

**The Operas of J. N. von Poissl (1783-1865)**

**Aesthetics and Ideology**

Martin John Pickard

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds  
School of Music

May 2012

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Martin John Pickard to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© 2012 The University of Leeds and Martin John Pickard

## Acknowledgements

My researches in Munich were greatly facilitated by the late Richard Salter and Deirdre Salter, and by Dr. Sabine Kurth of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. In Stuttgart I had excellent support from Magdalene Popp-Grilli of the Württembergische Landesbibliothek. Similar help was given in Darmstadt by Dr. Wolfgang Binal, formerly of the Staatstheater Darmstadt, and by Dr. Yorck E. Haase, of the Theatre Archive of the Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek. At the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin I was given valuable advice by Eveline Bartlitz and by Dagmar Beck of the Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesamtausgabe, who generously sought out relevant extracts from Weber's unpublished diaries. The late Peter Athmann (Nürnberg) was a fount of knowledge and advice about Bavaria, theology and the German language. Dr. Volkmar von Pechstaedt (Kassel), whose important contribution to Poissl studies is acknowledged elsewhere in this thesis, gave generously of his time and advice.

In the U.K. I have received support from my fellow researchers in nineteenth-century music Dr. Anastasia Belina-Johnson, Dr. Ilias Devetzoglou and Dr. George Kennaway. Prof. John Warrack kindly shared his enthusiasm, his huge knowledge of this period and some rare microfilm material. At the University of Leeds I had particular help from Dr. Rachel Cowgill, Dr. Kara McKechnie and Dr. Clive McClelland. Dr. Stephen Muir, researching in Prague, found a Czech-language publication relating to Weber and Poissl. A talk about Poissl which I gave at Newcastle University brought stimulating feedback and suggestions from Dr. Ian Biddle and others. I owe a particular debt to Prof. Henrike Lähnemann, also of Newcastle University, for her untiring advice on the practicalities of thesis-writing and translation, as well as for her knowledge of theology and German culture. Mark Weir (Naples) was a helpful, perceptive and thorough reader of my final draft. The greatest thanks must go to my supervisor Prof. Clive Brown for his wisdom, his knowledge, his unstinting encouragement, and for steering a novice researcher towards this fascinating area of operatic history.

## Abstract

The Bavarian composer Johann Nepomuk von Poissl was regarded by many in the second decade of the nineteenth century as German opera's greatest hope. Though neglected by later musicology, in his day Poissl was a central figure in the aesthetic discourses surrounding opera, being prominent as a composer, librettist, translator, journalist and director of the Munich Court Theatre. He was also a profoundly ideological artist, expressing in his operas a distinctive vision of Bavarian nationhood and of the wider German identity.

This thesis represents the first substantial study of Poissl's operatic oeuvre. It is based on a detailed reading of his thirteen surviving operas, all unpublished. It uses many previously untranscribed and untranslated sources. It shows how Poissl, in his prose writings as well as his operas, addressed what he and his contemporaries saw as the fundamental aesthetic values of opera. It also shows that several of Poissl's works were a response to specific political, ideological and cultural issues. These include the Franco-Bavarian alliance, the post-Napoleonic settlement and the Catholic restoration of Bavaria under King Ludwig I. These threads are drawn together in a case study of Poissl's opera *Athalia* (1814). This considers not only the literary and musical form of this piece but also its ideological content. It shows how Poissl's particular vision of nationhood and faith was embedded not only in *Athalia's* text but also in its music. It clarifies the dialogue-based form in which the opera was originally performed. It suggests that Poissl's later addition of recitatives to *Athalia* not only obscured the dramatic and musical strengths of this particular work, but also gave rise to musicological misconceptions which have distorted and restricted our view of Poissl's oeuvre as a whole.

## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Table of Figures</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>A note on sources, references and music examples</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 POISSL AND HIS REPUTATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Postscript.....	26
<b>CHAPTER 2 POLITICS, IDEOLOGY AND NATIONHOOD IN POISSL'S OPERAS</b> .....	<b>28</b>
The Franco-Bavarian alliance: <i>Die Opernprobe, Antigonus, Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> .....	30
Napoleon and after: <i>Athalia, Andromache, Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i> .....	36
Theatre of the nation: <i>Die Prinzessin von Provence</i> .....	43
Nationhood and religion: <i>Der Untersberg, Zayde</i> .....	51
<b>CHAPTER 3 POISSL'S OPERATIC AESTHETICS</b> .....	<b>62</b>
First principles: The Rossini debates and Poissl's <i>Erklärung</i> of 1816 .....	64
German operatic aspirations: 'Dramatic truth', 'characterisation' and the 'total effect' .....	75
<b>CHAPTER 4 POISSL'S MUSICAL DRAMATURGY</b> .....	<b>93</b>
Establishing a language: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> and <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> .....	93
Italian opera, German-style: <i>Merope</i> .....	105
<i>Opéra comique</i> in German: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> .....	117
<b>CHAPTER 5 ATHALIA: A CASE STUDY</b> .....	<b>136</b>
Composition and historical context .....	136
The libretto.....	142
Biblical precedents: <i>Athalie, Jephtas Gelübde</i> and <i>Joseph</i> .....	149
Reconstructing the original version .....	155
Speech, song and melodrama.....	160
Characteristic motifs (I): direct and indirect reminiscences .....	167
Characteristic motifs (II): the integrated overture.....	179
Characteristic keys .....	183
Athalia's Scene and Aria: a musico-dramatic analysis.....	194
The revised version of 1815.....	202

<i>Athalia's</i> reception, nationalism and the problems of revision.....	214
<b>CHAPTER 6 FURTHER PERSPECTIVES</b> .....	<b>220</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	<b>231</b>
<b>Appendix: Poissl's operas</b> .....	<b>236</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>263</b>

### **Supplementary Volume: longer music examples**

Example 1: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Duetto No. 3 (complete).....	3
Example 2: <i>Merope</i> , the death of Polifonte (extract from final scene).....	10
Example 3: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 6 (complete).....	14
Example 4: <i>Athalia</i> , extract from Act I Scene 3 (1815 version).....	30
Example 5: <i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i> , recitative after No. 4.....	34

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Poissl's operas .....	2
Table 2: <i>Merope</i> , table of numbers .....	107
Table 3: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , structure of Introduction No. 1 .....	130
Table 4: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , keys of the musical numbers.....	131
Table 5: <i>Athalia</i> , original version (1814).....	159-160
Table 6: <i>Athalia</i> , revised version (1815) .....	204

## **Table of Figures**

Figure 1: The Cuvilliés-Theater today, formerly the Hof- und Nationaltheater .....	13
Figure 2: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Sextet No. 13.....	32
Figure 3: Costume for <i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i> .....	40
Figure 4: Set design for <i>Die Prinzessin von Provence</i> .....	46
Figure 5: <i>Zayde</i> , Chorus No. 5.....	60-61
Figure 6: <i>Tancredi</i> (Rossini), 'Di tanti palpiti' .....	79-80
Figure 7: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Duet No. 2.....	93-94
Figure 8: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Overture (opening).....	94

Figure 9: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Overture (opening of <i>Allegro molto</i> ) .....	94
Figure 10: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Aria No. 12.....	95
Figure 11: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Finale Act I .....	95
Figure 12: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Finale Act II .....	96
Figure 13: <i>Die Opernprobe</i> , Aria No. 6.....	97-98
Figure 14: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Introduction, Act II Scene 6.....	99
Figure 15: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Conspirators' Chorus, Act II No. 5 .....	100
Figure 16: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Overture (opening).....	101
Figure 17: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Overture (opening of <i>Allegro assai</i> ) .....	102
Figure 18: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Overture ( <i>Allegro assai</i> , bridge section) .....	103
Figure 19: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Overture (second subject) .....	103
Figure 20: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Duet, Act I No. 3.....	104
Figure 21: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , Aria, Act II No. 4 .....	104
Figure 22: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i> , recitative before Act II No. 10 .....	105
Figure 23: <i>Merope</i> , Overture .....	108
Figure 24: <i>Merope</i> , Aria, Act II No. 7 .....	108
Figure 25: <i>Merope</i> , Aria, Act II No. 7 (continuation) .....	109
Figure 26: <i>Merope</i> , music from Act II No. 10 as shown in <i>AmZ</i> , 14 (1812), p. 641 .....	110
Figure 27: <i>Merope</i> , Aria, Act II No. 4 (original version) .....	112
Figure 28: <i>Merope</i> , Aria, Act II No. 4 (final version) .....	113
Figure 29: <i>Merope</i> , Overture .....	114
Figure 30: <i>Merope</i> , Terzetto with Chorus, Act II No. 3 .....	114
Figure 31: <i>Merope</i> , Aria, Act II No. 7 (last section) .....	115
Figure 32: <i>Merope</i> , Chorus, Act II No. 6.....	115
Figure 33: <i>Merope</i> , Duet, Act I No. 2.....	116
Figure 34: <i>Merope</i> , Recitative before Act I No. 6.....	116
Figure 35: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Entr'acte to Act II.....	118
Figure 36: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Entr'acte to Act III.....	119
Figure 37: <i>Les deux journées</i> (Cherubini), Entr'acte to Act II .....	120
Figure 38: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Finale Act I (opening) .....	121
Figure 39: <i>Joseph</i> (Méhul), Aria No. 3 (opening) .....	121-122
Figure 40: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Quartet and Chorus No. 8.....	123
Figure 41: <i>Die Zauberflöte</i> (Mozart), Finale No. 21 .....	123
Figure 42: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Quartet and Chorus No. 8.....	124
Figure 43: <i>Die Zauberflöte</i> , Finale No. 21.....	125

