

Love, Loyalty and Betrayal

Women and Fidelity – Double Standards

The opera and the play both demonstrate that men, like women are also unfaithful.

- ▼ In Mozart's Opera : Despina and Fiordilidgi (gullible heroines) are portrayed as unfaithful, however the loyalty of the two men who agree to the deception are unquestioned.
- ▼ Henry says that "Guglielmo and Ferrando deserve to be betrayed by the women". This shows that Henry is capable of recognizing the double standards between men and women and reveals that this behaviour constitutes infidelity as much as the women's.
- ▼ Through Lewis's condemnation of Lucy, Nowra demonstrates that, although modern society has become more sexually permissive, there are still eighteenth century double standards operating which condone men's fidelity but condemn women's fidelity.
- ▼ Lewis defines fidelity as 'not having sex' with Julie, despite being attracted to her and kissing her.
- ▼ Lewis often claims that 'women's constancy is like the Arabian Phoenix. Everyone swears it exists but no one has ever seen it', thus revealing his hypocrisy and 'self righteousness'.
- ▼ Julie articulates the play's message that men "want women to deceive them because it will prove their worst thoughts about women" and allow them to feel 'righteous'. Lewis' attitude towards Lucy confirms Julie's observation.

How Important is love to each Character?

In the 1970's, when parts of the world were devastated by the Vietnam war and corrupt political systems, the notion of love and fidelity is hardly as important as 'bread, a shelter, equality, health, procreation and money..' – social values and political values are more important than love.

Lucy

- ▼ Lucy isn't into fidelity as reflected by her sexual affair with Nick whilst in a relationship to Lewis.
- ▼ Lucy's infidelity mirrors the women's infidelity in Mozart's Opera.
- ▼ Lucy represents the modern day woman of the 1970s as she challenges the old fashioned concept of love and fidelity.
- ▼ Lucy's infidelity is an indication of the huge social revolution in the 1970s (free love) – 'a time when love was not so important'
- ▼ Lucy redefines fidelity (in line with modern views about morality) by arguing that 'she has sex with Nick but sleeps' with Lewis.
- ▼ Social welfare and basic human rights are the values that Lucy supports, rather than something as 'frivolous as love' (personal fulfillment).
- ▼ Lucy's failure to recognise the relevance of the messages in Cosi Fan Tutte reveals her incompatibility with Lewis.

Nick

- ▼ Nick espouses Lucy's view that fighting for political values and the socially disadvantaged is more important than love and fidelity.
- ▼ Fighting for political values involves struggling to improve the quality of life for socially disadvantaged or politically oppressed peoples. This is his primary motivation and it certainly means more than anything as 'frivolous as love'.
- ▼ Nick betrays Lewis' trust by having sex with Lucy and justifies this by accusing Lewis of being 'conservative' and arguing that 'women should not become between mates'.
- ▼ The reader is strongly positioned against Nick because he aptly embodies the theme of betrayal in the play and Mozart's Opera.
- ▼ 'Not into fidelity'

Lewis

- ▼ At the beginning of the play, Lewis shares the same political and social ideals as Nick and Lucy.
- ▼ Lewis redefines fidelity for his own benefit and self righteousness.
- ▼ Lewis defines fidelity as 'not having sex' with Julie despite being attracted to her and sharing a passionate kiss in the dark.
- ▼ He is a hypocrite, in that his behaviour constitutes infidelity as much as Lucy's.

- ▼ His view of love shifts, from the initial perspective presented at the beginning of the play where he believes that 'love is not so important nowadays', to one where love is a significant aspect of life as reflected by his comment, 'without love the world wouldn't mean much'.

What Mozart's Opera, *Così fan tutte* says about Love

- ▼ It is a swerving emotion, especially in the face of temptation.
- ▼ Women are commonly the unfaithful counterparts in a relationship.
- ▼ It disregards how men are unfaithful and highlights 'double standards' between men and women in relationships.
- ▼ Love can be tested.

Nowra's messages about Love

- ▼ Nowra provides a **practical** view of love.
- ▼ As Julie says, 'love is not a divine madness' suggesting that love is not an emotion that reflects desirable artistic or philosophical state – it is simply madness. This also balances the text's overwhelming support for a non-judgemental view of 'madness'.
- ▼ Julie shows the clearest example of love and fidelity in the play as she goes back to her girlfriend, who has 'stood by her through thick and thin' instead of persevering a relationship with Lewis.
- ▼ This example provided by Julie reinforces the play's ideas about the gravity of our moral and personal obligations to the ones we love.

