and beyond.47 Still, while this aspect of the New Musicology has started being addressed, there has yet to be a “second wave” of an explicitly feminist musicology that adequately grapples with the legacy of forebears such as McClary and Citron in this regard. Where is the discussion of macrostructure, economics and Marxism in feminist musical critique today? Certainly, in other fields feminists did not stop to congratulate each other for the well done work, rather they continued deepening an ever-more inclusive and diverse critique. Taylor specifically denounces the lack of historicism within the discipline, pointing out that musicologists generally engage with very specific periods but do not necessarily “believe” in historical analysis of before and after (as historians generally do), to gain material and factual understanding of why a composer would or would have not engaged with some

particular style of writing. Is it this peculiar disciplinary orientation toward the historical method that has kept “the woman question” in music from being productively re-assessed?

Rather than simply accepting that certain musical gestures were coded in gendered ways, a more materially-grounded historical analysis would require scholars to ask why such coding existed in the first place. I insist that such a historical analysis would also require a different kind of musical investigation, one that addresses the establishment of capitalism in Europe. Feminists in other fields have convincingly argued that the consolidation of the capitalist system dramatically impacted women’s participation in cultural production of all kinds. For example, in Caliban and the Witch, Silvia Federici examines in detail the complex political and economic changes that occurred with the establishment of capitalism and its effects in people’s lives.\(^{48}\) Federici reveals that the transition to capitalism entailed (among other social disruptions) a completely new way of assessing women’s value to society, which I argue can inform a new kind of music criticism.

Whereas the New Musicology engaged with the underrepresentation of women in the Western classical canon, it has done so through either a positivist or hermeneutic approach, each of which failed to engage with capitalism and its effects on women’s cultural production. This tendency to avoid materialist historical analysis explains why musicologists did not engage with the major ramifications that the genocide of women (namely the witch-hunts) had on European culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not coincidentally, that was the same period when tonality – with its firm establishment of “home” and “foreign” keys, and its emphasis on hierarchical order – was

\(^{48}\) Silvia Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).
coalescing as the predominant system for making musical meaning. I will argue that taking
the effects of this cultural shift into account generates very different insights into women’s
exclusion from the Western art music canon. Furthermore, I suggest that drawing on
advances made in fields such as feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory will
contribute to building a more holistic understanding of gender in the history of music, one
that might make space for examining how modern gender constructions were imposed on
men and women, and how this imposition caused alienating wounds on people of all
genders.

Here I suggest the incorporation of works of political theory, critical race theory
and Marxist feminist theory, and in the following pages I present the works that most
inform my own criticism of the field of musicology. These texts have guided my
understanding of gender and class in relationship to each other, a topic that was not really
investigated within the work of Citron, for example. Through the study of these works I
build my own arguments regarding the absence of women from the Western musical canon
and sketch a new kind of criticism, one productively embedded in wide-ranging
interdisciplinary studies.

The Establishment of Capitalism and the Witch Hunts

In Caliban and the Witch, Silvia Federici demonstrates that in early modern Europe
the exploitation of women’s free labor was essential to the successful establishment of
capitalism. In fact, she shows how a newly misogynistic culture exploited women’s labor
by separating it from the wage labor performed by men, and limited women’s expression
through accusations of witchery and evil practices that regulated and punished any
unorthodox behavior. These accusations, first directed towards peasants, over the course of three hundred years took such a strong hold that they irradiated every class. This is particularly important to my argument because class and music production are tightly interwoven with each other and I aim to dismantle, as many scholars have done before me, the ideology that music creation transcends the material and social context of its creators.

Federici points out how, during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries in England and parts of Europe, the state and the church enforced new laws and policies which legalized and encouraged violence against women and fostered a climate of deep distrust among communities. This, she argues, was necessary for the establishment of capitalism, which required villagers to be divided and disempowered to such a degree that they would finally accept the new system of wage labor, after resisting it for years with some degree of success. Federici explains how this shift required the forging of a new “persona,” obedient and submissive to the rules imposed by capitalists through the devastating binomen of money and time. Creating and enforcing this new “persona” took almost three centuries of cultural and political shifts, shifts which were accompanied by the promulgation of witchcraft accusations, by public torture and execution of women (and men who would take their side) who overstepped the bounds of their newly-imposed social

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50 One aspect of women’s struggles in asserting their creative work was the nineteenth-century idealization of the male composer as a genius and even as a god. This is particularly evident in the Romantic male composers who claimed that their music could awaken transcendent experience and that their task was “to objectify through music something unique and personal and reveal ‘higher truth’ to the public.” Lydia Goehr, The Imaginary Museum of musical works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 205-242; and Bram Dijkstra, Idols of perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-siècle Culture (New York: Oxford University Press,1986), 20-22.
roles, and by the “enclosure of the commons” which cut people off from traditional means of subsistence and forced them to accept wage labor in order to survive.\textsuperscript{51} Rebels and the leaders of heretic sects that refused the wage, and any women who practiced “witchcraft” (a loosely-defined term that could be applied to any woman who seemed to engage in activities outside her newly-proscribed social role) were imprisoned and publicly stripped of their humanity through torture, rape and burning at the stake. Federici explains that those “theatrical” horror performances were staged for a very specific purpose, namely to foster fear and hatred between men and women who, newly divided, were easier to control and force into more exploitable labor formations.\textsuperscript{52} For three hundred years entire populations in Europe were stripped of their cultural traditions and social foundations, and their ancient relationship to nature and to seasonal cycles was broken, in what came to be called the “great witch hunts.”

One important component of the newly established control over women was the capitalists’ need to quickly repopulate states devastated by the plague. Especially in the decades between the 1580s and 1630s, people died in such numbers (of disease as well as starvation caused by the loss of the commons and the ongoing crop devastations of the Little Ice Age) that the authorities presumed the existence of a conspiracy and exhorted the population to hunt for the offenders, namely the “witches.”\textsuperscript{53} The crisis was also partially attributed to the unwillingness of the young to procreate, a phenomenon that turned

\textsuperscript{51} Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch}, 31-36, 177-180. For more on the opposition and hatred towards wage-work see 72, 124, 136.
\textsuperscript{53} For more on the way climate change worsened the plague in Europe and Central Asia see: Robert Gottfried, \textit{The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe} (New York: The Free Press, 1983).
reproduction and population growth into a State matter. These new historical realities caused an intensification of the persecution of the “witches.” At the same time, procreation was regulated by stripping women of their control over reproduction through condemning abortion as a capital crime. In addition, infanticide became the one crime women were accused the most of and even miscarriage or stillbirth were often punished with death as it was believed to be evidence of witchcraft.

The suspicion towards women in general and in particular midwives (who during this period lost their once-respected status and became more and more often portrayed as servants of the devil), led male doctors into the delivery room, traditionally a woman-only space. Women lost their control over procreation and were “reduced to a passive role in child delivery, while male doctors came to be seen as the true ‘givers of life’.” These policies led to women becoming seen as labor machines, who were now expected to give birth to the next generation of wage workers. It took about two centuries to create a new

54 Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 85-86.
55 Women practicing ancient rituals and fertility cults were increasingly labeled as witches and were blamed for any illness, misfortune or crisis in the villages. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, due to a growth of poverty and malnutrition, an increase of infant mortality occurred, which also coincided with the high peak of witch-hunt persecution. Federici argues that attributing an infant’s death to witches was an effective method by which the State and the Church enforced control upon women’s autonomy and reproduction, since infanticide became the main reason for which women were burned and tortured. Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 178-186, 191-198. See also Guido Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 70-88.
56 In France, a royal edict of 1556 required women to register every pregnancy; they were sentenced to death in the case in which the infant would die before baptism, whether or not proven guilty of any wrongdoing. Similar statutes were passed in England and Scotland in 1624 and 1690. A system of spies was also created to surveil unwed mothers and deprive them of any support. In Protestant countries neighbors and midwives were supposed to report all relevant sexual details and women who were not enthusiastic about their offspring were punished. As a consequence, women began to be persecuted in large numbers, and more were executed for infanticide between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than for any other crime except for witchcraft, a charge that also centered on the killing of children and other violations of reproductive norms. See Margaret King, Women of the Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1992), 144-151; and Federici, Caliban, 87-89.
57 King, Women of the Renaissance, 154-155. With the marginalization of midwives and the widespread presence of male doctors, a new medical practice prevailed, which established that, in case of medical emergency, the fetus’s wellbeing would be prioritized over the mother’s life. This practice was in contrast to the customary birthing process which women had controlled before.
female “persona” docile enough to accept the ideologies of capitalism and be confined within the walls of her husband’s house.  

Federici explains that in this same period (mid fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries) women were also barred from certain types of work previously considered gender neutral. Women had been for centuries participating members in a wide variety of professional and artisanal guilds such as doctoring, farming, and many other jobs that had until this point been seen as gender neutral. However, Federici demonstrates that women were now systematically barred from almost all of that work and increasingly relegated to social and reproductive labor within the home, activity that did not qualify as employment under the new system of wage labor. She argues that this is also the source of the general scorn for “women’s work” that to this day makes certain jobs (such as childcare, teaching, or housecleaning) perennially underpaid and underappreciated by society.  

Federici demonstrates that violence against women came to its peak between 1650 and 1750. Rape, which had been illegal for centuries, was decriminalized by the end of the fifteenth century. This new policy entitled men to pursue sexual violence against women with impunity. Once raped, women lost all their rights and were ostracized from the community, thereby being forced to conduct a life of prostitution or vagabondage, practices  

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59 For a contemporary account on women’s identity issues in relationship to work, their body and their identity as women see: Federici, Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2020). For a detailed analysis of women’s work in the private sphere as well as the globalization of “intimate” female work see: Arlie R. Hochschild, The commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 185-212.  
60 Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 89-108.
that further cemented them as “deviants.” This led to a progressive rise of misogynistic ideologies, which evolved into a mass gynocide of vagabond, poor, old, and unmarried women. Moreover, through establishing new policies against pleasurable activities, and firm policies against sexual activities in particular, the State and the Church succeeded in enforcing a progressive change of the peasant into a working machine, a human being solely valued for their productivity.\textsuperscript{61}

Not coincidentally, these centuries are also the time when composers and theorists adopted the organization of pitches through hierarchical relationships, namely tonality, and established it as the most refined and sophisticated way of writing music seen, above all others, as the ultimate framework for musical expression. In \textit{Beyond Exoticism}, Timothy Taylor argues that it is not coincidental that the glorification of tonality arose alongside the Western culture of hierarchical domination.\textsuperscript{62} He points out that only by elevating a particular system and portraying it as the universal and inevitable could the other systems be marginalized as the “others.” Whereas Taylor here refers mostly to the practice of colonialization, I find it important to link his arguments to the historical reality of the witch hunts. He explains how the need of differentiating the Self from the Other (and the human from the inhuman), derived by the progressive intensification of colonial practices, can be also applied to the newly established anxiety of differentiating “respectable” women from the degenerate “witches.”

\textsuperscript{61} For more on sexual policies see: Ruggiero, \textit{Boundaries of Eros}, 70-88. For politic and ideologic maneuvers that lead to the mechanization of the body see: Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch}, 139-145; and for the philosophy that led to it see: René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” trans. Elizabeth Haldane (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1996), 1-50.

\textsuperscript{62} Taylor, \textit{Beyond Exoticism}, 24-28.
Colonialization, Tonality and Opera

Federici argues that just as the demonization of women in Europe had served emerging capitalism, in the Americas this same practice enabled conquistadores to justify their abuses of indigenous peoples in the name of religion and state order, while destroying communities under the false accusation of their being in service to the devil. Women were once again the most targeted in this battle, first because the misogynistic ideologies already well developed in Europe were brought along overseas, and second because women were often in a position of power in the Americas, being the priestesses of feminine cults and practitioners of rituals in connection to nature. Those staple practices of cultures in the “New World” were not only brutally banished but also seen and portrayed as demoniac, which, Federici argues, enabled Europeans to justify their atrocious practices, both to themselves and to the rest of the world.

She also sheds light on the multiple ways in which European values based on misogynistic and racist ideologies were brought overseas to the Americas and justified the colonizers’ regime of horror. Christianization, forced labor, torture, rape and mass slaughter were portrayed as necessary tools to civilize “savages” in the eyes of literate white Europeans; they also offered a rather convenient justification for the exploitation of international labor, enslavement and land appropriation that characterized the first great global expansion of capitalism during this period. Very quickly, the religious practices and forms of social organization of natives were declared illegal and portrayed as

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abominable in Europe, through literature and artwork that furthered hatred towards these Others.

Similarly, Taylor explains how the colonialization of the New World as well as the established trades in the African and Asian continents created a need for Europeans to distinguish themselves from the Other. Taylor explains that, previous to the emergence of modern concepts of race, scholars thought and wrote more in terms of groups or categories. One of the arguments that was successfully raised during this time was the idea of the similarities between the modern “savage” and prehistoric people, bringing forth the ideology that contemporary savages could inform the historical understanding of less developed (or evolved) humans. This idea, Taylor explains, is a fundamental step towards distancing the “savage” from “humanity,” making it possible to create a hierarchical ideology of human development as well as to exploit the “less developed” Others for the benefit of “Selves.”

Descriptions of the New World, which were so widely circulating in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were mostly based on the ravenous imaginations of their authors, since there was a distinct lack of real information. This enabled Europeans to conceive the New World as anything. Taylor argues that the natives were initially not seen as Others, rather as Not Selves, and more specifically as everything that was not a European self – this Not-Self was characterized as wild, sexually ravenous, cannibalistic, irrational and monstrous, in contrast with the calm, rational, self-controlled European

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self. Similarly, Europeans would musically represent these new Others in an undifferentiated way, using whatever non-European material was available.

Taylor argues that colonialism’s effect in solidifying European cultural monopoly expressed itself musically through the establishment of tonality and the birth of opera. His central argument is that tonality and opera gained such strong power and dominance in Western-European cultures when they did because it was a period in which the establishment of hierarchical order and representations of otherness were becoming urgent matters to the Europeans, who were struggling to make sense of the difference they were encountering in their colonial explorations. Whereas it had previously been common practice to have a variety of systems in music and for them to coexist, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the tonal system was promulgated as the ultimate form for musical expression. Taylor argues that it is not coincidental that the glorification of tonality arose alongside the Western culture of hierarchical domination. In fact, tonality and its ability to create margins and centers established a musical rhetoric in which hierarchy became naturalized. Additionally, he also points out that only by elevating a particular system and portraying it as universal and inevitable could the other systems be marginalized as the “others.”

Both Taylor and Federici, among others, point out that the Americas were also feminized, in colonial discourses, and colonialization itself was often described as a kind of rape. By the end of the sixteenth-century the Americas could be convincingly and unproblematically represented in paintings, maps, engravings and title pages as a female nude in a feather headdress, thus connecting colonial domination abroad with the new

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66 Taylor, Beyond Exoticism, 43-48.
67 Ibid., 20-21.
forms gender domination was taking at home. And similarly, operas started reflecting these themes through violent staging of stories of domination over women, as well as through staging colonial encounters.

This topic is thoroughly explored by Catherine Clément in *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (1988), which exposes bluntly the dreadful roles women have tended to occupy in canonical European opera. In fact, she offers a horrific summary of the deaths of the famous “prima donnas” in the most notoriously celebrated operas, pointing out that in Euro-Western operas most of the female characters are plagued by a constant destiny, namely an often violent death by the hand of a man, frequently their lover. She also points out how often opera heroines are foreigners (Carmen a Gypsy, Isolde from Ireland and Butterfly from Japan) caught in a social system incapable of tolerating their presence. This reality brings up something obvious, Clément argues, namely the display in music of centuries of oppression, violence and domesticity.

Musicologists criticized the book for not being more sophisticated in explaining her claims “musically,” and for not being traditional in its organization and therefore producing rather unfocused analysis. Perhaps, though, these “issues” derive from Clément’s backgrounds in philosophy, psychoanalysis and anthropology. Her operatic analysis is not too concerned with deep musical analysis, rather she leads the reader through her own

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69 Ibid., 29-31.
70 Catherine Clément, “Dead Women,” in *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1988), 43-59.
journey of struggles with opera. Being a feminist and being a lover of opera can sometimes feel like contradictory positions. Deliberately exploring this conflict, through feminist thoughts and psychoanalytical analysis, she argues something quite simple yet powerful, namely that women on stage, divas, are celebrated as long they hold their tight place but are violently killed if they act in any unbecoming way. Furthermore, she points out that although divas are the centerstage, their characters are often ridiculed or abused on stage, reiterating, in a public forum, that women are either objects of (male) pleasure or are repudiated and killed as rebels.