Figure 44: <i>Les deux journées</i> (Cherubini), Ensemble and Chorus No. 7 (opening).....	126
Figure 45: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Trio No. 3 (opening).....	127
Figure 46: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Overture.....	128
Figure 47: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Introduction No. 1 .....	129
Figure 48: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Recitative before No. 9.....	131
Figure 49: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Trio No. 3 (conclusion) .....	132-133
Figure 50: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Aria No. 4 (opening) .....	133
Figure 51: <i>Jephtas Gelübde</i> (Meyerbeer), Aria No. 3 (opening).....	134
Figure 52: <i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i> , Quartet and Chorus No. 8 (opening) .....	134
Figure 53: <i>Athalia</i> , Introduction No. 1 (opening).....	154
Figure 54: <i>Joseph</i> (Méhul), No. 5 (opening) .....	154
Figure 55: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale Act I.....	155
Figure 56: <i>Athalia</i> , Duettino No. 11 (Munich score, hand A) .....	157
Figure 57: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 14 (Munich score, hand B).....	157
Figure 58: <i>Athalia</i> , recitative added to Act I (Munich score, hand C).....	158
Figure 59: <i>Athalia</i> , Recitative and Duet No. 2 (opening).....	162
Figure 60: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8 (end) .....	162-163
Figure 61: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 9 (opening).....	163
Figure 62: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama, Act III (end) .....	163-164
Figure 63: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 15 (opening).....	164
Figure 64: <i>Athalia</i> , Duettino No. 11 (opening).....	165
Figure 65: <i>Athalia</i> , Duettino No. 11 (continuation).....	166
Figure 66: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	169
Figure 67: <i>Athalia</i> , Duet No. 2 .....	169
Figure 68: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	170
Figure 69: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 15 .....	170
Figure 70: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8.....	171
Figure 71: <i>Athalia</i> , Boys' Chorus in Duet No. 2 .....	172
Figure 72: <i>Athalia</i> , Joas's Romanze in Melodrama No. 8.....	172
Figure 73: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8.....	172
Figure 74: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8.....	173
Figure 75: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	173-174
Figure 76: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8.....	174
Figure 77: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 6.....	175
Figure 78: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 15 .....	175-176