Where do Loyalties Lie?

The play raises questions about where loyalty is owed and under what circumstances.

Henry & Traditional Social/Political Values

- ▼ Henry defines betrayal as having improper allegiances.
- ▼ He embodies the values of many conservative Australians in the 1970s, for whom opposition to the Vietnam war is equated with support for communism and betrayal of those who fought in previous wars.
- ▼ This is supported by the quote, 'my fffather fffought in the war for you. For you and for me. He was a gggreat man. You are traitors' and '...you stab my ffather in the back'.
- ▼ Through Henry, Nowra suggests that unwavering loyalty to traditional values can blind people to their need for social and political change.
- ▼ Loyalty to history.

Nick & Lewis

- ▼ Broken promises between Nick and Lewis :
 - » Nick feels betrayed when Lewis does not help him to organise the moratorium.
 - » Lucy and Nick perceive Lewis' involvement in a play about love and fidelity a betrayal of artistic and political values – Lucy : 'the theatre needs to be meaningful and intelligent'.
 - » Lewis feels betrayed by Nick when he and Lucy do not help with the play and when they have a sexual liason.
 - » For Lewis, loyalty lies within the play and the mental patients who truly 'need him'.

Sanity & Normality – Mental Health & Madness

Nowra's messages about 'madness' and 'mental health'

Nowra proposes the idea that 'madness' is not always a simple psychological or psychiatric diagnosis, but is sometimes a matter of perspective and judgement. It embodies a wholistic view of human behaviour rather than an attitude of diagnostics and labelling.

- ▼ 'A madman is someone who arrives at a fancy dress party dressed in the Emporer's new clothes' (this comes from a fairy tale whereby, an emporer is tricked into believing he is wearing an invisible cloak, but is really naked) – this description provided by Justin suggests that madness is behaviour that follows a logic of its own but might not appear rational to others or an intepretation of the world that does not match up to others.
- ▼ Nowra refuses to define madness objectively as he does not formally define the psychological or psychiatric conditions of any of the patients. Instead, they are presented as people who indulge in extremities of 'normal' behaviour.

- ▼ This illustrates the idea that human behaviour is a spectrum, and that mental stability is not a black and white issue.
- ▼ Society sees particular kinds of difference as threatening and deals with fears by stigmatising (judgementally labelling) the individual.
- ▼ Nowra creates characters who cross the boundaries between the so called binary opposition (contrasting pair of ideas or positions) of sanity and insanity.

» This is done to highlight inconsistencies and injustices in the mental health system.

Lewis 'crossing the line'

- + Justin mistakes him for a patient
- + He joins Roy in imitating the shock treatment
- + Stands by the patients and sides with Cherry, although Doug started the fire
- + Replaces Doug in the play

Patients blurring the line between sanity & insanity

- + Julie is rational – she is not mentally ill but has a drug addiction (shows how people did not know how to deal with mental illness)
- + Ruth who after leaving the asylum becomes a 'time and motion expert' where her obsessive compulsiveness is an asset.
- + Zac's eccentricity helps him to become a successful musician

Institutions cannot help Insanity?

- ▼ Cosi demonstrates that institutions cannot help people like Roy and Henry who are suffering from severe mental illness.
- ▼ Roy's mania continues
- ▼ Henry dies soon after Cosi, despite his brief respite from his stuttering incoherence.

Play's Key Images: Light and Dark; Fire & Water

These images highlight the plays thematic concerns.

Light & Dark

Through this imagery of light and dark, Nowra shows that chaos can be both frightening and liberating, and control can sometimes be repressive.

LIGHT	DARK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Light traditionally represents hope and clarity and, significantly, the play's opening stage direction connects the arrival of Lewis with a suggestion of hope – 'It is pitch black inside the theatre. A heavy door opens...a chink of daylight enters' ○ While light is illuminating, too much light can be blinding, as shown by Zac's overwhelming vision – culminating in his crazy idea to recreate a world removed from 'real things'. ○ Zac's delusion of clarity parallels some of the misguided attempts from the medical profession to to restore the order of society by creatng a separate world for the mentally ill , and to bring greater harmony to their lives with drastic and bizarre treatments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opposed to this is the chaos and confusion that errupts when the lights go out. However, chaos is sometimes liberating, as Julie and Lewis discover when they kiss 'passionately' in the darkness.

Fire & Water

The apocalyptic and biblical images of fire and water are highly symbolic in the play.