Her book, the English translation of which opens with a preface by Susan McClary, does not aim to do musicological criticism, as McClary does. Whereas Clément hints at some usage of musical passages to seduce and distract the audience from what is really happening, McClary fills that gap by providing a very detailed analysis of the music. Clément’s focus is more directed towards opening a discussion on what happens on stage and how those narratives informed and still inform the condition of women and even more so, the reality that the music in opera seduces and infatuates the audience as much as not to move away from rational dislike of narratives of violence. McClary, on the other hand, brings this argument forward by providing a very focused and detailed analysis of how both the text and the music are weaved together to create pleasure within the body and manipulate, through musical “escamotages,” one’s experience. Ultimately, they both expose the uncomfortable reality that we, meaning the un-aware audience, end up being “tricked” and seduced through the music and led to deeply enjoy narratives which consciously we might find abhorrent.72

72 See also: Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
The Mechanization of the Body in the Rhetoric of Euro-Western Culture

Federici discerns yet another element in the reform and construction of a new “persona,” one that had major ramifications on how music became valued – namely the theorization of the mind/body split represented by the work of Descartes and Hobbes. She connects the imposition of waged hourly labor with the mechanization of the body and argues that this ideology took such a strong hold in early modern Europe because it served the new system of labor that enabled capitalists to require inhumane and unnatural work shifts from people now seen more as machine than human. What was new with the mind/body split was not its dualistic way of understanding the world – a paradigm that has arguably been present in many cultures for millennia – rather it was the increasingly powerful assumption that one side of a duality could and should prevail over the other.

In this instance, the intellect came to be perceived as the most important aspect of human development, though only in literate and high-class white men (thanks to the brutal background of misogynist oppression of the lower classes happening concurrently). Many “scientific” accounts of that time go into great detail to demonstrate how women’s bodies were simply physically unable to foster a great intellect, featuring pseudo-science that linked intellectual powers to male genitalia.

In Gender and Genius, Christine Battersby explores this issue through the analysis of the eighteenth-century pseudo-science explaining the gendered separation of the body from the mind. This theory “biologically” excluded women from being considered geniuses because of their lack of male genitalia and the so-called “vapors” produced by their wombs that obfuscated their minds. This idea was first connected with an aesthetic of gender domination, which dictated that women be relegated to the realm of the (unthinking)
body; and second to the pseudo-scientific theories of the connection between the genius and male physical attributes. Intellectual power and genius, on the other hand, could solely be attributed to men. In this light, the body-feminine-women/mind-masculine-men separation was not only restricted to the individual but also created a gendered view of the world, which saw the body as an object to be dominated and forced to labor.

These ideas played an important role throughout the transition to capitalism, supporting the intense privatization of women, who were objectified and progressively forced into domestic labor. By the nineteenth century, whereas women were not seen as capable of composing elevated music, they had had a way to distinguish themselves and elevate their social status through the dedication to Euro-Western classical repertoire, especially via music written for the piano. In her dissertation Anna Bull argues that “female respectability and propriety was integral to the successful disciplining of the body, as performed through classical music.” She argues that conservatories in England, which in the nineteenth centuries were mostly attended by women, were serving the growing demand for training respectable femininity – represented often by behaviors informed by submission, free emotional labor and private entertainment within the household.

Bull argues that musical training was particularly important for the newly established middle class because it enabled it to distinguish itself from the working class. In this regard, Euro-Western musical training (which was seen as morally exemplary and

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73 “The soul of a pure women (usually a virgin) could separate herself from her body and communicate directly with God and the angels – acting as a medium between the male who loves her and the divine. But this did not, of course, imply that flesh-and-blood women had the physiology or psychology to become great artists. (…) Women’s own mind was clouded with vapors that rose up from her womb and prevented her from perceiving Truth, Beauty and Goodness with the same clarity as could a man. A woman could be a Muse – but was unsuited to be a great artist.” Christine Battersby, Gender and Genius, 33-34. For more on high art, gender and Romanticism see also Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, Romanticism & Gender (New York: Routledge, 1993), 43-48, 144-154, 171-208.

uplifting), was used as a very shrewd maneuver to occupy girls and women with a laborious never-ending training, while at the same time benefiting the newly established market of graded exams and conservatory music education. This meant that women were not praised for their musicality or virtuosity, but rather for their ability to embody a “machine” capable of technical mastery.

Technical mastery – then as now – required from its mostly female students thousands of repetitive hours of disciplined and detailed body work. This meant that (middle class) women’s respectability depended on decades of weekly lessons and daily practice, meant to train the body (and the mind) to rigor, obedience and humility. Bull suggests that this training represented a component of “class boundary-drawing” around the respectability of women’s bodies, which not only implied a strenuous disciplining of the “respectable” female body but also a rigorous denial of that body’s sexuality.

This is discussed in “‘Girling’ at the Parlor Piano” in which Ruth Solie explains the relationship between musical training, the disciplining of the body and the hiding of sexuality. Through the diaries of Victorian women, Solie is able to elaborate on certain customs such as the strategic deployment of music to ward off unwanted suitors or piano playing to mask amorous conversations from other curious guests. Moreover, she explains how “musicality” quickly became an important asset for establishing a good marriage, evidence proven by the numerous ads in newspapers of the time which listed musical abilities alongside good character and beauty, as ideal qualities in a wife.

Music and musicality in the sexual marketplace, Solie explains, did not come without dangers, since girls too occupied with their pianos were often seen as too frivolous
and too much dedicated to their own pleasure, rather than being dedicated to more mature occupations, such as running a household.\textsuperscript{75}

Anna Bull argues that what established the rigor so strongly in women’s bodily control was the enforcement of graded exams within conservatories, which asked for an incredibly refined level of technical achievement. This control over student’s playing was so strict that it also included (and still does today) dictated fingerings for scales as well as for technical studies. She demonstrates that women were not so much graded for their own musicality but rather for the “proper” and rigorous control of their bodies in performing perfectly (or not so perfectly) those insidious technical passages. Women were also encouraged to perform “containment” in their technical virtuosity, which suggests that only this kind of virtuosity – namely bare and technical - could be mastered by young women in their attempt to embody respectability, but could and should never manifest in musical virtuosity, unsuited for real ladies.

Since this musical training could not be seen as a tool for economic independence (for the most part women were excluded from the musical marketplace), it suggests the reading of Euro-Western musical training as a gendered form of discipline. Mastery of a music instrument represented one’s capacity for restraint, rational labor and timeless dedication. Those were all values that could be examined, certified and commodified within conservatories. In this way, proficiency in Euro-Western music “was an institutionalized boundary between respectable middle-class women and their ‘degenerate’ working-class others who lacked this ‘containment’ and refinement.”

\textsuperscript{75} Ruth A. Solie “‘Girling’ at the Parlor Piano,” in \textit{Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 113-117.
What Anna Bull depicted as a strong need of class differentiation was, not coincidentally, developed in England, birthplace of modern capitalism and one of the most powerful Empires in history, which arguably constructed its customs not only to discipline its female population but also to instill properness into colonies in an attempt to “civilize” the “dangerous savages.”

Now that I have laid out the specific historical frame for my intervention, the rest of the thesis examines the repercussions of these historical changes on music and musical culture, and ultimately suggests some possible directions music criticism could take in light of this reassessment of our field’s historical development.

**Chapter Outlines**

**Chapter I – The Gendered “Other”: Female Erotic Sublimation in Ferrara’s Court**

In chapter one, I discuss the relationship between the new coding of femininity established in the Renaissance and the progressive exclusion of women from the creation of high-art. I argue that the establishment of capitalism, which disenfranchised women as objectified Others, was at the core of their absence from music production. Here I discuss the work of Joan Kelly and Margaret King in relation to Silvia Federici’s analysis of the establishment of capitalism, considering the societal changes in Italian courts and specifically Ferrara. The Este court was a center of musical excellence and offered a place for women’s free exploration of their voices. As we will see, Ferrara was unique in its avant-garde musical production, which was deeply intertwined with *il concerto delle donne*. In conclusion, I discuss the influence that Ferrara’s musical excellence had in shaping the taste in favor of soprano voices as the protagonist in opera in the following centuries.
Chapter II – *Die Zauberflöte* as Reflection of Shifting Ideologies

In the second chapter I analyze *Die Zauberflöte* arguing that it mirrors the societal changes happening in Europe as the result of the establishment of capitalism and the scientific revolution. I analyze the characters of the Queen of the Night, Monostatos as the Othered and the marriage of Tamino and Pamina as the ultimate celebration of white, elite-centric patriarchy. Here I engage with questions around class, race, and gender, drawing parallels between socio-political events and specific characterizations and events within the opera. In conclusion I discuss how the opera offers a metaphorical account in music of the material, economic, and political changes occurring simultaneously in Europe and the Americas.

Chapter III – Decomposing the Canon

In the third chapter I argue that in order to understand the absence of women and BIPOC composers from the Western musical canon, the establishment of capitalism needs to be taken in account. In light of my critique of the New Musicology I reassess the gendered and racialized construction of the Western musical canon, offering my own interdisciplinary interventions, and demonstrating the ways in which the formation of the canon reflects the political economy established in Europe in the previous historical period.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I offer some reflections on how the intersection between capitalism, the Western musical canon formation and discrimination based on gender and race can
contribute to challenge and question some of the imperialistic values we hold within Western musical institutions today. I argue that it is vital to give serious thought about how the dehumanization of women and BIPOC as a result of capitalism has diminished their ability in building Western musical culture and how this reality still represents an obstacle to their success today. Finally, I point out how we still value German music as the culmination of musical culture, and I offer some insights into how intersectionality can contribute to rewrite the history of the Western music canon formation.
CHAPTER I
THE GENDERED “OTHER”:
FEMALE EROTIC SUBLIMATION IN FERRARA’S COURT

In this first chapter I linger at length on the history of women’s dehumanization in Western European culture, a long process that took place in concomitance with the establishment of early capitalism. Although my discussion touches on some aspects of music and music history, this chapter is primarily concerned with extramusical processes of social and economic development. My goal is to demonstrate that incorporating this historical reality within the study of women’s musical production is fundamental in understanding fully the role they have or have not played in Euro-Western music. The ultimate goal of my thesis is to demonstrate that in order to understand the absence of women and BIPOC from the Euro-Western musical canon it is necessary to analyze historically the shaping of their role in society, both in music and more in general within the economic and political milieu.

This chapter first analyzes the historical transition to early capitalism, drawing consistently from the work of Silvia Federici to understand another historical transition: the transformation of existing Western European patriarchy into a more virulently misogynist one that systematically divested women of their rights, relegated them to the private sphere, and imposed new lines of enmity between women and men. Secondly, I reference the work of Joan Kelly around the changes female customs underwent during this transitional period, specifically within the Italian courts of the nobility. As I will demonstrate, the Italian Renaissance in particular offers a fertile ground for the study of the progressive disenfranchisement of women’s freedom and power during this transitional period in European history. This can be observed through the restrictions imposed on female eroticism in this period; through the loss of powerful female leaders, who
historically had been allowed to stand as vassals of their husbands during wars or illness and were in charge of the land in equal power to their consorts; and through the newly developing societal norms imposed on women, who despite their access to education (when noble) began being discouraged from pursuing deep study and participating in literary circles.76

Following these broad historical analyses, I offer two case studies to show how these changing customs were mirrored in poetry and later in music. Here I analyze the conclusion of the IX day in the Decameron, written in the fourteenth century, and I then compare it with a Guarini poem (written two centuries later) inspired by Boccaccio’s text. Guarini’s reinterpretation is particularly striking when analyzed in the context of the change of customs around female sexuality as I will discuss in detail below. Furthermore, it offers an interesting opportunity to analyze the famous il concerto delle donne’s musical production, and their avant-garde practices, through a different lens than the ones we are perhaps more accustomed to using.

**The Establishment of a New Economic System**

It is not coincidental that these dramatic shifts in societal norms occurred during the rise of the mercantile and manufacturing economy, which supported the consolidation of states and favored an economy increasingly based on the extraction of surplus value from waged labor. This change did not happen organically; rather, it was enforced through

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strict new laws that deprived people of their access to land and to their traditional means of subsistence. Hardly smooth, this “transition” was characterized by waves of class struggle and arduous fights for personal freedom, specifically manifested in the resistance to wage labor and, later, to the infamous living conditions wage work increasingly imposed. At the epicenter of these battles were often women, who were most affected by the new laws that devalued their traditional forms of labor and excluded them from many of the guilds they had traditionally occupied. Across this transitional period, women were also deprived of their reproductive autonomy and were forced either into marriage or, more often for poor women, into prostitution.

For these reasons, women played major roles in the heretical movements that arose during this period in opposition to the consolidating power of the state, the new merchant class, and the church. These movements represented perhaps the most important oppositional force in early Renaissance Europe. Female-led heretical sects denounced social hierarchies, private property, and the accumulation of wealth, values that were at the foundation of the emerging capitalist economy. Silvia Federici documents the great social power that some of these sects accumulated, and how they represented a threat to ruling class power and thus led the church and state to clamp down on their efforts with an iron grip: first through the crusades, which were aimed against heretics to eradicate their presence; and second, through the creation of the Holy Inquisition, which in addition to persecuting heretics generally was also particularly in charge of finding the so-called “witches” – women (and some men) who were leaders of the rebellion or who were practicing traditional ways of healing. Subsequently, the church used the charge of

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78 For more on sexual policies see: Ruggiero, *Boundaries of Eros*, 70-88.
heresy and witchcraft to attack every form of social and political insubordination, causing a gynocide, namely, the “great witch hunts.”

Federici argues that the dehumanization of women, as well as the violence inflicted upon peasants, was fundamental in reshaping the societal and economic organization of England and Western Europe. She argues that the witch hunts, ostensibly undertaken in the name of religion, actually constituted a political scheme enforced by the state to silence the female leaders, heretics and healers who presented a threat to the new system of wage labor.79 Whereas peasants were the most affected by this relentless violence, a more subtle attack was also directed towards women of higher ranks, who progressively lost their positions of power and were relegated to the private sphere.80

In “Did Women have a Renaissance?” Joan Kelly examines women’s progressive loss of freedom and autonomy within the Italian aristocratic court culture between the 1350s and 1530s.81 She explains how in the mediaeval courts married noblewomen were free to have men at their service who paid homage to them. This implied a relationship of lovers, based on reciprocity and obligations on both parts, to respect and support each other as equals. Kelly argues that the (perhaps surprising) degree of sexual autonomy afforded to noblewomen in this period was predicated on the fact that women were allowed to own and inherit property, which, under feudalism, also enabled them to wield political power.82

79 For more about women as healers in the Middle Ages see: April Harper, “The Image of the Female Healer in Western Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages,” Social History of Medicine 24 (2011), 108-124.
80 See Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 31-36, 177-180. For more about female power in the Middle Ages see Corinne Saunders, "Middle Age in Romance? Magic, Enchantment and Female Power," in Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages, ed. Sue Niebrzydowski (New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 37-52.
82 Joan Kelly, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” 23; see also: Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 31-36, 177-180; for more about female power in the Middle Ages see: Corinne Saunders, “Middle Age in
Kelly explains how women’s desire for lovers, and thus their sexual and affective needs, originally coexisted with the aristocratic need for political (and mostly pre-arranged) marriages and was not only tolerated but even encouraged. This is evident in the courtly love poetry of the troubadours, which had at its center women’s erotic pleasure; Kelly demonstrates that in the tradition of courtly love, men shaped themselves primarily to be pleasing to women. Quite importantly – and, for Kelly, not coincidentally – it was also normal for women to preside over a court, administer the estates, take charge of political actions, and even lead military maneuvers. This culture of greater gender parity amongst the ruling class was manifested in the artistic and romantic customs of courtly love, which was powerfully shaped by women. Kelly argues that women were able to contribute so strongly to these customs only because they had actual power to exert in the political and economic decisions of their time.