Figure 79: <i>Athalia</i> , Recitative and Quartet No. 7 .....	176
Figure 80: <i>Athalia</i> , Athalia's dream narration, Act I (recitative version).....	177
Figure 81: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8.....	177
Figure 82: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 9 .....	178
Figure 83: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 14 (opening) .....	178
Figure 84: <i>Athalia</i> , Overture.....	179
Figure 85: <i>Athalia</i> , Terzetto No. 3.....	179
Figure 86: <i>Athalia</i> , Terzetto No. 3.....	180
Figure 87: <i>Athalia</i> , Terzetto No. 3.....	180
Figure 88: <i>Athalia</i> , Athalia's dream narration, Act I (recitative version).....	180
Figure 89: <i>Athalia</i> , Entr'acte and Chorus No. 5 .....	181
Figure 90: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 6 (opening) .....	181
Figure 91: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 6.....	181
Figure 92: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	182-183
Figure 93: <i>Athalia</i> , Overture (revised version).....	183
Figure 94: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	184
Figure 95: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	185
Figure 96: <i>Athalia</i> , Arioso in Ensemble-Stück No. 12 .....	186
Figure 97: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 6.....	187-188
Figure 98: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	189
Figure 99: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama, Act III (opening) .....	190
Figure 100: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 9 .....	191
Figure 101: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 14.....	192
Figure 102: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 4 .....	193
Figure 103: <i>Athalia</i> , Chorus No. 13.....	193
Figure 104: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 15 .....	194
Figure 105: <i>Athalia</i> , dream narration (recitative version) .....	197
Figure 106: <i>Athalia</i> , dream narration (recitative version) .....	197
Figure 107: <i>Athalia</i> , Scene and Aria No. 6 (bars 20-24) .....	198
Figure 108: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama, Act III.....	198
Figure 109: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act I Sc. 4 (1815 version) .....	205
Figure 110: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act III Sc. 6 (1815 version).....	206
Figure 111: <i>Athalia</i> , Act III Sc. 5 (1815 version).....	206
Figure 112: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act III Sc. 4 (1815 version).....	206-207
Figure 113: <i>Athalia</i> , Act III Sc. 3 (1815 version).....	207

Figure 114: <i>Athalia</i> , Finale No. 9 .....	207
Figure 115: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act II Sc. 3 (1815 version) .....	208
Figure 116: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act III Sc. 8 (1815 version).....	208
Figure 117: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act III Sc. 7 (1815 version).....	208
Figure 118: <i>Athalia</i> , opening of Act II Sc. 2 (1815 version) .....	209
Figure 119: <i>Athalia</i> , recitative from Act I Sc. 4 (1815 version).....	210
Figure 120: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8 (1814 version) .....	212
Figure 121: <i>Athalia</i> , Melodrama No. 8 (1815 version) .....	212-213
Figure 122: <i>Der Untersberg</i> , Chorus No. 1 .....	222
Figure 123: <i>Alma-Lied</i> , opening .....	222
Figure 124: <i>Zayde</i> , No. 13 Scena No. 13.....	223
Figure 125: <i>Zar und Zimmermann</i> (Lortzing), Lied mit Chor No. 9.....	223
Figure 126: <i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i> , Aria No. 8 (final section).....	226
Figure 127: <i>Der Freischütz</i> (Weber), Scene and Aria No. 8 .....	227
Figure 128: <i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i> , Aria No. 17 .....	227
Figure 129: <i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i> , recitative from Act II.....	228
Figure 130: <i>Euryanthe</i> (Weber), Finale No. 14.....	229

## A note on sources, references and music examples

None of Poissl's operas have ever been published. However in the last decade individual MS scores from German archives have begun to appear online. Between 2000 and 2007 the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Institut für Musikwissenschaft at the University of Cologne established a web-based archive of opera manuscripts from German libraries under the title *Das Opernprojekt: Die Opern in Italien und Deutschland zwischen 1770 und 1830*. This can be accessed online at <<http://www.oper-um-1800.uni-koeln.de/>>. It includes scores of many Poissl operas. Unfortunately the website is still (October 2011) technically unreliable, so in order to avoid frustration for the reader, weblinks to *Das Opernprojekt* have not been included in footnotes to the main text. Instead, all manuscripts included in the archive are marked 'also in Opernprojekt' alongside their library shelfmarks in the Appendix.

Other more reliable online resources are cited with weblinks in footnotes. The most frequently cited of these, and the most potentially useful in the future, is the Münchener Digitalisations-Zentrum (MDZ) which continues to upload Poissl material from the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, and can be searched. The weblinks given in footnotes here represent the items available in October 2011, but new material is being added on a regular basis.