FIRE	WATER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fire imagery dominates Act One, with the theatre nearly burning down, almost causing the project to be abandoned. ○ In using this imagery, Nowra alerts us that theatre itself can be considered destructive or threatening by confronting audiences and challenging society's values; this is precisely what Cosi aims to do. <p>When Doug is removed, the fire is replaced by water imagery (Act 2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The cleansing rain constantly dripping through a hole in the roof. ○ It soaks the posters, fuses the lights and fills buckets. ○ The water despite its excessiveness is ultimately regenerative; it symbolizes the capacity of theatre to create a world 'as far removed from this depressing asylum [of the everyday world] as possible', where 'harmony' can exist and optimism is possible.

Illusion (art) & Reality (life)

'Did they have instant coffee in Mozart's day' – Ruth's preoccupation with delineating illusion from reality

- ▼ Ruth's seemingly absurd need to clarify the difference between illusion in reality highlights the difficulty of actually being able to prove which is which.
- ▼ Ruth is fixated on tangible details, and she worries about things like having real coffee in the opera, and exactly how many steps to take across the stage.
- ▼ The difference between having real or imaginary coffee is utterly unimportant to the audience, who can accept theatrical illusion as a temporary reality, however, Ruth can 'can handle something being an illusion or real but not at the same time'.
- ▼ Ruth's inane questions highlight the unreliability of our own perceptions of the physical world, and raise larger questions about how clear-cut the distinction between reality and illusion really is.

Theatre as Illusion

- ▼ Theatre has always created illusions and depended on the readiness of audiences to willingly suspend their disbelief, accepting (for a while) appearance as reality.
- ▼ In *Cosi*, Nowra wants to prevent the audience from doing this by creating characters in a play, acting as characters in an opera – thus draw our attention very explicitly to the idea of performance.
- ▼ This forces us to distance ourselves from the 'people' on stage and concentrate on the social and political issues embodied in the characters.
- ▼ By blurring the boundary between illusion and reality, Nowra makes an important connection between art and life.
- ▼ This connection is also made through the play's **setting**: the burnt out theatre.
 - » This setting serves as a metaphor for a real world torn apart by the chaos of war and implies not only that theatre has a political role in the real world, but also that its potentially as powerful as a moratorium in voicing opposition to war.
- ▼ The merging of real and illusory worlds thus draws strong parallels between art and life, and highlights the importance of art in our lives.
- ▼ While the Opera provides an escape for the patients, it is closely linked to their lives.
 - » Each character makes a **personal connection** with the content of the opera:
 - » Henry's comparison of Guglielmo and Ferrando's infidelity with his own father's loyalty.
 - » Cherry by introducing the shock treatment equipment

Madness as Illusion

- ▼ The residents of the asylum each have ways of altering their own realities, or constructing new ones that are more bearable – and these strategies tend to reflect the behaviours that have landed patients in the institution.
- ▼ As Zac notes, 'if I could put up with reality then I wouldn't be here' and this is true for most of the patient.
- ▼ The characters each have their own illusion, their own escape from the everyday world.
- ▼ Their collective existence in the institution is another layer of illusion – their 'madness' gives them an escape for as long as they need it.

The Power of Music

The notion of music is present throughout the play, and the play as a whole endorses the belief that music has therapeutic powers.

Roy

Roy is the patient who most strongly embodies this value, as his longstanding dream of producing *Cosi Fan Tutte* appears to be one of the few things that gets him through his depressing daily existence in the asylum.

- ▼ For Roy, the opera is associated with so-called happy childhood memories, whether these are real or imagined: Roy says that his mother played the music for him 'over and over'.
- ▼ It is not just the theatrical illusion of the music that gives Roy's life meaning, but 'the music of this opera keeps the world in harmony'.
- ▼ 'music is what love between humans should be. And we've thrown the music out of this opera' showing that music for Roy represents one of the most idealistic emotions – love.
- ▼ 'A world without music is a world hardly worth living in'.
- ▼ Music provides a symbolic 'saviour' in a world tainted by the effects of war asserting the power of art to strengthen the human spirit.

Zac

For Zac, music is an energising and motivating form of ‘therapy’ providing a clear contrast to his drugged-out, comatose state.

- ▼ He becomes greatly excited when he brings his old, battered accordion, and offers to contribute **Wagner’s** music to the opera.
- ▼ Wagner’s music has theraputic power, motivating and exciting him beyond his drug-induced state.
- ▼ Wagner’s music also eventually gets Zac out of the asylum, as Lewis notes in his concluding monologue.

Politics and Empowerment

There is tension between the political and social values of theatre in Cosi.