By exposing these historical facts, Kelly reveals a counterintuitive way of thinking about women’s position in mediaeval times. We are generally conditioned to think of history as a progressive teleological narrative, with rights and freedoms slowly won over time, such that we tend to assume earlier periods were always more oppressive than later periods. The case of women in England and Western Europe before and after the transition to capitalism provides a counter example to these historical expectations. Where women in the medieval period had relative degrees of economic autonomy and social power, by the time of the Renaissance they had been relegated to a far more repressive and regulated condition.

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Sexual Politics and Gender Antagonism

The freedom women experienced in the fourteenth century was quickly dismantled, when in the fifteenth century the church and the state worked to establish new laws that unleashed waves of misogynist violence that ultimately affected the condition of women in all classes of society. Ruthlessly controlling the rebellious (mostly) male workers, who were unable to get married until they had the means to sustain their wives (often quite late in life), the political authorities established brutal sexual policies that essentially gave men free sex in an attempt to calm their revolt. Rape, which had been illegal, was decriminalized during this period, both in France and Italy, allowing groups of men to enter in women’s homes, drag them in the streets without any consequences to their reputation while destroying women’s social status. These new sexual policies effectively redirected class antagonism towards the consolidating capitalist class into (male) antagonism against women.

The consequence that this targeted violence had on women was atrocious. Once raped, they could not regain their social status and were forced into prostitution or vagabondage. Furthermore, as Federici demonstrates, this rape culture leant an explicitly violent, misogynistic edge to the existing patriarchy, which degraded all women regardless of class. It also normalized violence against women, setting the ground for the witch hunts that not surprisingly started in the same period. This gender antagonism was also pursued by the authorities through the institutionalization of publicly managed and tax-financed brothels, which were opened, between the 1350-1450, in every town and village in Italy.

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83 Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 89-108.
84 Ibid., 99.
and France. Prostitutes could solicit their work even in front of churches, since it was seen as a public service.85

Yet another aspect of this crisis was the alliance of the nobility and the church to quash the growing demands of the emerging working class. All told, in this period the European ruling class launched a global attack that in the course of the following centuries drastically changed the whole planet. These historical changes set in place the foundation of the capitalist global economy, with its relentless seeking of new avenues of wealth while bringing new workers under its control. The iron grip seized by the European and English ruling classes in this period established a climate of terror, which enabled them to impose ever-more inhumane labor conditions and a global slave trade while justifying all of this via new “humanistic” philosophies that clearly “othered” Black workers, Native Americans, and all women.

Female Submission in Renaissance Italy

The kind of economic and political female power that had prevailed in previous centuries, had no place in Renaissance Italy, where political actions, directed from the state and the church to expropriate women from their rights, completely reformulated courtly manners and love. By imposing chastity upon women and establishing a climate of terror for any independent and unmarried women, who could convincingly be accused of witchcraft and subsequently killed, the culture of male domination was reinforced and brought to new depths.86

85 Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 49.
86 Federici argues that attributing an infant’s death to witches was an effective method by which the State and the Church enforced control upon women’s autonomy and reproduction, since infanticide became the
Within new literary currents, such as those led by Dante, a new social norm was constructed that saw love as detached from physical eroticism, and turned what was once a mutual erotic desire between a man and a woman into narcissistic spiritual love, in which the male poet contemplated his own feelings rather than those of his beloved, and that did not require the physical presence of his beloved at all. At the same time, as women were losing their commanding positions, women’s chastity came to be demanded and imposed in Renaissance courts, which caused a loss of their own rights to experience erotic love. This created a double standard not present before in mediaeval courts, which robbed women (and only women) of their lovers and imposed on them the requirements of chastity outside marriage, and solely procreative sex within marriage.

Crucial for understanding these complex new societal norms were the intertwined concepts of honor and reputation that began attaching to female sexuality. Whereas male honor was determined by various public and private expectations, mostly from other men, for women expectations in the public sphere were very limited. As a result, female honor was deeply intertwined with their chastity (which we could see as a kind of sexual “privacy”), meaning fidelity in marriage and absolute virginity before marriage. Sexual honor, however, was also important for men, but this honor was deeply connected to the ability to control “their” women. Accordingly, chastity, fidelity and virginity of daughters reflected on the honor of men and their family as a whole. All these different aspects

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m a in reason for which women were burned and tortured. See Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 178-186, 191-198; and Ruggiero, Boundaries of Eros, 70-88
87 Kelly, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” 38.
88 “Stated simply, it is the view that unchastity, in the sense of sexual relations before marriage or outside marriage, is for a man, if an offense, none the less a mild and pardonable one, but for a woman a matter of the utmost gravity. This view is popularly known as the double standard.” Thomas Keith, “The Double Standard,” Journal of the History of Ideas 20, no. 2 (1959), 195.
determined the loss of erotic openness for women, which was replaced by mere sexuality, an act deprived of pleasure and desire, performed only as a form of duty. Following I offer an analysis of the poem “I’ mi son giovinetta,” as a case study to show how these new customs manifested in poetry and in music.

“I’ mi son giovinetta,” Poetic Analysis

Boccaccio’s Decameron, considered one of the most important works of the fourteenth century, was written between 1349 and 1351. Here, in a text whose narrative spans ten days, Boccaccio offers an outlook on the ideal life of the aristocrat, based on courtly love, freedom, intelligence and shrewdness. The book depicts a group of young women and men who escape from the Black Death to live outside Florence, telling each other humorous stories with frequent references to the bucolic eroticism of the time. This can be observed, for example, in the conclusion of the IX day, which is a narration of a woman’s amorous encounter.

Written from the perspective of the female character, it opens with a description of an early spring day, embellished by erotic longings and the vivid description of floral surroundings that remind her of her lover. The coming together happens as a result of the longing of her heart for both a soul-opening and physically erotic exchange, developing into a romantic rendezvous. Her desire is very explicit as she explains how the pleasure derived from flowers is very similar to the pleasure of seeing her lover and that if he would be there, she would not be able to tell this story, but rather his smell and her sighs would
be testimony (and not her words). These sighs, which came out warm and pleasant, flow towards her love; and when he hears them, he comes towards her for enjoyment.\(^{90}\)

Io mi son giovinetta, e volentieri m'allegro e canto en la stagion novella, merzé d'amore e de' dolci pensieri.  

In prime of maidenhood, and fair and feat' mid spring's fresh foison chant I merrily: thanks be to Love and to my fancies sweet.

Io vo pe' verdi prati riguardando i bianchi fiori e gialli e i vermeil, le rose in su le spine e bianchi gigli, e tutti quanti gli vo somigliando al viso di colui che me amando ha presa e terrà sempre, come quella ch'altro non ha in disio che' suoi piaceri.  

As o'er the grassy mead I, glancing, fare, I mark it white and yellow and vermeil dight with flowers, the thorny rose, the lily white: and all alike to his face I compare, who, loving, hath me ta'en, and me shall e'er hold bounden to his will, sith I am she that in his will findeth her joy complete.

De' quali quand'io ne truovo alcun che sia, al mio parer, ben simile di lui, il colgo e lascio e parlimi con lui: e com'io so, così l'anima mia tutta gli apro e ciò che 'l cor disia: quindi con altri il metto in ghirlan della legato co' miei crin biondi e leggieri.  

Whereof if so it be that I do find Any that I most like to him approve, that pluck I straight and kiss with words of love, discovering all, as best I may, my mind; yea, all my heart's desire; and then entwined I set it in the chaplet daintily, and with my yellow tresses bind and pleat.

E quel piacer che di natura il fiore agli occhi porge, quel simil mel donache s'io vedessi la propria persona che m'ha accesa del suo dolce amore: quel che mi faccia più il suo odore esprimer nol potrei con la favella, ma i sospir ne son testimoni veri.  

And as mine eyes do drink in the delight which the flower yields them, even so my mind, fired with his sweet love, doth such solace finds, as he himself were present to the sight: but never word of mine discover might hat which the flower's sweet smell awakes in me: witness the true tale that my sighs repeat.

Li quai non escon già mai del mio petto, come dell'altre donne, aspri né gravi, ma se ne vengon fuor caldi e soavi e al mio amor sen vanno nel cospetto: il qual, come gli sente, a dar diletto di sé a me si muove e viene in quella ch'i' son per dir: “Deh! vien, ch'io non disperi.”  

And the sighs never come out of my chest, like those of other women, harsh and grave; they instead come out warm and pleasant, and flow towards my love. And when he hears them, he comes toward me for enjoyment, and comes/ singing [the song] I am about to sing for you: “Come, so I may not despair.”\(^{91}\)

Her unapologetic erotic desire expresses itself in a way that would be inconceivable two hundred years later, as I will demonstrate below. At play in this shift are various political aspects that saw female eroticism as a threat to the establishment of new economic


\(^{91}\) Italian and English translation provided by *Decameron Web*, project of the Italian Studies Department's Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown University. The translation of the last paragraph was provided by Dr. Emiliano Ricciardi (UMass, Amherst) via written communication.
forces. Furthermore, the discovery of the “New World” and the resulting politics overseas had a considerable role in reshaping women’s value within society. Following, I discuss some of the specific reasons, as mentioned above, behind the historical transformation in women’s social position.

**The Privatized and Gendered Other**

As I briefly discussed in the introduction, the theorization of the Other in contrast to the “self” played a major role in justifying the violence necessary to establish the conditions for capitalist accumulation during the Renaissance. In other words, in order for the European ruling class to collect enough power, it had to render illegitimate the claims the lower classes had on land, on the products of their labor and even on their own bodies. In fact, Silvia Federici argues that the tendency of the capitalist class was “to impose slavery and other forms of coerced labor as the dominant work relation, a tendency only limited by workers’ resistance.” This was true in Europe, where slavery was revived and extended, as well as in the new American colonies, and in Africa and the Caribbean. Federici argues that the subjugation of women must be placed within this historical context.

During the Black Death – a mass health crisis without historical precedent – the population decrease was partially blamed on low fertility in women and the unwillingness of youth to reproduce. This led to the introduction of policies promoting population growth, which by the 16th century had been already linked with a nation’s wealth. In this regard, women were obviously protagonists, in a way though that once more dehumanized them

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92 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 64.
93 Ibid., 66.
as possessors of the one, and only one virtue, namely giving birth. In an attempt to “encourage” women to perform this labor, capitalist reproductive policies were set in place, encouraging marriage while penalizing other ways of organizing life. Also, the family structure was given a new importance as the key institution for the transmission of property and for the reproduction of the work-force.

At the same time, the state intervened in supervising sexuality, procreation and family life. Under this new regime, women were required to register every pregnancy and were sometimes sentenced to death if their infant died before or after labor. This resulted in an increasingly oppressive persecution of women, who were executed in the 16th and 17th centuries for their seeming attempt to kill their infants. The persecution of witches was also centered around infanticide, set in the belief that witches were pursuing horrendous rituals with fetuses and giving them to the devil to feast on them. Women lost their control over reproduction, and their midwives were forced out of the birthing rooms, replaced by male doctors, who significantly prioritized the lives of the infant over that of their mothers. In this manner, women were denigrated to human machines, treated primarily as instruments for reproduction of the work-force and as “natural” breeding machines, functioning entirely outside their own control.

Yet another important component of women’s devaluation was their progressive exclusion from the public workforce. While many occupations – such as ale-brewing, butchery, and smithing – had traditionally been performed by both men and women, new laws regulating guild membership restricted women from participating in them. Some occupations that had traditionally been performed only by women, for example midwifery,

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94 Ibid., 88.
were criminalized and banned altogether. The sentiment spread around this time was that women were to be bound at home and work solely to support their husbands and to produce and care for children within the domestic walls. Furthermore, all the various forms of work they did do was automatically perceived as non-work, defined simply as “housekeeping,” which was unpaid, or paid very little when outside the home, so that it was never enough for women to live on their own. Relegating women to the private (meaning unwaged) sphere led to the complete domination of men, who were now perceiving “their” women as a natural resource that was their right to use as they saw fit. Furthermore, given the normalization of misogynist violence, women were unable to even walk alone on the streets, lest they risk being raped.

Women were discouraged from spending time with other female friends, and generally “encouraged” to remain within their husbands’ or fathers’ property. Furthermore, they were increasingly portrayed as inferior to men, for being too emotional, lustful and unable to govern themselves. In the Age of Reason, women were muzzled, prostitutes were whipped and caged, and women who were convicted of adultery were killed. Accused of pursuing devilish rituals, millions of women were killed, erasing indefinitely a whole world of feminine practices, systems of knowledge and spiritual traditions that had been present for thousands of years before.95

Through this systematic dehumanization women became the European Others, alongside Native Americans and Africans, all of whom experienced a climate of terror imposed by the establishment of an economic system benefitting the mercantile and capitalist classes on the backs of those considered non-human.

95 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 100-1.
Silenced Women, Glorified Singers

As a result of this new misogynistic culture, women were not only silenced but also relegated to very small lives, limited in most cases to two options, life in a convent or marriage. Margaret King explains how even in those extremely rare cases in which a wealthy young woman was fully educated in humanistic studies, upon reaching marital age she (or rather her father) had to make a choice between a man or the church, both of which would prevent her from continuing her studies.\textsuperscript{96} Despite all, some Italian courts still supported women’s musical abilities. For one thing, women musicians generally received smaller salaries and therefore it was cheaper to maintain them at the court. Nonetheless, despite the large-scale devaluation of women in society during this time, women musicians were often received with awe for their beautiful voices and incredible vocal capacities.

This contradictory attitude towards women prevails in the following centuries, during which they continued to be systematically excluded from wielding power, owning property and contributing to political or intellectual life, all the while also continuing to be powerful figures in the musical realm, specifically the realm of accompanied singing and later opera, where they became beloved divas. This has important ramifications later, which I explore in detail in the second chapter, in relegating women to their voices (and thus their bodies) and in the nineteenth-century tendency to view operatic repertoire as second-class in comparison with instrumental music. This was true especially in relationship to the canonized symphonic repertoire and “absolute music,” which was not coincidentally a male dominated arena. Following, I analyze the antecedent of operatic singing, discussing the role Ferrara played in shaping Italian taste towards soprano voices.

\textsuperscript{96} King, "Thwarted Ambitions," 280-300.
Throughout the sixteenth century, Ferrara quickly became renowned for its female ensemble, which was put together by Alfonso II D’Este in an attempt to maintain musical excellence at the court, despite the economic loss he had experienced as a result of an earthquake that destroyed half of the city. Even though he held an absolute policy of secrecy, his ensemble stirred the curiosity of other courts, leading even to episodes of espionage.\(^97\) By the mid sixteenth century, Ferrara was exceptional for its avant-garde and esoteric musical practices.\(^98\) These new styles were mostly shaped by the female singers led by the San Vito Convent maestre, as well as Luzzasco Luzzaschi and others, who entertained the duke and duchess for many hours every day. In 1579 Livia D’Arco, Laura Peverara and Anna Guarini, namely *il concerto delle dame*, established a new level of excellence, performing virtuosic singing while accompanying themselves on the lute and singing at *voci mutate* and *pari*.\(^99\)

*Il concerto delle dame* was created to entertain Margherita Gonzaga, a very young bride brought to Ferrara in an attempt to finally conceive an heir that would keep alive the D’Este duchy. Presumably these very private performances were pursued in an attempt to encourage Margherita and Alfonso’s erotic desire and ability to procreate. Each day the three singers, most often accompanied by Luzzaschi, offered long hours of vocal performances, which became increasingly refined, obtaining unprecedented levels of

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\(^97\) In contrast to today’s value of art as intrinsically connected to its popularity, in the Italian courts the idea prevailed that something was valuable only if kept secret and consumed by a very limited audience.


\(^99\) *Voci pari* meant that the individual parts of the work so designated shared an equal or nearly equal range, either high or low. The Italian term *voci mutate* implied that the scoring required mature male voices, usually with nearly equal ranges. See: Frank Carey, *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
virtuosity both in terms of speed and range. Composers at the court wrote music to emphasize the bravura of each singer and, at the same time, specialized coaches choreographed their physical movements, facial expressions and hand gestures to bring a visual element to the performance.  