The musical discussions in this thesis are illustrated by music examples created by the author. These are mostly in the form of vocal score transcriptions. They do not give a complete representation of the orchestral texture, but are sufficient to illustrate the point under discussion. Similar principles apply to the sung text, where the German spelling and punctuation have been modernised without comment. For those readers who would like to study the original MS material, the equivalent pages can be viewed as scanned images on the accompanying CD, filed under the appropriate Figure number. So for example MS images equivalent to Figure 12 can be found in the folder 'Figure 12' on the CD. This also applies to the longer music examples in the Supplementary Volume. Scanned images of *Zayde* and of the Frankfurt and Stuttgart scores of *Athalia* were not available, so there are no MS images for Figures 5, 60, 62, 64, 70, 76, 81, 99, 108, 120 and 124.

Finally, a systematic overview of all Poissl's operas is provided in the Appendix. This is designed to supplement and support the discussions of the operas in Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6. Basic information is provided for each opera, including a dramatis personae, an act-by-act plot synopsis indicating the positions of musical numbers, a list of published and MS sources and a summary of known performances.

## List of abbreviations

### German Periodicals

<i>AmZ</i>	<i>Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung</i> (Leipzig)
<i>AmZ (W)</i>	<i>Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den österreichischen Kaiserstaat</i> (Vienna)
<i>Flora</i>	<i>Flora: Ein Unterhaltungsblatt</i> (Munich)
<i>JLM</i>	<i>Journal des Luxus und der Moden / Journal für Luxus, Mode und Gegenstände der Kunst / Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode</i> (Weimar)
<i>Morgenblatt</i>	<i>Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände</i> (Stuttgart and Tübingen)
<i>MTJ</i>	<i>Münchener Theater-Journal</i> (Munich)

### Books

<i>ADB</i>	<i>Allgemeine deutsche Biographie</i> , ed. by Rochus Liliencron and others, 56 vols (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1875-1912)
<i>Briefe</i>	<i>Johann Nepomuk von Poißl: Briefe (1807-1855). Ein Blick auf die Münchener Musik- und Theatergeschichte</i> , ed. by Volkmar von Pechstaedt (Göttingen: Hainholz, 2006)
<i>Grove</i>	<i>The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , ed. by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn, 29 vols (London: Macmillan, 2001)
<i>MGG</i>	<i>Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> , ed. by Ludwig Finscher, 2 <sup>nd</sup> rev. edn, 26 vols (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1994-2007)
<i>Sängerlexikon</i>	<i>Großes Sängerlexikon</i> , ed. by Karl Joseph Kutsch and Leo Riemens, 3 <sup>rd</sup> rev. edn, 5 vols (Bern: K. G. Saur, 1997)

### Writings by Poissl

<i>Ansichten</i>	Johann Nepomuk von Poissl, 'Meine Ansichten über den allmählichen Verfall der Musik', in <i>Jahrbücher des deutschen National-Vereins für Musik und Wissenschaft</i> , 3 (1841), pp. 113-115, 121-123, 129-132, 137-139
<i>Erklärung</i>	Johann Nepomuk von Poissl, 'Erklärung', in <i>Münchener Theater-Journal</i> , 2 (1816), pp. 446-458, 503-507

### Unpublished dissertation

Schrott, Dissertation	Ludwig Schrott, <i>Der Opernkomponist Johann Nepomuk von Poissl</i> , unpublished typescript (ca. 1932), 396 pp. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, shelfmark 4 Mus.th. 2134
--------------------------	--

### German library sigla

B	Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin
DI	Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek
DS	Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek
F	Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek
Mbs	Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
SI	Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek
WRha	Weimar, Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt – Musikarchiv des Deutschen Nationaltheaters

## INTRODUCTION

The second decade of the nineteenth century, the decade preceding the moment when Weber's *Der Freischütz* (Berlin, 1821) established the dominance of Romantic opera in Germany, witnessed the most successful years in the career of the Bavarian composer Johann Nepomuk von Poissl (1783-1865). Poissl's biblical opera *Athalia*, premiered in Munich in 1814, was praised in terms that anticipated the rapturous reception of *Der Freischütz* seven years later. It was held up as a paradigm for future German operas, and together with some of Poissl's other works was performed by most of Germany's larger theatres.<sup>1</sup>

Poissl completed eight operas between 1812 and 1820, as well as a major re-composition of Nasolini's *Merope*. Although two of his works remained unperformed he was, for this period at least, one of the most productive and widely-discussed opera composers in Germany. By contrast the years 1812-1820 saw no new operas from Poissl's close friend Weber. The two German-language operas of another friend, Meyerbeer, were performed within weeks of each other in 1812-1813,<sup>2</sup> but Meyerbeer then pursued his career outside Germany and in other languages, a fact lamented by both Poissl and Weber in their reviews of his Italian opera *Emma di Resburgo*.<sup>3</sup> The final version of Beethoven's *Fidelio* appeared in 1814 and Spohr and Hoffmann both produced significant works in this period,<sup>4</sup> but Poissl considerably exceeded all these better-remembered contemporaries in terms of productivity. On this basis alone Poissl can claim our interest, as an experimenter in the laboratory of German opera at a time when other major figures were silent.