Nick’s Priorities against Lewis’ in terms of the Value of Theatre

NICK	LEWIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gives political activities priority over directing. ○ Nick reflects his goals to to make ‘people want the war to end...want changes in our society...[and] want to overthrow the establishment’ through his theatre productions. ○ Shares the same view as Lucy, that theatre should be ‘meaningful and intelligent’ like Brecht’s theatrical productions. ○ Nick thinks that: ‘politics is the real theatre’. This indicates that Nick values theatre for its politics rather than its artistic significance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ At the beginning, Lewis approaches theatre one the levels of entertainment, illusion and the value it can bring to performers lives. ○ Nick and Lucy claim that Lewis’ work with the patients is a form of failure to acknowledge social hardship and inequalities and is less important than large scale, public efforts to implement social change. ○ However, while Nick and Lucy engage in protests against war, challenging unjust political systems and indulge in ‘intelligent and meaningful’ theatre – Lewis is fighting for his own changes through Cosi Fan Tutte. ○ He is trying to bring change to the patients lives and give them confidence and the power to take charge of their own realities. ○ This demonstrates that Lewis is also working towards social change but in a more local context.

+ Historical Setting

Background

Cosi was written in the 1990s but is set in 1971.

The social era of the 1970s provides an important background for the dynamics within the institution. Through this, Nowra positions us to condemn the values of society which treats mentally ill people in barbaric ways.

The 1970s was a decade of huge social upheval, in Australia and in other parts of the world.

The Vietnam War

The Vietnam war occurred within the time period: 1961 – 1975 (dates are debateable)

- ▼ The Vietnam war, in which Nick and Lucy are passionate **protesters**, was a war that divided Australians.
- ▼ Nick and Lucy represent mostly young, left winged activists who rebelled against the official military commitment of their country by supporting the Viet Cong (communists) in Vietnam. As Nick explains in the play, the aim was to defend North Vietnam against American imperialism with both moral and financial aid.
- ▼ Nowra’s Cosi draws parallels between the madness of war and the madness of the asylum – juxtaposition.
- ▼ The structure of the play within a play highlights the parallels between the characters and themes in Mozart’s opera, and those in Nowra’s play. Both contain the backdrop of war : the Vietnam war in 1970 (Cosi) and the Albanian battle for independence from the Ottoman Empire 1790 (Cosi Fan Tutte).

Context of Social Change

- ▼ **Sexual revolution** : The sexual revolution, an outgrowth of the counterculture, cast aside traditional sexual restraints and began a decade of alternative eroticism, experimentation, and promiscuity. In part facilitated by the development of the birth-control pill and other contraceptives, Australia in the 1970s broke many sexual taboos. Interracial dating, open homosexuality, communal living, casual nudity, and dirty language all seemed to indicate a profound change in sexual behavior. Sexual activity among the young especially increased.
- ▼ **Free Love** : Free Love had become by the 1970s-80s a historical predecessor of the radical critique of sexuality notably carried on by feminist and homosexual liberation movements. During the later 1960s, revolt against the Vietnam War, the overall Youth Culture sensibility and the commercial sexualization of culture together conspired to return Free Love toward the center of the radical picture. “Make Love Not War”.
 - » Lucy represents the modern day woman of the 1970s who challenges the traditional and antiquated conception of love and fidelity. Her sexual liason with Nick despite her commitment to Lewis is exmpelary evidence of the parallels Nowra draws with the contemporary society he lived in, whereby, women were liberated and considered on par with men.
 - » Doug refers to the notion of ‘make love not war’ and discusses free love and the rock and roll phases.

+ Structure, Language & Style

Structure

- I. **Act One**: a sense of impending crisis is driven by the tensions between the characters and the impossibility of the task they’ve undertaken and the incompetence of the director.
 - II. **Act Two**: tensions escalate and the crises become more dramatic, while the patients’ needs to perform the opera become the driving force.
- ▼ **Play-within-a-play**: this structure highlights the parallels between the characters and themes in Mozart’s opera, and those in Nowra’s play.
 - » Both, opera and play revolve around issues of loyalty, fidelity and betrayal.
 - » The backdrop of war is also a significant feature of both texts: Cosi/Vietnam war of the 1970s and Cosi Fan Tutte/Albanian Battle for independence from the Ottoman Empire in the 1790s.

Black Comedy

Black Comedy: a theatrical form that allows serious or sensitive issues to be presented in a comical context.

- ▼ In a black comedy, the audience is encourgaed to laugh at things that are normally not considered humorous.
- ▼ Black comedies are not about making fun of any group in society but are about exploring meaningful issues in accessible and entertaining ways.