What remains of these new musical practices is Luzzasco Luzzaschi’s publication of the Madrigali, (published in 1601, only after the death of Alfonso D’Este and with him the whole duchy). This collection offers only a glimpse of il concerto delle dame’s vocal endeavors, but lots can be observed regarding the usage of voices. Several of the madrigals composed by Luzzaschi used poems written by Giovan Battista Guarini. One of them is the seventh madrigal of this collection, “I’ mi son giovinetta,” which is inspired by the conclusion of the IX day of Boccaccio’s Decameron, which I discussed above. Guarini’s interpretation of Boccaccio’s text offers an opportunity to observe how the new societal norms imposed on women were reflected in poetry and by extension in music. Following I offer first the analysis of Guarini’s text in relationship to Boccaccio’s and then a musical analysis of Luzzaschi’s musical setting.

**Female Eroticism in Guarini and Luzzaschi**

The differences between the way this text functions in Bocaccio in comparison to its later setting in the madrigal reveals the changing perspective on women’s sexuality – indeed on sexuality in general – that characterized this historical transition period. The erotic amorous desire that the Decameron depicts as female becomes male in Guarini’s poem, without leaving a trace of the original longing. In other words, Boccaccio’s lady was

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free to fantasize about her lover, being very explicit in her erotic and warm invitations, which is in strong contrast with the customs governing female sexuality by the late 1500s. In fact, in Guarini’s poem the domination of male over female is expressed through the uninvited male courting the lady, who responds with a strong refusal accompanied by intimidation. This reflects two new societal norms: first, the newly established expectation that women should guard their chastity, and second, the spectacle of a woman essentially placing a curse on a man: “Fuggi se saggio sei/ Primavera non sarà mai (Flee in the beams of this/ Spring will never be for you). What would happen if he would not flee? That is left to the imagination of the reader but given the popular ideas that associated women with witchcraft and otherwise inhumane rituals, it is not unlikely that this “curse” was yet an emphasis to the intimidating powers of women, which based on the new societal belief, needed to be controlled and repressed by strong men for the wellbeing of all.

“I’ mi son giovinetta
e rido e canto a la stagion novella.”
Cantava la mia dolce pastorella,

Quando l’ali il cor mio
Spiegò come augellin subitamente,
Tutto lieto et ridente
Cantava in sua favella:
“Son giovinetto anch’io,
E rido e canto a più beata e bella
primavera d’Amore
Che ne begli occhi suoi fiorisce”, et ella:
“Fuggi se saggio sei”, disse, “l’ardore,
Fuggi ch’in questi rai
Primavera per te non sarà mai.”

“I am a young girl,
and I laugh and sing to the new season.”
Thus sang my lovely shepherdess,

When my heart suddenly
Spread its wings like a bird,
All lightness and laughter,
It sang in this way:
“I am also a young man,
And I rejoice and sing to the more
beautiful Spring of Love
That blossoms in her eyes”, and she said:
“Flee if you are wise, the passion,
Flee in the beams of this
Spring will never be for you!”

Luzzaschi’s musical setting is characterized by clear, linear and diatonic melodies, and manages to emphasize the meaning of the text while also creating space for the singers to showcase their vocal ability. Contrary to previous musical styles, which were composed
with a complex use of polyphony, here the poem is emphasized through the use of the word painting technique typical of the madrigals. Yet, it is not empty of the virtuosic flourishing ornamentation, but those always happen at cadences, without interfering with the meaning of the poem. These virtuosic moments are meant, as previously discussed, to emphasize the *bravura* of the sopranos and create a sense of awe within the small audience.

There are several things to consider within the madrigal. First of all, the voices proceed per imitation and are very close in their register, without following the traditional “hierarchy”; they alternate who is in the higher register.

![Figure 1, "I' mi son giovinetta," m. 1-10.](image-url)

This is quite unusual, given that generally in music of this era the soprano is in the high peaks and the alto normally stays in a lower register. Second, the musical texture presents
a lot of temporal freedom, with flourished intensifications at the end of phrases contrasted by widening sections on words such as “saggio” (wise) or “non sarà mai” (it will never be).

Given that these pieces were performed by women it is very likely that these performances offered a momentary escape from the customary, a space in which their eroticism could express itself, even though only through performing. This freedom is musically suggested through the use of eroticized chromaticism, such as on the word “ardore” (D-C#-D) in m.31 and a dominant seventh chord.

![Figure 2: “I’ mi son giovinetta” m. 24-33.](image)

The temporal freedom was yet another musical shift that could be associated with the female influence, especially when put in relationship to the rational structured polyphonic singing. This new style could represent the ideological perception of women as incoherent,
unstructured and rebellious to time and space; enabling *il concerto* to experience a new kind of freedom, shaped by an improvisatory flavor and unapologetic virtuosity.

Arguably, *il concerto delle dame*’s performances were channeling a kind of powerful erotic desire that could not be expressed in words anymore. Through the display of highly skilled musical ecstasy, which enchanted Italian courts and swayed audience’s taste towards the celebration of female vocal virtuosity, their singing and reception considerably transformed the way female singers and more generally soprano voices were received. Susan McClary argues that their musical practices had incredibly important consequences in Italians’ preference for high voices, divas and castrati, and that *il concerto*’s work enacted heterosexual eroticism and the liberation of the body in music, implying bodies “rubbing against each other” and freedom from the gravity and constraining rigor of the “introverted polyphony of the Renaissance,” liberating a perception of time that celebrated dynamic changes, accelerations, velocity and tailored virtuosity.101

Even so, the ladies constituting *il concerto delle dame*, though protected by Alfonso II D’Este, were still expected to behave according to the custom of their times. In fact, Alfonso encouraged them to get married as soon as possible, in order to consolidate their position at the court. This was done to prevent scandals, since at the time female musicians were seen as courtesans that were inevitably associated with prostitutes. Not being married was a deal breaker even for the most talented female musicians. Barbara Strozzi, for example, arguably one of the most important composers of the Renaissance, is underplayed

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because of her seemingly “promiscuous” behavior that still today overrides the value of her valuable body of work.\textsuperscript{102}

Even though it was ostensibly “secret,” \textit{il concerto delle dame} created an insatiable desire for soprano virtuosity among most of the Northern Italian courts, creating in the span of merely ten years a flourishing of women ensembles and female soloists, who conquered the market and were, by the end of the sixteenth century, generally paid significantly more than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{103} The demands of the audience for sopranos continued throughout the seventeenth century, with operatic divas showcasing their voices in lavish arias.

It appears contradictory to have the witch hunts and the flourishing of a musical trend dominated by female singers happening at the same time. In fact, whereas the accusation of witchcraft was affecting mostly poor women, by the end of the sixteenth century it started troubling middle- and high-class women as well. Furthermore, the dehumanization of women of “lower” ranks and elevation of noble singers to famous divas created yet another level of alienation between classes and particularly between women of different classes. This created antagonism, distrust and jealousy, thereby supporting the increasingly marked lack of solidarity among people.

\textsuperscript{102} I want to point out that these values are still very present today and shape the way Barbara Strozzi is written about. Although Wikipedia is not a scholarly source, it is still the medium through which many people learn first about a person’s accomplishment. Strozzi’s page, both in Italian and English, gives more emphasis to her sexual life than to her musical compositions. Furthermore, the painting chosen as her supposed portrait is yet again emphasizing her sexual availability rather than her musical talent. Clearly, the values that were set in place in the Renaissance are still present today when writing about these women who were such important musical figures, and the sexual judgment blinds people’s eyes to their real and worthy accomplishments.

\textsuperscript{103} This shift in the market happened very quickly as the popularity of female singers rose. Whereas in the mid of the sixteenth century women singers could be paid significantly less than their male counterparts, with the heighten demand for sopranos their pay increased while courts contended for the best female musicians.
The witch hunts continued until the mid-eighteenth century, with the peak between 1650 and 1750. Only when the accusations of witchcraft got out of control, with servants accusing their lords and children accusing their parents, did the authorities in all Europeans states intervene to put an end to the inquisitorial zeal. Soon witchcraft became a ridiculous legend, retroactively viewed as the dark work of ignorant individuals rather than of the state, and in the eighteenth century the European intelligentsia rewrote the story of the witch hunt by dismissing it as merely a product of medieval superstition.104

This gender history is directly relevant to the history of capitalism, in that the exclusion of women from participation in skilled waged labor, and their relegation to doing all the work of social reproduction for free, was a necessary requirement for the establishment of a capitalist system. This history is also more indirectly relevant, because it speaks to the general view of magic today, which is often dismissed as a form of ignorance but that formerly governed the lives of people and set society’s organic rhythm, organized around nature’s cycles. That magical connection between humans and nature needed to be severed in order to submit people to the work demands of early capitalism.

In the following chapter I analyze the main characters of Die Zauberflöte and specifically their symbological role within the opera. Wolfgang A. Mozart’s last opera offers an incredibly detailed record as mirror of the new emerging society, constructed on the backbones of people of color, women and some men.

104Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 205-206.
CHAPTER II

*DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE* AS REFLECTION OF SHIFTING IDEOLOGIES

“A birdman’s work is never done
From crack of dawn to set of sun
In unrewarded servitude
He labors to protect his brood”

Papageno

“Be steadfast, patient, and be silent”

The three spirits

In this chapter I propose an analysis of *Die Zauberflöte* tracing the ways in which the plot and its underlying meaning mirrors the important societal changes happening in concomitance with the establishment of capitalism. Throughout the chapter I demonstrate how this opera reflects the devastating effects that the establishment of capitalism had on BIPOC, women, and men of the lower-class. As we will see, the principles played out in the opera are beyond gender, rather they intertwine with class and race, reaffirming the absolute supremacy of enlightened white high-class men.

The opera is based on the two cosmic opposites of the moon and the sun, respectively associated with the *feminine* and *masculine* principles. The plot is played out through a perpetual antagonism between the two, who start as equals but end with one dominating the other. These two opposite principles are represented initially by the Queen of the Night, ruler of nature, the night and symbolically representing the moon, and Sarastro, the head of the Temple and worshipper of the sun. Both characters are monolithic, neither of them changes throughout the opera rather they stay in their oppositional roles while pursuing their own interests through Pamina and Tamino, Papageno and Monostatos. What changes throughout the opera, is the progressive intensification of the *masculine***’s
domination over the feminine. As we will see, this happens in various stages and through the intersection of gender, race, class, and spirituality.

Before offering a detailed analysis of these issues I will review the plot of the opera and discuss some of the main issues at play throughout the story. I then contextualize the opera within the contemporaneous socio-political landscape to show how it reflected many of the new prejudicial ideas about female customs, as well as emerging race theories and Western values of dominance over the Other. The shifting attitudes within Italian courts regarding the progressive silencing of women and the imposition of female chastity, as discussed in the previous chapter, became the new norm in all Europe and were consolidated more strongly in the centuries to follow. Surely those ideologies were supported in Vienna, where Wolfgang A. Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* was premiered in 1791. Following, I analyze in detail the characterization of the Queen of the Night and Monostatos, drawing parallels between their roles within the opera and their symbolic roles in a newly capitalistic society.

**Synopsis**

Tamino is a prince who inadvertently enters the realm of the Queen of the Night, where he is attacked by an enormous snake and saved by three ladies in the service of the Queen. Papageno enters the stage and claims to be the savior, until the ladies reappear and reveal his lie. Then, to prevent Papageno from further lying, they put a lock on his mouth, prohibiting him from speaking. Papageno is presented as an unsophisticated man, who does not know where he comes from, who his parents are, or where he lives. He does not really have an identity per se, rather he is interested in finding food, shelter and sex (all the
“animalistic” behaviors, according to Enlightenment views). On the contrary, Tamino knows his parents and his land, he is from noble blood and clearly identifies himself as superior to Papageno.

The Queen enters the scene and implores Tamino to save her daughter from a horrible kidnapper, Sarastro. Tamino immediately falls in love with Pamina’s portrait and agrees to save her. To help them in their task, the Queen gifts a golden flute (the titular magic flute) to Tamino and silver bells to Papageno. Tamino and Papageno leave the Queen’s realm and enter the Temple of the Sun. As they approach the temple, Tamino, committed to save Pamina from her kidnapper, is welcomed by a priest who assures him of Sarastro’s goodness. Tamino reveals that he learned about Sarastro, Pamina and the evilness of the temple from the tale of a woman. The priest responds that women chat a lot and that he should not believe their gossiping, but rather use his own better judgment. The young man is thus invited to join the temple and is reassured that everything will become clear. Convinced by Sarastro and the other priests, he embarks into a new journey to gain “wisdom” and “enlightenment.”

Pamina, who is imprisoned and under the surveillance of Monostatos, begs Sarastro to free her so that she can return to her mother. Sarastro instead tells her that her mother is an arrogant woman and that it is proper for a man to guide her heart (rather than her mother). Here he clearly states that every woman who does not have a man restraining her will necessarily overstep her bounds. Sarastro reveals that he kidnapped Pamina to save

her from an earthly kind of womanhood. Rather, it is his wish to initiate her and guide her
to the more elevated spiritual realm. This initiation cannot happen, however, on her own
but instead requires a male authority. This issue is quickly solved as Pamina immediately
falls in love with Tamino’s portrait, given her by Papageno.

Pamina and Tamino finally meet in person at the end of the first act, just before
Sarastro announces that Tamino needs to be initiated. The trials test Tamino’s and
Papageno’s ability to hold their tongue and remain silent when women attempt to talk with
them. Papageno, who is the servant of the Queen, chatters away both to himself and with
the three ladies; Tamino however proves his “superior identity” by maintaining the silence.

In the following scene, Monostatos approaches Pamina while she sleeps and
attempts to kiss her. The Queen intervenes and sends him away. He hides but stays and
listens to the conversation between the Queen and her daughter. Pamina declares her love
for Tamino and reveals his commitment to the temple of Sarastro. The Queen is enraged
and explains to Pamina her need to restore the balance by regaining the power that Sarastro
has to himself. She orders Pamina to kill Sarastro, but she refuses. The Queen sings her
famous rage aria and then leaves. Monostatos enters the scene, blackmailing Pamina. He
asks for intercourse in exchange for his silence regarding the Queen’s plot – Pamina refuses
because of her love for Tamino and Monostatos is sent away once more, this time by
Sarastro.

Pamina and Papagena are now presented to Tamino and Papageno, who are still in
vow of silence, but Papageno engages in flirtatious behavior and only Tamino holds his
tongue. Pamina, desperately trying to have her beloved talk to her, is convinced that
Tamino does not love her anymore and intimates to kill herself, since life without his love
is not worth living. She is saved by the three children spirits who reassure her of Tamino’s love. Reunited, Pamina and Tamino undergo the last trial together, and, protected by the music of the golden flute, they pass unharmed through fire and water. This triumph (their marriage) marks their full initiation to the Temple.

Subsequently, Papageno is in despair because he cannot find Papagena, and just like Pamina had before, he plans to take his life. He is similarly saved by the three children spirits who tell him to use his bells to call his beloved. Papagena appears and their celebration explodes in a duet of earthly love, as they sing about finding fulfillment in bearing children.

Monostatos, who has turned over to the darkness, appears with the Queen of the Night (who has promised Pamina’s hand to Monostatos) and the three ladies. Sarastro overcomes them and relegates them all to the eternal night. The he announces the sun’s triumph over the night, leading humankind into a new era of brotherhood and enlightenment.

**Beyond Gender: Feminization and Masculinization**

As clearly depicted throughout the plot, this opera is constructed to represent the progressive domination of the *masculine* over the *feminine*. In “Light Dispels Darkness,” Priscilla Stuckey explains that those principles do not necessarily fully represent gender, as the metaphor of light over the darkness does not automatically map onto the dominance
of all men above all women. Instead, the social order prescribed by the Temple of the Sun bestows authority to some men over other men and all women.\textsuperscript{106}

Women, who are viewed by the temple initiates as gossips and intellectually inferior to men, are depicted as incapable of controlling their tongues. Silvia Federici discusses this new derogatory view of talkative women, locating it as part of a larger process of degradation of women’s role within society during the seventeenth century. In fact, women were accused of being unreasonable, vain, wild and were especially blamed for their “female tongues” as instruments for insubordination and false accusations. Women who were accused of such behavior were sometimes even muzzled and paraded in the streets.\textsuperscript{107}

Papageno is thus a “feminized” character, also incapable of controlling his tongue, so much so that a lock is put onto his mouth during the first act. In the second act, Papageno admits his inability to stop chattering and compares himself to a woman, or as Stuckey argues, to the initiates’ construction of the \textit{feminine}. She argues that Papageno is feminized because of his inability to control himself, and because of his closeness to nature. Therefore, he is not representing the \textit{masculine}, who is spiritually whole, but is rather the \textit{feminine}, close to nature and animals. Stuckey explains that the duality of \textit{masculine}-sun and \textit{feminine}-moon is split through the intersection of gender and class. Gender here does not represent solely being a man or a woman, rather it assumes positive or negative connotation based on the principles of \textit{masculine} and \textit{feminine}, which are present in each individual. The true masculine principle is then embodied only by a spiritually whole, and

\textsuperscript{106} For further reading on how capitalism effected individuals differently based on gender and class, see: Holly Lewis, “Marxism and Gender,” in \textit{The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory and Marxism at the Intersection} (London, Zed, 2016), 93-166.

\textsuperscript{107} Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch}, 101.
specifically high-class individual. In contrast, the feminine principle is split in “good” and “bad” feminine, embodied presumably according to behavior, but as we will see, low-class men and all women, all those who are not able to hold their tongues, are femininized and are relegated to the dark, the realm of nature and of the erratic dominance of the Queen.108

Similarly, Monostatos (a Black slave) had never been truly in the light and cannot ever be perceived as an enlightened, masculine man. Aside from being constantly ridiculed, he continuously attempts to seduce Pamina, marking him as a monster, not so much because of his sexual desire, but rather for his attempts to overcome his outcast role. His love for Pamina is simple and apparently innocent; initially he mostly expresses it in unreciprocated love rather than direct violence. At the same time though he oversteps several boundaries that are societally unacceptable. First of all, he is Black and Pamina is white, a union that could not be accepted without the permission of the prince himself. Second, he is not only a servant but a slave, whereas Pamina is of royal descent.

Through the development of the plot, the perspective of his character continues to shift towards a progressive worsening of his image. Initially he is the servant of Sarastro, but after threatening to rape Pamina, Sarastro severely punishes him. Nevertheless, he does not learn his lesson and when Pamina is sleeping peacefully, he attempts once more to force himself onto her. After the Queen leaves and he blackmails Pamina, Sarastro intervenes and declares “I know that your soul is as black as your face.” This statement serves as a final repudiation and Monostatos leaves and tries to forge an alliance with the Queen. Monostatos is then exposed as a traitor and a lascivious being who could have never really walked in the light. The story implies that it is his actions that ultimately banish him

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from the temple, even though, in descriptions such as these, we can see that he never really was part of it. Sarastro compares him to the “evil mother” and because of his skin color being “black” he declares him less than human.109

The character of Monostatos is ambiguous; he is the only person in the entire opera who changes sides, being first the servant of Sarastro and then becoming allied with the Queen at the end. In addition to reiterating stereotypes about the disloyalty of non-white people, this reflects his conflictual position of being an outsider in both the realms of the Sun and the Moon. Sarastro repudiates him after Monostatos tries to sexually assault Pamina, declaring that he is not only dark skinned but that he also has a “black soul.”110 Sarastro pushes him back to the realm of the Night, more fitting because of his “darkness of skin and soul.”

Throughout the opera he is ordered around by Sarastro and tricked through the use of magical instruments that seem to affect only animals and Black men. This stereotypical representation of Monostatos and the other enslaved men depicts them as closer to animals than whites, a belief common to reigning race philosophies of the time. Voltaire, for example, claimed that Black people had the same desires, passions and needs as animals, and positioned himself, and all whites, as dramatically superior in intellectual features.

109 The belief in meritocracy – meaning, the attribution of economic power to individual talent and hard work – is a foundational aspect of capitalist ideology. Many scholars have demonstrated how this ideology collapses when intersected with class, gender and race as meritocracy does not consider the reality that some individuals have their way paved towards success through economic help, recommendation from influential people, etc. whereas others try to achieve the same kind of results without those advantages. This ideology supported capitalism because it is constructed on the individual and blames the individual and not the whole corrupted economic system for their failure. For more on meritocracy and the new form of social division it establishes see Anna Bull, Class, Control, and Classical Music (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 80; and Jo Litter, Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power, and Myths of Mobility (New York: Routledge, 2018).
Generally, the tendency throughout the eighteenth century was to demonstrate white superiority in order to justify the enslavement and dehumanization of Blacks. This, of course, had a very specific political and economic target as previously discussed, since it assured a tremendous amount of wealth collected in form of human commodification.

Aside from trying to demonstrate the inferiority of Africans and other colonized societies based on their closeness to nature, colonial ideologies pursued direct moral oppression of their sometimes polyamorous societal organizations or their worship of female deities.¹¹¹ Their presumed inferiority was also deduced from their apparent lascivious behaviors and sexual promiscuity, which were seen as intrinsically connected with their lack of intellectual abilities.¹¹² Parallels between the dehumanization of women and Africans can be drawn here as both categories were created based on pseudo-scientific and philosophic writing that upheld more material political and economic maneuvers. Monostatos’ portrayal reflects the racial theories developing at the same time in Vienna and more generally Europe.

Monostatos’ only aria within the opera, “Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden” (Everyone feels the joys of love) is supposed to be comical, as the music reveals, even though the text raises serious issues, such as his love for a white woman (which was mostly forbidden at the time), his Otherness and his isolation. Throughout his monologue he outcasts himself for his Blackness and celebrates rather whiteness and purity. Aside from disparaging

¹¹¹ For more about polyamorous societal organizations see: Christopher Ryan and Cacilda Jeth, Sex at Dawn: How We Mate, Why We Stray, and What it Means for Modern Relationships (New York: Harper, 2011).
himself, he is very explicit in his sexual desire for Pamina and in the way he connects that desire to her whiteness.

Alles fühlt der Liebe Freuden,  
Schnäbelt, tändelt, herzt und küsst,  
Und ich soll' die Liebe meiden,  
Weil ein Schwarzer hässlich ist!  
Bin ich nicht von Fleisch und Blut?  
Immer ohne Weibchen leben,  
Wäre wahrlich Höllenglut!

Drum so will ich, weil ich lebe,  
Schnäbeln, küssen, zärtlich sein!  
Lieber guter Mond, vergebe,  
Eine Weiße nahm mich ein,  
Weiß ist schön! Ich muss sie küssen;  
Mond, verstecke dich dazu!  
Soll' es dich zu sehr verdrießen,  
O so mach' die Augen zu!

Everything feels the joys of love,  
Bills and coos, dallies, cuddles, and kisses,  
And I should have avoided love,  
Because a black person is ugly!  
Was I then not given a heart?  
Always to live without a little wife,  
Would truly be the flames of hell!

Thus, I want, because I am living,  
To bill and coo, kiss, be tender!  
Dear good moon, forgive me,  
A white woman captivated me,  
White is beautiful! I must kiss her;  
Moon, hide yourself for this!  
Should it vex you too much,  
Oh, then close your eyes!

This aria not only portrays Blackness as “ugly” and outcast, but also symbolizes the stereotypical perception of Black men as incapable of sexual restraint and obsessed with white women.\(^{113}\)

In “Monostatos: Racism in *Die Zauberflöte,*” Steffen Lösel points out that Monostatos’ reference to love as intrinsically connected to being alive, is portrayed in a manner that is more animalistic than humanistic.\(^{114}\) This idea is fully in line with the philosophers’ conception of Africans as more animals than humans.

Finally, there is yet another rupture, not based solely on gender values. Sarastro individualizes the capacity of love as a human value, but it clearly is *masculine* and obtainable only through the initiation of the temple. Stuckey emphasizes that the female

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\(^{113}\) Lösel, “Monostatos: Racism in *Die Zauberflöte,*” 275-324.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., 282.
gender is also split between *masculine* righteousness and *feminine* evil. In contrast to her evil, passionate mother, Pamina has proved herself worthy of the initiation because she resists Monostatos’ sexual advances and then rejects her mother’s intimidation and refuses to murder Sarastro. Her righteousness and *masculinity* are affirmed through the perpetual refusal of the darkness, here represented by the Queen of the Night and Monostatos. Though Pamina is not a man, she represents rather the masculinized “good feminine,” which has become worthy of the light because she has shown virtue and proven her control over the body. But Pamina is a woman, and her specific kind of womanhood transcends through her submission to the order of the sun and Tamino. This establishes Pamina as a woman who is *masculine* because of her virtue, but it does not make her a man. Tamino and Sarastro represent the enlightened *masculine*, because they are men, and they are noble, white and in full control of their earthly desires.

**The Scientific Revolution and a New Form of Power**

Stuckey argues that the scientific revolution had an important role in establishing a new rhetoric of domination. Whereas the sun and the moon had been perceived for centuries as two diametrically opposed cosmos, the new Copernican and Galilean revolutions had discovered how the earth was turning around the sun (and not vice versa) and how the moon was infinitesimally smaller than the sun. The sun, she explains, was recognized as the central power of the universe and source of light, whereas the moon, historically representative of the *feminine*, lost its position of power. Therefore, the sun and
the moon, as well as light and darkness, assumed a new hierarchal relationship both in the
esoteric traditions and within scientific speculations.115

As I explored in the introduction, the period between the Middle Ages and the
eighteenth century was characterized by a major reorganization of power. The newly
constructed ideas of gender and race, which supported a dynamic of structural domination,
were put in place to support a new economic system based on the exploitation of “free”
labor. The perception of Blacks, women and lower-class men as dark, as depicted in Die
Zauberflöte, mirrors the societal organization that progressively elevated high-class white
males as the representer of all culture.

The intensification of a system based on extraction of “free” labor in human form,
limited only by the resistance of the enslaved to inhumane work, characterized this same
period, as colonialism was increasingly setting foot in the Americas and Africa. Similarly,
Federici demonstrates that violence against women was essential in establishing control
over Native populations and Africans, whose spiritual practices often included goddesses,
powerful female figures and fertility rituals. Here the parallel to the opera is evident: the
enslaved Black servant Monostatos, the lower-class Papageno and the overly emotional
Queen of the Night are the antagonists to be dominated for the wellbeing of humanity. The
cult of the goddess and the matriarchal power need to be suppressed and extinguished for
the empire of the sun god to flourish.

In Europe during this time, the dehumanization of Africans, Native Americans and
women was societally justified through the creation of an imaginary horrific savage, one
who was practicing cannibal rituals and celebrating and worshipping the devil. Soon

refiguration of the so-called savages practicing these rituals spread all over Europe, stimulating the idea that savages were in need of control and salvation through Christianity and work discipline. Associated with these images were also the erotization of the Other, which created a strong conflict within “cultured” men. (This issue is still relevant today, and although seduction is not attributed to witchy powers, rape and sexual violence against women are often not taken seriously in courts or blamed on women’s behavior and apparel choice).

Alongside the institutionalization of opera, which offered opportunities to reaffirm the white European dominance over exotic/otherworldly characters, came the normalization of tonality as the preferred system to organize sounds. Timothy Taylor argues that the need to form some sort of intellectual image of the New World, without having concrete information about Native peoples’ actual lives, enabled intellectuals to imagine a world dominated by sexual promiscuity, monstrosities and cannibalistic rituals. Taylor argues that the establishment of tonality as the norm enabled composers to create an exotic musical rhetoric to represent not only Otherness, but to also aesthetically evoke the satisfaction of a hierarchical system. Furthermore, he argues that tonality arose to reign supreme in Euro-Western music because it provided a specific spatial organization, both geographically and psychologically, that established margins and centers, and that embodied the pleasures of both exploring “exotic” other worlds and “returning home.”

In other words, it provided a solid musical organization based on a specific harmonic hierarchy that provided an identifiable base or norm (the tonic), from which music

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exoticism representing the Other would be easily depicted (in the form of “distant” or “alien” key areas).\textsuperscript{117}

In this same period, the theorization of the mind/body split had a strong influence in establishing a class and gender distinction between the Other and the Self. White high-class males were progressively establishing themselves as the possessors of intellectual capacities of higher caliber. Selfhood and intellect were constructed as in opposition to the body, creating a heavy distinction between male/intellectual beings and women/BIPOC as corporeal.

**The Gendered Mind/Body Split and the Mechanization of the Body**

The spreading of Mechanical Philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries played a major role in the dehumanization of the Other. This philosophy aimed to deconstruct a human being and demonstrate that an innate split is ever present, one that separates the intellect from the body. Instead of challenging the idea itself, I draw on Federici’s work to discuss how this ideology was used and enforced to support the new work demands under emerging capitalism, as well as to justify a new class-based wage labor system.

The desacralization of the body and the emphasis on the connection between the intellectual elite and greater humanness created the perfect opportunity to further emphasize a hierarchy of power. The aim was to make bodies easily controllable and

\textsuperscript{117} It is not coincidental the language used to describe the tonal organization of pitches, the tonic, being the “home key,” and the dominant who always tends to the tonic “home.” The “inevitability” of the tension between dominant and tonic, supported by the sub-dominant is seen, by the seventeenth century, as natural. Similarly, the use of Others for the profit of the dominant Selves and the return of the produce to the European “home” was naturalized and perceived as inevitable.
manageable, maximizing their ability to work. Descartes and Hobbes are the fathers of this ideology and speak of the body as an automaton. They refer to human beings as living machines and discuss death as simply the breaking of a tool. Furthermore, Hobbes’ view of human nature was extremely negative; he refers to it as selfish, competitive, and murderous. His ideas were used to justify the “naturalness” of capitalism in eighteenth-century political economy; his view of human nature as brutally competitive and self-serving can make capitalism seem like an ideal system for organizing the interactions between human beings.

Whereas Descartes saw the body (as well as nature) as a “Great Machine,” obedient to the physical laws set in motion by God’s will, Hobbes advances this idea a bit further, using the mechanization of the body to justify the domination of the state over individuals. What emerges from their ideologies is the dehumanization of individuals, who are now depicted as working machines, perceived as regular and automatic engines, suiting perfectly the demands of the growing capitalist work-discipline.

Although this ideology affected both genders, fostering a climate of hatred and establishing sexual pleasure as necessary exclusively for the species’ survival, the successful establishment of this ideology (namely nature and the body as machines) was a two-fold loss for women, who were perceived on the one hand as a natural resource for free sex and on the other as the reproducing machines for the wealth of the nation. Furthermore, it prescribed as a norm a specific form of sexuality effective only for the

118 Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 139.
119 This is particularly relevant if contextualized within the vastly popular belief that the body is sacred and holder of magical powers. Magic needed to be eradicated in order to impose order and receive predictable behavior from workers. Thus, nature was seen as a great machine that could and should be controlled by humans, likewise the body stripped of its magical association could be subjugated and used for profitable work. Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 141-5.
120 In his Meditations (1641) Descartes insists “I am not this body.”
violent/insensitive male who is willing (and at the same time socially required) to force his own pleasure onto another human. Here I want to point out that the cost of the instrumentalization of sex caused an insurmountable loss for any gender, even though the cost for women, and anyone seen as sexually “deviant,” was the highest.

Heterosexual sex and domination between genders was, according to Susan McClary, recorded in music through specific narratives as well as metaphorically in sonata form, and was consumed on operatic as well as symphonic stages. Following, I discuss how the characterization of the Queen of the Night in Die Zauberflöte mirrors several of the topics so far discussed, such as the hatred and fear of older women in power, the silencing of women, and the mechanization of the female body and the transformation of older women into witches.

Rage and Madness in a Suppressed Matriarch

As we have seen, the Queen of the Night has a complex and conflictual role within Die Zauberflöte. She is first depicted as a loving mother who tries to save her daughter from her kidnapper, then another side of her is revealed, one that is intimidating, emotional and erratic. In the first act, when she evokes the help of Tamino in rescuing her poor daughter, who has been kidnapped by Sarastro, she sings “O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn.” Here we (the audience) are led to feel compassion and identify with the pain of a desperate mother too weak to help her daughter herself.

O zittre nicht, mein lieber Sohn,
du bist unschuldig, weise, fromm
Ein Jüngling so wie du, vermag am besten,
dies tiefbetrübe Mutterherz zu trösten.

Oh, don't tremble, my dear son!
You are innocent, wise, pious;
A youth like you is best able
to console this deeply troubled mother's heart.
Zum Leiden bin ich auserkoren,
denn meine Tochter fehlet mir.
Durch sie ging all mein Glück verloren,
ein Bösewicht, ein Bösewicht entfloß mit ihr.
Noch seh’ ich ihr Zittern
mit bangem Erschüttern,
ich ängstliches Beben,
ich schüchternes Streben.
Ich musste sie mir rauben sehen.
"Ach helft! Ach helft!" – war alles was sie sprach
allein vergebens war ihr Flehen,
denn meine Hilfe war zu schwach.

Du, du, du wirst sie zu befreien gehen,
du wirst der Tochter Retter sein!
ja! du wirst der Tochter Retter sein.
Und werd’ ich dich als Sieger sehen,
so sei sie dann auf ewig dein.

I am chosen for suffering
For my daughter is gone from me;
Through her all my happiness has been lost,
A villain, a villain fled with her.
I can still see her trembling
with fearful shaking,
her frightened quaking,
her timid effort.
I had to see her stolen from me.
"Oh help! Oh help!" – was all that she said
But in vain was her pleading,
For my powers of help were too weak.

You, you, you will go to free her,
You will be my daughter’s savior.
Yes, you will be the rescuer of my daughter.
And if I see you return in triumph,
Let her then be yours forever.

“Denn meine Hilfe war zu schwach” (For my powers of help were too weak) is emphasized musically through a long painful descending scale and a time suspension on “war” (was) with a concluding cadence on “schwach” (weak). Her invocation for Tamino’s help is “appropriate” and “innocent,” fully fitting into the proper image of a woman/mother. Suddenly, though, the whole scene shifts radically, just after having portrayed herself as weak and docile, the Queen reveals another side of herself. She gives orders to Tamino and seems to already celebrate the success of her daughter’s rescue. Used to being obeyed she does not even consider the possibility of Tamino’s refusal, rather she is in full control, so much so that she decides to promise Pamina’s hand to Tamino. This commitment seems out of place with the docile mother but fully fits her matriarchal goddess-like ruling position.

Musically, the last section of this Aria, starting with “du, du, du” clearly foreshadows her later rage Aria “Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen.” The motherly sweetness and despair characterizing the first and second stanzas, are suddenly replaced by a commanding queen/woman. A new sense of urgency, created through incessant eight-
and sixteen-notes at the strings, set the tone for the long virtuosic and melismatic passage under the word “dann” (then) just before “ewig” (forever). This reveals a totally different side of her character, presaging the bird-like arpeggios which are so famously celebrated in her later aria.

The queen/woman is here intimidating, powerful and aware of her authority; she orders and is used to being obeyed. None of the sweetness remains, rather her virtuosic arpeggios and sixteen-notes scales express an almost otherworldly power and a joy that is not celebratory but fierce and intimidating. Her joy is for herself only, her display of power is not intended to please or attract a man, it is for herself only.121

Her return in the second act is anticipated by thunders and delayed by a short scene in which Pamina lays sleeping. Monostatos, approaches her, unknowingly observed by the queen. As previously discussed, he represents a whole set of racist stereotypes, being Black and “ugly,” in love with a “pure, white” woman (Pamina) who will never return his feelings.

As soon as he approaches Pamina, presumably to sexually assault her, the Queen appears accompanied by majestic thunders and immediately drives Monostatos away. This moment is key to her character as it contradicts her first aria. The helplessness she is in great pain to express to Tamino is here absent, rather she does the very thing that she claimed not to be able to do, she “saves” Pamina and then orders her to kill Sarastro. Here she reveals a larger desire; she is not interested so much in saving her daughter as to gain the power of the sun and destroy Sarastro. Pamina refuses and her rage explodes.

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She sings “Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen,” where she alternates between stages of rage expressed through intimidating words and wordless moments of virtuosic bird-like song. This rhythmical figuration is square and rigid, transmitting her firmness in her anger, and has none of the typical feminine characteristics. Furthermore, the switching back and forth between words and high-pitched wordless arpeggios appear un-natural and forced.

Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen,
Tod und Verzweiflung flammert um mich her!
Fühlt nicht durch dich Sarastro
Todesschmerzen,
So bist du meine Tochter nimmermehr.

Verstoßen sei auf ewig,
Verlassen sei auf ewig,
Zertrümmert sein auf ewig
Alle Bande der Natur
Wenn nicht durch dich!
Sarastro wird erblassen!
Hört, Rachegötter,
Hört der Mutter schwur!

The vengeance of hell boils in my heart,
Death and despair flame about me!
If Sarastro does not through you feel
The pain of death,
Then you will be my daughter nevermore.

Disowned may you be forever,
Abandoned may you be forever,
Destroyed be forever
All the bonds of nature,
If not through you
Sarastro becomes pale! (as death)
Hear, Gods of Revenge,
Hear a mother's oath!

Carolyn Abbate argues that the treatment of her voice implies a dismissal of her powers and her progressive transformation into a mechanical creature, an automaton. She represents a mutating figure, a character that moves from human to machine, who can be controlled and dismissed because of her insanity and ambiguous selfhood.122

Within a larger context she represents the last female monarch, now a figure of the past who has been deployed and dominate by patriarchal power. Her characterization as irrational, independent and intimidating reinforce the idea that she, as a woman, is in need of male control to restrain and guide her. Left without a husband (as Pamina’s father, we

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learned, died), she loses her judgement and becomes obsessed with power, so much so as to oppose herself against a male monarch. Here it is implied and is explicated in dialogues between Sarastro and his servant that women need a man by their side to keep them from turning into monstrous, violent creatures, so men put themselves in the dominating position of establishing order. 123

This characterization of the Queen is again drawn from the political changes that shaped a newly misogynistic and sexist society. The monarch has an anti-climactic journey, from powerful Queen to an old witch who can be easily deposed. Her journey is also one from mother/wife to monstrous old women, who necessitates control or death. This reflects the new ideologies that cast widowed, independent women as dangerous and older women as disgusting. Silvia Federici explains how women, especially those who rebelled to the working demands of early capitalism, were accused of witchcraft to conveniently dispose of them and publicly instill a lesson to the communities they were from. She also discusses how women’s value was progressively linked to youth and their ability to bear children. The commodification of women as reproductive machines outcast older women, who once having completed their tasks as mothers, were seen as useless and even dangerous for the wellness of the economy.

In the opera, Sarastro is initially the Queen’s opposite, he represents the sun, the rational the orderly and the masculine (and the state). Throughout the story though, Sarastro becomes increasingly stronger, collecting allies and overturning Tamino and Pamina while at the same time disparaging the Queen. She is being ridiculed for holding onto a position

123 For more about the interconnection between women’s honor and marriage during the Renaissance see, Guido Ruggiero, “‘More Dear to Me Than Life Itself:’ Marriage, Honor, and a Woman’s Reputation in the Renaissance” in Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of the Renaissance (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57-87.
of power and is casted as a “bad feminine” because she is not accepting the new, “enlightened” order.¹²⁴

**The Representation of Proper Love**

Clearly triumphant, the music celebrating Pamina’s and Tamino’s victory and initiation, reveals the union of “the noble couple” as the ultimate celebration of love. Their success comes from their acknowledgement of their differences, Tamino led by reason, Pamina by love. She is the guide in the final trials, leading them through fire and water, while Tamino plays the magic flute, protecting them from death. Pamina knows her place as the holder of love, passion and sexuality, the one who can navigate through the perils and survive, being protected by her man’s reason and wisdom. Tamino also needs Pamina as reason without passion is empty. Both are then incomplete and in need of each other, but Pamina is the one who is portrayed as weaker; without the protection of Tamino, she would be overcome by passion (like her man-less mother). Instead, walking next to each other, she embodies her sphere of emotion and sexuality. Tamino’s initiation transforms him into a particular kind of man, one that is enlightened and wise, combined with the renunciation of the physical plane.¹²⁵ The musical fanfare explodes, and the noble couple is welcomed in the temple of the sun by their brotherhood. Their marriage signals a new, more perfect union, one that is not equal but rather complementary.

Pamina has been purged of her arrogance and “bad femininity” that threatens male authority and control through the trials and the love for Tamino. Her place, as a high-class

¹²⁴ For more about the dichotomy between “good” and “bad” feminine see: Anna Bull, *Class, Control and Classical Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 146-8.
woman, is one of eternal marriage with the light (the man) and through her initiation she has learned her proper place, as subsidiary to her man. Whereas Tamino’s initiation is from child to man, Pamina’s initiation is from “bad feminine” to “good feminine” that being represented by her chastity, her commitment to her love for Tamino, and her rejection of her monstrous mother.

Immediately the scene shifts, Papageno’s theme returns, this time quicker and anxious. Papageno is desperate and thinks he has lost Papagena. As suggested by the three spirits he plays the magical silver bells. The bells symbolize the return to the natural feminine realm, rather than the masculine sun. Papageno is not initiated, he does not change throughout the opera and does not have a teleological journey of evolution. He starts and ends as bird-man, his journey is not one of growth but rather a confirmation of his lower rank and earthly desires. Papagena enters the scene, both are playful and rejoice in their union, but lose their words, rather than properly speaking they sing “pa-pa-pa-pa.” Their duet starts with an animal-like language. Clearly their wish is to engage in “earthly” love and celebrate their union through the bearing of many children. They do not aspire to spiritual love, wisdom or enlightenment, they recognize their place and embody their reproductive duties.

Clearly depicted is the split between high- and low-class women: Papagena and Pamina are not the same kind of woman. Papagena is not and could have never been initiated to the temple of the sun, her duties are “earthly.” Not coincidentally she is often staged as a prostitute, as a woman who is interested in sexual pleasure and for whom marriage meant bearing many children. Pamina is diametrically opposite; she is worthy of the initiation because she has proved that her virtue is far superior to earthly matters, she
is not seeking sexual pleasure or power, her guide is her love and commitment to Tamino. Marriage for her is a spiritual, enlightened union with Tamino. Pamina and Papagena represent the respectively the chaste dutiful wife (good feminine) and the whore (bad feminine). Class is at play here, even though virtue is depicted as intrinsically related to one’s behavior. Silvia Federici and Guido Ruggieri clearly demonstrated how low-class women were commodified as sexual and reproduction machines for the production of the new working force. Middle- and high-class women instead affirmed their superiority through not engaging in “promiscuous” behavior and waiting for their marriage. It is also important to point out that wealth played an important role here: middle- and high-class women could refrain from prostitution because they had economic support from their families. Low-class women, who were the most effected from the new laws that devalued their traditional forms of labor and excluded them from many of the guilds they had traditionally occupied (as discussed in the introduction), were forced into prostitution.\footnote{Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch}, 21-31.}

Pamina enters the temple because she is wealthy, white and is loved and supported by a noble man. For Papagena that was never an option, she is part of the groundwork necessary for the middle- and high-class wealth and cannot ascend.

The theme of Monostatos returns, he enters the scene intimating silence and is quickly followed by the Queen and the three ladies. Weirdly, the Queen just repeats what Monostatos says, first the intimation of silence, then his command “your daughter must be my wife.” The queen reassures him; she will keep her word and her daughter will be his wife. Roaring and thunder explode, Monostatos is scared, but so are the Queen and the
Ladies. This clearly foreshadows what is about to happen, the Queen loses her powers, and the thunders are not symbolic of her power anymore, rather they are turned against her.

Figure 3: Final invocation of the Queen of the Night

The final invocation of the Queen’s power has a quality of a funeral march with the dotted rhythm and the monotone and homorhythmic chant. The scene is not really serious though, as the strings still respond to the “religious” voices with the comical theme associated with Monostatos. The last measures of their invocation resemble a chorale, which is quickly interrupted by the thunders and disruption of the strings. This contraposition reveals the societal perception of women who pursue power and Black men who desire white women; both are outcasted, ridiculed and banished in name of the light. Their death comes from the explosion of thunders, as though even the darkness and nature oppose them. In this way those very realms that had been traditionally held within feminine powers (moon, night,
water), rebel against her and cast her, her ladies, and the Moor into eternal darkness. This represents symbolically the end of the celebration of the physical, natural world, which must defer to celebration of rationality. Sarastro enters the scene, accompanied by a flaming sun, rising on stage. Often Pamina and Tamino are staged at the center of the sun, symbolizing their union as the ultimate expression of enlightenment.

In conclusion, \textit{Die Zauberflöte} offers a metaphorical account in music of the material, economic, and political changes occurring simultaneously in Europe and Americas. The symbolism of the opera clearly reflects a change of value, characterized by an ostracization of all women, people of color and lower-class white men, and an opportunity for wealthy men and (properly behaved) wealthy women to rise to their dutiful superior place. The symbolic initiation to the temple of the sun represents the transition to the new persona, one that knows its proper behavior, one that perpetuates violence against the Other in an attempt to affirm their superiority.

The opera’s representations of women, low-class white men, and racialized Others, reflect the historical dehumanization of individuals through the witch hunts, the African and Native American’s enslavement under the hand of white Europeans, and the transformation of lower-class people into working machines. These large themes of violence and domination are established in opera and recorded in instrumental music. This is true especially in Germany and Austria, where nationalistic ideas were constructed a few decades later, on the inferiority of non-Germans; these themes emerge within the ideology of “absolute music” and the celebration of German symphonic repertoire as the ultimate representation of human development. The teleological journey of \textit{Die Zauberflöte}, in which the hero needed the \textit{good feminine} to overcome the evil and obtain enlightenment,
becomes, in the span of less than a hundred years, a solo journey of the Romantic hero, who now embodies both masculine and feminine principles and has freed himself of the need of women to complete himself. Rather, the journey is represented by those principles within himself and all women are within a different, lower, earthly plane.

Building on this journey, I trace the development of the Western musical canon and the exclusion of women and BIPOC from it. I argue that given the socio-political landscape of Europe, class, gender and race need to be considered as major factors at play, when trying to understand the canon’s formation.
CHAPTER III
DECOMPOSING THE CANON

The canonization of a specific eighteenth- and nineteenth-century repertoire became a matter of musicological inquiry in the last fifty years, and several studies have been published presenting very different ideas on how certain musical pieces came to be part of the Western musical canon.127

This analysis is directed towards depicting what scholars’ thought were key factors in the selection of “great masterpieces” and, more importantly, toward discerning the reasons behind the absence of women and BIPOC from the canon. Many critiques of the racism and sexism at the heart of the canon have been leveled by such scholars over the years, and various approaches toward “solving” these problems have been suggested. Here I critically engage with feminist musicology and specifically the ways in which they attempted to diversify or widen the appreciation for women and BIPOC composers. Doing so I expose some of the ways their arguments unintentional deploy some of those ideologies they are at great pain to dismantle.

I want to make clear that my work is not directed towards expanding the canon, but rather is engaged in presenting a study that considers the establishment of capitalism as an important factor in the canon’s exclusivity. Part of my argument, in fact, is that expanding or diversifying the canon will not solve the issue at stake. Here I intertwine feminist Marxist

studies with feminist musicology to expose some of the hidden ideologies at work in the latter and I offer counterarguments that take into account a wider array of political and economic factors than has feminist musicology.

I will first lay out some of ways the history of canon formation has been understood by scholars such as Joseph Kerman and William Weber. Following, I examine the ways feminist musicology of the 1990s understood the canon formation, mostly drawing from the work of Marcia Citron. Here I focus specifically on women’s exclusion from the canon and the conflictual reception of their creative work. I also discuss the gendered conception of creativity in relationship to the idea of “genius.” As we will see, this conceptualization was linked to the relegation of women to the physical sphere and the glorification of men to a god-like status.

After this, I draw connections between the gendered musical rhetoric in the canon and the use of sonata form. “Absolute music” becomes the centerpiece of this inquiry, brought forth through the work of Susan McClary and Marcia Citron. This leads me to discuss German nationalism and the role that it played in establishing musicology as a discipline. I examine a foundational text of the discipline, On the Musically Beautiful, and the ways in which Eduard Hanslick reaffirms some of the sexist and racist ideologies that became mainstream through the establishment of capitalism.

In conclusion, drawing from the works of Angela Davis and Sarah Ahmed (among others), I discuss why diversifying the canon and advocating for multiculturalism does not solve the issue at stake, and how decolonizing the discipline would require a whole reorganization of musical institution and even more so, the end of capitalism.
Critics, Performers and Canon Formation

In nineteenth-century Europe a new impulse emerged, one that sought a historical dimension for cultural work. Just as literary work was canonized and organized within specific sets of value, a similar need materialized in music.\(^{128}\) This attempt is sometimes described as a desire to create a “museum of music,” in other words a musical culture legitimized by a historical and teleological sense of development.\(^{129}\) How did this happen, and who shaped these discourses? Several contemporary scholars have undertaken to tell the story of canon formation, often coming to contradictory conclusions.

Musicologists such as Joseph Kerman have tended to tell the story of canon formation by focusing on nineteenth-century cultural preoccupations like the role of the performer in constructing musical meaning, and the fetishizing of genius and originality. Further, Kerman posits that the concretizing of the canon occurred most fully in the late nineteenth century, as a means of defending music from what was seen as the threat of modernism. Kerman does not really engage with issues of power, and certainly not with the racial and gendered exclusivity of the canon.

By contrast, historian William Weber tells a very different story of canon formation, one that de-centers both Romanticism and Germany from the conventional musicological understanding of where and why the canon came to be. Weber instead insists that we must take a much longer view of history if we are to fully comprehend all the social and cultural forces that led to the slow establishment of canons over time (He is also unique in insisting that there are multiple canons, not just one). Weber looks at the establishment


of a “pedagogical” canon in the sixteenth century and examines the ways newer performance repertoires came into conflict and dialogue with the growing fixation on the notion of “classics” in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, Weber does analyze canon formation with respect to the ideologies it was meant to uphold, yet he, too, avoids engaging with the way canon formation deliberately excluded women and racialized Others.

Literary theorist John Guillory directly addresses the way canonization serves power, seeing it as a process through which “socially defined minorities are excluded from the exercise of power or from political representation” and identifying the ideology of “literature as quasi-scripture as a process of social exclusion,” specifically the exclusion of female, black, ethnic, or working-class authors from the canon.130 Although Guillory discusses the canonization of literature rather than music, many of his points speak to the process in music as well. He argues that using gender as a hypothetical criterion of exclusion from the canon is not enough to explain women’s exclusion from the canon, as confirmed by the existence of canonical women authors before the revisionary movement of the 1990s.131 He clarifies that although the impulse to retrieve great women’s work is noble, it is more important to understand how institutions and other means of education have systematically prevented women’s access to the means of cultural production.

In this regard, Silvia Federici’s analysis of the dehumanization of women is particularly relevant, as she clearly traces the process by which female creativity and power

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131 Ibid., 17.
was violently suppressed and erased, while constructing a new female identity fully subservient to her male counterpart.

Whereas Weber’s analysis is wide in its scope and traces the canon formation back to the Middle Ages, his interventions do not take into account the newly misogynistic gender discourse and divisions of labor that were reshaping European society during the same period, and thus, his analysis of some of the power relations that contributed to canon formation is incomplete. By freeing ourselves from the “authority” he does not consider that the “foremost authority” is not only imperialist but also sexist, limiting considerably the scope of his work. Intentionally or not, he does not consider the establishment of capitalism, happening in England and Europe at the same time his analysis takes place, and that exclusion prevents him from considering a whole other set of factors that played out in the construction of the canon.

Although effective in many ways, his horizontal approach to the study of society at the same time of the canon formation lacks consideration of three major processes, namely the great witch hunts, colonialism and the establishment of early capitalism. The emergence of the canon represented more than the birth of empirical thought and the relinquishing of traditions; it also served to represent and establish musical supremacy that reflected the values of a very selected group of people and their values.

**Women Composers: Creativity and Professionalism**

As discussed in the introduction, the 1990s saw a proliferation of feminist musicological studies, led by the impulse to diversify the discipline and reevaluate the role women played in the history of music. Alongside the work of Susan McClary (among
others), who offered new paths for specifically feminist criticism in music, another body of research emerged, which was led by the desire to enlarge the Western musical canon to welcome the works of women. However, although this discourse was undertaken with explicitly feminist political aims, it largely failed to consider capitalism or colonialism as vast structuring powers that conditioned the process of canon formation as well as the disenfranchisement of women. This is perhaps even more glaring in Marcia Citron’s analysis of women’s exclusion from the canon. Her work presents an important analysis of the role gender played in the canonical and non-canonical debate, but it maintains a similar distance from the role socio-economic maneuvers at play in the canonization process.

In an attempt to understand the marginalization of women from the standard “classic” repertoire, Citron offers a detailed analysis of the different factors that prevented composers who happened to be women from being recognized for their work during the historical period that musicologists associate with canon formation – namely eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Her book, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, still represents today the most exhaustive study on the absence of women from the musical canon. Although her work is thorough in depicting facts and realities in women’s lives, it does not satisfy a larger set of questions around the political and economic reasons that played out in women’s disenfranchisement.

Citron discusses the gendered conception of creative work that attributes to men the ability to create and to women the ability to *pro*create. This idea, she argues, limited

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the reception of women’s creative work and relegated them, in the public imagination, to their bodies.\textsuperscript{133} She links the male-centrism of artistic creation with God’s ability to create life, and shows how women’s bearing of children was seen as an earthly activity rather than a spiritual or intellectual one. The identification of male creativity with God’s creation, she argues, is an attempt by men to claim for themselves a realm of creation from which women are excluded.\textsuperscript{134} Although this dualistic gender ideology does have an important role in shaping the reception of musical works, the way she brings forward her arguments implies that the reception of women’s artistic work as “less-than” men’s derived from an antagonism between genders, led by men’s desire to impose their authority over women. This is a common way of viewing what patriarchy is and how it works; yet it seems a simplistic way of analyzing the issue, especially when read through the lens of Silvia Federici’s much longer and more materially-engaged analysis. In fact, when contextualized within a historical analysis of larger scope, this kind of argument falls short. On the one hand it implies that hatred between women and men is inherent to their nature, rather than a historically- and culturally-specific phenomenon; and on the other hand, it does not consider either the political or economic reasons behind the disenfranchisement of women or the political environment in which this gender antagonism arose.\textsuperscript{135}

In this regard, Silvia Federici tells a different story, one that identifies misogyny as one of the necessary pedestals of a newly-emerging economic system.\textsuperscript{136} She shows how a specifically hateful gender antagonism developed out of the new necessity for the growing

\textsuperscript{133} Citron, \textit{Gender and the Musical Canon}, 44-5; for more about the female body in early modern Europe, see: Merry E. Wiesner, “The Female Life-Cycle” in \textit{Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41-81.

\textsuperscript{134} Citron, \textit{Gender and the Musical Canon}, 44-54.

\textsuperscript{135} For more about the connection between misogyny and establishment of capitalism see: Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch}, 48, 96.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 139.
capitalist class to impose conditions of wage labor on the peasantry, as well as to establish control over their production and reproduction. Federici convincingly shows that enforcing misogyny and more specifically encouraging men’s suspicion against women (or witches) was an important first step towards establishing control over individuals and suppressing any form of insurrection against the new demands established by the ruling class. Taking into account this longer, more complex gendered history reveals different kinds of problems at the heart of canon formation than the ones diagnosed in the feminist musicology of the 1990s. Furthermore, taking the longer history of misogynist patriarchy into account also reveals different kinds of social issues than the ones William Weber diagnoses in his own attempt to take a ‘longer’ view of the history of canon formation.

Citron also examines the role professionalism and public life played in the reception of women’s musical works. She discusses women’s relegation to the private realms as an important obstacle in their lives. Along these lines, she explains that a successful artistic career would be difficult for a woman in this period because it would be in conflict with their roles as nurturers and mothers. Here she misses the occasion to discuss the very cause of that privatization, which – as Federici’s intervention suggests – goes much deeper than simply a social attitude held by men in the nineteenth century.

In this regard, Citron also raises a very interesting point regarding the issue that women have had in attempting to pursue careers as composers. She explains how some experience a split awareness between being a woman and being a composer – the implicit conflict between the composer’s modus vivendi and the role of nurturer. This conflict is centered, according to Citron, as an issue between the identity as mother/woman and the

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137 Citron, Gender and the Musical Canon, 88-90.
138 Ibid., 84.
desire for recognition and success as a music professional, which seem to exclude each other.

She suggests that women’s lack of presence in the music profession can be linked to their own fear of success and to feeling uncomfortable with the kind of notoriety that comes with fame, given that this would conflict with their normal social roles as mothers who should stay inside the home. Statements like this shift the blame for their own exclusion onto women themselves, as though they could have found career success had they only had more courage and better attitudes.

Once this new society gave men freedom to have lives, careers, and obligations outside of the home, and women were relegated to their private homes, where they were solely responsible for childcare and domestic labor, the issue of time becomes real and pressing. When could a woman actually sit down to compose, during a day spent cooking, cleaning, and managing innumerable children? Even in relatively wealthy households of privileged artists like the Schumanns, where they had maids and nurses, it is clear from diaries and letters that Clara spent much of her time on household duties while Robert was secluded in his study, composing. Finally, this example raises additional questions of class that Citron does not engage – Clara Schumann had significantly less time to compose than her husband did, yet still she had more time than her own nurses and maids.

This reveals a considerable issue within feminist musicology, where the word “women” is often used as a universal term, when really it refers to high-class wealthy women. This is part of how we can see the huge lacuna in their thinking, perhaps framed

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by their own (possibly unconscious) ideological commitments to capitalism and therefore their inability to see that “class” is absent from their own analytical frameworks.

Additionally, Citron stresses how marriage often prevented women from gaining recognition because a working wife could be seen as an insult to the image of the husband as well as a source of competition.\textsuperscript{140} This, she points out, was true for Alma Mahler, who as part of the marital contract with Gustav had to completely give up her compositional work. Although this could have represented one of the aspects of women’s silencing, it does not address why husbands could harbor that kind of dominance over their wives and why women had to comply with it. Here she could have discussed, for example, the fact that women could not open a bank account under their own name until the nineteenth- or even twentieth-century in some places.

Citron argues that men needed to claim for themselves a realm of creation from which women were excluded, a realm exclusively of the intellect (not the body) that required a heightened mind. This ideology, that separated and gendered the body and the mind, was theorized in the seventeenth century and then consolidated in the centuries to follow, and it offered the perfect rhetoric to elevate a handful of (white) men to a god-like/genius role of (music) creators. Again, however, I argue that the gendered history of the concept of genius deserves a broader look. Even though the mind-body split was a new theory, the idea of male (and only male) genius dates back to Hellenism and was later revived by Romantics, who looked back to Ancient Greece’s philosophers. In this regard,

\textsuperscript{140} Citron, \textit{Gender and the Musical Canon}, 91. For more about women, competition and marriage see: Wiesner, \textit{Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe}, 56-78; and Guido Ruggiero, “‘More Dear to Me Than Life Itself:’ Marriage, Honor, and a Woman’s Reputation in the Renaissance” in \textit{Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage and Power at the End of the Renaissance} (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57-87.
in *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*, Christine Battersby discusses how the concept of genius was intrinsically linked to being male, as depicted by Aristotle, Plato and Seneca, all of whom attempted to scientifically and medically demonstrate the inferiority of women:

> The soul of a pure women (usually a virgin) could separate herself from her body and communicate directly with God and the angels – acting as a medium between the male who loves her and the divine. But this did not, of course, imply that flesh-and-blood women had the physiology or psychology to become great artists. (…) Women’s own mind was clouded with vapors that rose up from her womb and prevented her from perceiving Truth, Beauty and Goodness with the same clarity as could a man. A woman could be a Muse – but was unsuited to be a great artist.\(^{141}\)

This passage clearly depicts how women (“chaste” and “pure”) were only vessels for men to obtain a connection with the divine but could not be divine themselves. Artistry was clearly linked to the capacity of being the receptor and translator of something superior and otherworldly. Whereas male citizens were seen as capable of transcending the body through their intellectual abilities, women were relegated to their bodies by an intrinsic lack of intellectual clarity.

This passage also expresses the idea that women were subservient to men, since they provided the inspiration and perhaps the connection to the “sacred,” but always and only for men’s glory. Battersby also points out how Greek ideologies were retrieved and amplified during nineteenth-century Romanticism. For example, Aristotle had argued that the superiority of males could be seen from their larger body size and the location of their reproductive organs, being outside rather than inside the body. According to Aristotle, women’s failure to develop their full potential was manifested by internal placement of

their genitals, implying that the next stage of women’s development would be for them to become males. Perhaps more important was how the Romantics took this idea and exploited it.

Battersby explains how Romantics linked artistic creation with the male Christian god of creation and with individuality. Just as god created the world by himself, the artist who is made in god’s image requires solitude and inspiration to create. He makes himself by himself and creates alone, secluded from everything else. Anne Mellor similarly demonstrates how during the Romantic period male poets began conceiving of artistic creation in explicitly procreative terms, describing the act of writing a poem as giving birth. For Mellor, this is evidence that the nineteenth century saw a strengthening and reconsolidating of misogynist patriarchy that had not been as present in earlier generations.¹⁴²

This fetishization of male individuality and creativity did represent another obstacle for women who generally were not able to seclude in rooms by themselves.¹⁴³ It also does not take into account that most of the “so-called self-made geniuses” always had women (and men) at their side who supported their work. The idea that women’s nurturing was irrelevant and detached from men’s success was yet another way in which the value of women’s work was erased. Indeed, this is a major feature of Federici’s intervention, which

¹⁴² Mellor explicitly discusses how Romantic (male) artists “subsumed” feminine traits (long hair, fainting, weeping, heightened sensibility, fragility and weakness) and made them aspects of masculinist Romantic artistry. Mellor, “Gender in Masculine Romanticism,” in Romanticism & Gender, 17-29.
¹⁴³ Virginia Woolf explored this issue in A Room of One’s Own, famously arguing that if women are to ever contribute significantly to the world of literature, each one must be given 500 pounds a year and a room of her own in which to work. See Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own (New York: The Fountain Press, 1929).
painstakingly demonstrates the way the exclusion of “women’s work” from the new wage labor system slowly came to render this work socially scorned and even invisible to society.

What Citron focuses on is men’s personal antagonism against women, and she takes it as given that this antagonism is a transhistorical constant in society, which Federici’s argument contradicts. More importantly, the growing misogynist ideologies became used after the seventeenth century to justify and even require violence against women. The larger historical analysis redirects the focus from individual sexist men’s choice to oppress women, toward a more deliberate and structural suppression of female creativity and agency in favor of a new economic system that required the free labor of women and colonized peoples.

**Gender Suppression in “Absolute Music”**

The feminist musicologists of the 90s diagnosed what they saw as the political and cultural barriers women in music have faced; they also engaged with analyses of specifically musical values and ideologies that they felt contributed to women’s exclusion. For example, the oppression of women was the protagonist, according to Citron and McClary, within the rhetoric of the sonata form and German symphonic music that came to comprise the backbone of what we think of as the canon. Discussing the exposition of the first and second theme in the first movement of works written using the sonata-form, Citron writes:

> The two themes of the exposition are set up as a hierarchy that exhibits stylistic traits considered characteristic of man and woman, respectively. They are constructed in various ways, as we shall see, but the basic model is one of ideological domination of man over woman. It seems to be an extension of general societal notions of ideal man and ideal woman and their proper relationship. (...) The themes themselves were apparently strongly
This interpretation of the form was an important target in feminist musicology of the 1990s and an important first step in discussing sex in music. In the explosively received *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary argued that at the basis of the sonata form was a specific way of consuming music on stage that reiterated patriarchal and misogynistic values. She writes:

"Tonality itself – with its process of instilling expectation holding promised fulfillment until climax – is the principal music means during the period from 1600 to 1900 for arousing and channeling desire."

This musical rhetoric, McClary argues, reflected the common perception of the primary, tonic theme as “masculine” and the gentler, more lyrical secondary theme as “feminine.” Notoriously throughout the piece and the teleological narrative of both themes, their final recapitulation is characterized by the primary theme’s “domination” of the secondary theme, via transmuting it into the tonic key. McClary stresses this musical narrative metaphorizes the subjugation of female sexuality and the ultimate dominance of a culture of violent assertiveness of male sexuality.

Citron uses this interpretation to establish a norm against which to compare music written by women, and specifically to analyze the late nineteenth-century woman composer Cecile Chaminade’s compositional choices in her Sonata no. 21. Rather than following the “norm,” Chaminade treats her thematic material somewhat differently, avoiding the prescribed domination rhetoric at the end of the sonata. Citron argues that these compositional choices represent perhaps an attempt to resist the conventional representation of “female-male domination” and offer rather a different way for two

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144 Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 133.
contrasting themes to interact and create a narrative. She emphasizes that Chaminade’s “weirdness” was intentional and not simply a result of her gender, points that I stress because of the attempts of scholars to demonstrate that women and men write intrinsically different music only on the basis of their gender. Nevertheless, this rhetoric establishes a norm to which any diverse procedure is perceived as Other, creating yet another binary way of perceiving desire. This is most notable in the way McClary discusses homosexual desire and its manifestation within different musical narratives.

I find these interventions problematic because they are based on the assumption that sonata form was something already established and that composers followed or disobeyed the “rules” deliberately, trying possibly to convey an underlying meaning. Whereas McClary’s analysis of Carmen’s Habanera and Bizet’s sensual musical rhetoric through the use of exotic dance in conjunction to chromatism and provocative text is revelatory and groundbreaking, her deployment of the same kind of strategy for demonstrating the channeling of desire within “absolute music” is problematic. On the one hand, these interventions sometimes seem to imply that composers are intentionally choosing to either conform to or depart from an established norm, based on what they wanted to say or explore about gender dynamics; this would be hard to believe. On the other hand, however, if composers were totally unconscious of the gendered symbolism of

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146 Susan McClary, “Construction of Subjectivity in Schubert’s Music” in Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology, ed. Phillip Brett, Elizabeth Wood and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 204-233. In this chapter McClary offers the same kind of analysis, arguing that Schubert avoided the dominating rhetoric of sonata form in order to offer a different view of masculine subjectivity than the Beethovenian norm.


sonata form, it would imply that compositional choices are somehow essentially tied to a composer’s gender and/or sexuality, a claim that both McClary’s and Citron’s analyses would suggest, despite their insistence to the contrary. In either case, this understanding of how and why “women’s” compositions differ from men’s is problematic and incomplete.

**German Nationalism and Canonization**

In bringing this chapter to a conclusion, I would like to briefly return to the way musicologists have tended to understand the historical process of canon formation. A major theme in this discourse has to do with tying canon formation to the growing imperative in Germany to identify a “national” identity. Why was the Western tradition of German and “absolute music” recognized as the ultimate manifestation of men’s intellect? How did German classical music come to symbolize sophistication, intellectual greatness and discipline? And how does that all intertwine with capitalism and gender? Although some of these questions would require a much broader study of German cultural imperialism and how that effected the global understanding of classical music, which is beyond the scope if this thesis, I discuss how (unquestionably) fundamental German music is for the Western musical canon and for the establishment of Musicology as a discipline. I also suggest some direction where these set of questions may lead in further works and ways in which challenging German cultural imperialism might lead toward a different way of conceiving classical music and by extension the Western musical canon.

The field’s fixation on German music surely has something to do with the fact that musicology itself emerged from the foundational work of the very German critics who were engaged in this German-centric process of canon formation. Both Joseph Kerman and
Cecilia Applegate discuss the German foundation of musicology as a discipline, in an attempt to question the universality of German music in the nineteenth century. Both point out that the approach to analyzing, understanding, and valuing nineteenth-century German music is specifically designed to elegantly and scientifically demonstrate its musical coherence and superiority. Critics of the same century, such as A. B. Marx and E. T. A. Hoffman, played a fundamental role in reinforcing this idea of superiority, individualizing Beethoven’s symphonies as a national treasure and symbol of the ultimate superiority of the German Geist.

An important aspect of the construct of German nationalism was the constant attempt to educate the public about their heritage. This was a project that Marx took to heart, establishing his educational project through a persistent domination over the concert programs. In his mind, it was fundamental to limit the public’s exposure to only the “highest” works, and he argued that in order to succeed in elevating the German spirit, it was necessary to first re-introduce the finest works of Haydn and Mozart. This would ensure the proper assimilation of the more complex works of Beethoven.

The elevation of this musical trinity did not happen naturally, rather it was a result of a strategic, well-orchestrated plan that involved the opposition of German symphonies to Italian opera (especially the works of Rossini and Spontini). Marx argued that the symphony had an important dramatic sense that reflected the depth of the German Volk and that Italian music did not have any dramatic sense, rather it was frivolous and

superficial. He argued that symphonies were morally superior because they did not give futile pleasure to the listeners but rather required an intellectual engagement. Furthermore, drawing from the Hegelian understanding of the world spirit, he saw Beethoven’s music as the result of the progressive evolution of German music (and the German’s spirit) towards higher states of consciousness, not so much of the individual but of the whole German consciousness. Marx stressed this idea as an opportunity to make his claims more universal and prove the superiority of the German spirit.

The oppositional strategy that Marx used was the traditional elevation of one thing in opposition to the “unsophisticated” Other. He fervently argued against the presence of Italian or French music within Germany’s programs, claiming that those musical endeavors would ruin the spiritually more elevated German people. This ideology of German supremacy was then further developed into true universality, attributing to Germany the task to educate and heighten the spirit of other nations, who had fallen far behind Germans. At the same time, Marx argued that whereas symphony had the capacity to rouse Germany’s spirit, it could not possibly be understood by Italians and French because it was the exclusive property of Germans.

Marx also introduced the idea that symphonies needed to be performed without interruption and that they could be understood only if heard multiple times, introducing a whole new concept of musical consumption. In fact, this had an important impact in the musical culture of the time. Not only the place that contemporary music had occupied on the stage was replaced by the “great masterpieces;” but it also established a hierarchy that considered new works as less relevant.

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Marx prescribed which pieces to include in concerts, the order of the works within each concert and in the concert season justifying the repeated presence of Haydn’s and Mozart’s symphonies for educational purposes. These works, he claimed, were fundamental in preparing the audiences for the more demanding works of Beethoven. Of course, that left no room for works of different German composers and even less for foreign pieces, which he perceived as trivial and almost damaging to the German’s spiritual integrity.

By the 1830s the national heritage was successfully institutionalized within the symphony concert culture, assuming perhaps even a stronger significance because this decade marked the death of Hegel, Goethe and just a few years before of Beethoven (1827). Their deaths marked the end of an era and demanded from the nation to keep their greatness alive through the celebration of their timeless works. As attending concerts became part of the lives of an increasing number of people, the routine of featuring the “great masterpieces” was taken for granted and a constant struggle between new works and the classics forged the concert programming of the almost two hundred years until today.

This impacted negatively all contemporary music of the time and had an important role in gendering music. As the “great masters’” works were elevated to represent the ultimate evolution of the German Geist, opera was disparaged as second-class music. It is not coincidental that opera was a realm in which women were protagonists; the early German theories of absolute music are often explicitly misogynist (and racist). An important example is Edward Hanslick’s canonical book on music aesthetics.

Written in 1854, Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (On the Musically Beautiful) is at the foundation of modern musical aesthetics. Aside from defining what music is, he attempts
to prove “scientifically” the inability of women and “savages” to compose music (meaning “absolute music”).

*Women,* who by nature are highly emotional beings, have achieved nothing as composers. The cause, apart from the general reasons why women are less capable of mental achievements, is the plastic element in musical compositions which like sculpture and architecture, though in a different manner, imposes on us the necessity of keeping ourselves *free* from all subjective feelings. If the composing of music depended upon the intensity and vividness of our feelings, the complete want of female composers, as against the numerous authoresses and female painters, would be difficult to account for. It is not the feeling, but a specifically musical and technically-trained aptitude that enables us to compose.153

He links “scientifically” women as subject to emotion and irrationality and as unable to be objective. In his view (white) men are more capable of the intellectual abilities required for composition of proper musical experiences. Part of his argument is based on the bodily responses that he observes in women while they listen to music. Their head nodding and foot tapping links them in his thought to the primitive, the “savages” and the feminine, all of which he considers inferior and aberrant. He clearly adopts the mind/body dichotomy discussed in the previous chapter, enabling him to attribute any sensual (or bodily) response to music to those who are linked more strongly to the body, namely women and “savages.”

Hanslick aims to demonstrate that beauty in music is something defined and precise. His arguments are therefore directed towards discrediting the idea that music can “express” feelings (rather, emotional responses to music occur within the listener, and are thus not part of “the purely musical” aspect of music) and he builds them through the demonstration that music cannot express specific emotions (such as love or yearning) or

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gender. In other words, music, being moving form, does not have the power to be programmatic on its own. These theories which are at the foundation of musicology and music theory, rest in these German scholars’ intense subconscious need to uphold and enforce a specifically misogynist and racist understanding of what “music” is and who is capable of consuming it fully and correctly.

What is here at stake is yet way beyond musical aesthetics. What Hanslick and several influential German philosophers, such as Kant, perpetuated is an intellectual attack constructed through pseudo-scientific theories against the Other. Unknowingly or not, they have fully absorbed, supported and brought to a new level of dehumanization, the ostracization of the women and Africans/Natives that had been set into motion three hundred years prior. In a way they continued a lineage of oppressors that, according to Federici, started with the early establishment of capitalism. Whereas the battles in the Middle Ages had been more physical, meaning that part of the establishment of the new economic system actually happened through a genocide of women, Natives, Africans and others who were rebelling against the state and the church, the battle pursued in the nineteenth center is one that is foremost intellectual. Rather than actually killing people and putting them on the stakes under the false accusation of witchcraft (or forcing people to “free” labor until their death), scholars engage in an intellectual battle, meant to demonstrate objectively the inability of women and the racialized Others to engage in meaningful cultural participation. As a result, what emerges is that they too, as much as the state and the church had in previous centuries, participate in establishing capitalist values. Furthermore, they played a role in enforcing their domination over the Other, performing their own kind of primitive accumulation. In music, this form of oppression resulted in
stealing the ability of the women and Africans/Natives to directly participate in musical production perceived at the same level of the white male “genius’s” creation. In this way, German musical scholars in the nineteenth century “enclosed” music and set the definition of it in a way that intentionally outcasted (with very few exclusions) any non-white, male, composers.

These kinds of arguments are then not based on intellectual greatness but are rather heavily influenced by the socio-political and economic frame of capitalism, which in order to “properly function” necessitates of that large numbers of the population must be available for exploitation by a much smaller group of elites, and, further, that this exploitation must be justified by widely-held perceptions that those exploited must somehow be inferior or less than fully human. Federici demonstrates that this is an ongoing process of capitalism (rather than a phase, as Marx had defined it) and that if analyzed through a global prospective (holding at its center women and ethicized Others), primitive accumulation never ends. In fact, even though it is not happening in Europe anymore, today the witch hunts, slave labor and land-theft continues in Africa.154

In all of this, money plays an important role in defining who enters the elite and who does not. Although scholars like to elevate classical music as beyond material matters, Western classical music is kept alive through musical institutions, recording labels, advertisements, concerts and books, all of which are working within capitalism.155 The reason why the canon still holds such a fundamental place within today’s musical

institutions is that white supremacy has not been challenged at its root, because doing so would require a whole reorganization of global economy. Quietly we maintain imperialistic values while we scream for equality, diversity and change – what a conflict! Scholars such as Angela Davis and Sarah Ahmed, have demonstrated how multiculturalism or diversity panels do not offer the solution sought after, rather they establish yet another way in which racism and sexism are enforced and perpetuated.\textsuperscript{156} Davis explains how ineffective “diversity management” is, as it assumes “that a racially, ethnically, and culturally heterogeneous workforce needs to be managed or controlled in ways that contain and suppress conflict.” This, she explains, is precisely the process by which relations based on class, gender and race are preserved and fortified.\textsuperscript{157} Furthermore, she points out how slogans addressing issues of power, independence and sovereignty fail to address it within intersectionality. Davis especially warns us on how the discourse on preserving diversity lies on a superficial level while homogenizing political and economic demands. This is true especially within institutions (or corporations) as it guarantees that they function with the same efficiency as it would, if there were no cultural differences at all. This plays out in Western music institutions as well, as the contrasting impulses of bringing diversity clashes with the preservation of values rooted in cultural imperialism.


\textsuperscript{157} Davis, “Gender, Class, and Multiculturalism,” 41.
CONCLUSION

In summary this thesis demonstrates that in order to understand the non-representation of women and BIPOC in the Western musical canon we need to trace back the origin of the canon formation to the early modern period and study it in relationship to the socio-political and economic events happening at the same time. Centering the discourse around the impact early capitalism had on all women and Africans/Natives offers an opportunity to change both the way we think of musical value and even more so the way we continue to hold imperialistic values within musical institutions. In this regard, it is important to give serious thought to the effect that the witch-hunts in Europe and the Americas had on women’s social reception and on their ability to participate in building musical culture. As discussed in the first chapter, although not directly affected by the witch hunts, even women of high-class were forced into new customs that established chastity and silence upon them. And even those places where women were allowed to succeed, such as in Italian courts and later opera theaters, their reception was casted within the dichotomy of “chaste and pure” or “evil and whore:” one being (very bluntly said) “marriage material,” and the other serving the capitalistic need for new work force to ensure national wealth. Either way, women lost their independence and respect within society, and were increasingly commodified to serve and be subservient to men.

Similarly, Africans and Natives were objectified as working machines and thereby dehumanized and forced into horrendous life conditions for the so sought-after wealth of white people. Although the dehumanization based on gender and race differs in its intensity depending on various factors, I argue that this intersectionality is fundamental to understand the role that capitalism played in building a musical culture based on white
male creation. In fact, parallels can be drawn between the two, not because the experience as a white woman was the same as that of a Black woman or Indigenous men, I would never argue such absurdity! Rather, they all are victim of the dehumanizing process that capitalism requires in order to become established.

As clearly shown this dynamic functioned within Western classical music as well, as it established a whole set of values that elevated the creation of men’s work as God-like and attributed it to their intellectual genius. At the same time, women and people of color were increasingly relegated to the body, with perpetual attacks on their ability to succeed, may it be through limiting their education, abusing their bodies, and through creating a society in which their success was perceived as dangerous and fruit of witchery powers.

The diabolic machine set in place through colonialism and the great witch-hunts was recorded in music. For example, Die Zauberflöte clearly expresses the role that class, gender and race played in determining one’s life. This opera destroys indirectly the ideology of meritocracy because the only characters who triumph are members of the noble class and are white. The opera thus represents the fulfillment of the patriarchal enlightenment where white high-class men are above all women and some men. This clearly feeds into the new ideologies developing later, specifically in Germany and the new fetishization of “absolute music.”

The final chapter engages with why the canon is so homogeneous and why women and BIPOC are excluded from it. Beyond the ideology of “absolute music,” which as clearly discussed, fiercely excluded the participation of women or people of color, it is unclear why Western musical institutions around the globe value the composition of German composers, especially Beethoven, above all others. Perhaps that lies within the
fact that German theorists defined what is the highest form of music and explicitly outcasted the gendered and racialized Other.

At the end of this study, I wondered whether there was research about why the canon is so centered around German music, and why it was (and still is) globally accepted as the best music in the world. I also wondered what the intersection between German cultural imperialism, capitalism and the upholding of the Western musical canon was and by extension what kind of values are held within western musical institutions today.

Future works could address this very intersection, engaging critically with the underlying ideologies underneath the glorification of German music, and how perhaps bringing it down from the pedestal could enable scholars to address it more in political terms rather than ideologically. By this I mean moving beyond questions of value and systems designed to glorify German music, and rather become curious of what unsaid ideologies live underneath our perpetual love for this very specific repertoire.

Finally, several books and articles have been published regarding the intersection of capitalism and Western classical music, informed by critical race theory (among other disciplines), but not much attention has been given to how all these intersect with gender. Future works could look into how sexists and racist values are held within musical institutions, such as conservatories, musical schools and concert venues, and critically engage with the obstacles that women and BIPOC face because of their gender and race. It could also offer a closer look into how body shape and beauty effect women’s musical

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careers, as well as their willingness (or not) to engage in sexual behaviors with mentors, teachers, or other figures in their lives that have power in determining their career. A much larger study could also encompass how non-conforming genders are affected by capitalism and musical institutions, and how they navigate these intersecting issues while pursuing a career in Western classical music.

This study represents a first step towards analyzing music production through the intersectionality of gender, class, race and capitalism, offering a new and provocative way to think of the Western classical canon not as the culmination of musical culture but rather as the emblem of capitalist values.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