However these years of Poissl's greatest prominence (Table 1) were also particularly significant ones for the development of the art-form. In his writings and in the operas themselves we see Poissl responding to two events which had a profound effect on German

---

<sup>1</sup> After the Munich premiere *Athalia* was taken up by theatres in Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Prague, Darmstadt, Berlin, Weimar, Karlsruhe and Mannheim. See Appendix section 6 for a list of performances. Conspicuously absent from this list is Vienna, where none of Poissl's operas appear to have been performed, despite his efforts to promote them there. See Poissl's letters to Ignaz von Mosel in *Briefe*, pp. 90-91 (10 July 1820); 94-96 (9 February 1821); 98-100 (23 March 1821).

<sup>2</sup> *Jephtas Gelübde* (Munich, 23 December 1812); *Alimelek* (Stuttgart, 6 January 1813).

<sup>3</sup> Poissl, 'Musikalischer Bericht aus München', *AmZ(W)*, 4 (1820), pp. 366-367, 374-376, 382-384, 398-400. *Sämtliche Schriften von C.M. von Weber*, ed. by Georg Kaiser (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1921), pp. 305-310. See also Carl Maria von Weber, *Writings on Music*, ed. by John Warrack, transl. by Martin Cooper (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), pp. 277-289.

<sup>4</sup> Spohr: *Faust* (composed 1813) and *Zemire und Azor* (Frankfurt, 1819). Hoffmann: *Aurora* (composed 1811-12) and *Undine* (Berlin, 1816).

operatic culture. The first was the downfall of Napoleon (1813-1815), which intensified calls for a new German opera to compete with the foreign works which dominated theatre repertoires. The considerable success of *Athalia* among the German musical intelligentsia must partly be read in this context. As Clive Brown has written, certain operas succeeded ‘almost as much by the fact that, in the upsurge of patriotic fervour which followed the defeat of Napoleon, the German public needed to acclaim great German art-works as by the genuine admiration which they elicited from a portion of their hearers’.<sup>5</sup> *Athalia*, a biblical parable of national liberation, was not merely the first major German opera to reflect the post-Napoleonic mood in its subject matter, but also profited from this euphoria of liberation. In 1814 critics and audiences saw in *Athalia* the emancipated German opera that they hoped to see.

<b>Opera</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Premiere</b>	<b>City</b>
<i>Die Opernprobe</i>	German/Italian	23 February 1806	Munich
<i>Antigonus</i>	German	12 February 1808	Munich
<i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i>	Italian	1 July 1812	Munich
<i>Merope</i> (Nasolini / Poissl)	Italian	1 September 1812	Munich
<i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i>	German	28 May 1813	Munich
<i>Athalia</i>	German	3 June 1814	Munich
<i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia, oder Die Freunde</i>	German	21 April 1815	Munich
<i>Dir wie mir, oder Wie sich alle betrügen</i>	German	Comp.1816	Unperf.
<i>Nittetis</i>	German	29 June 1817	Darmstadt
<i>Issipile</i>	German	Comp. 1817/1818	Unperf.
<i>La Rappresaglia</i>	Italian	7 April 1820	Munich
<i>Die Prinzessin von Provence</i>	German	23 January 1825	Munich
<i>Der Untersberg</i>	German	30 October 1829	Munich
<i>Zayde</i>	German	9 November 1843	Munich

**Table 1: Poissl’s operas**

The other operatic watershed of the 1810s was the arrival of Rossini’s operas on German stages. This development, from 1816 onwards, seemed to threaten what little progress German opera had made in wooing the public, exacerbated an already long-running debate about the relative merits of German and Italian opera, and crystallised the aesthetic arguments on both sides. With Italian opera achieving unprecedented levels of popularity German composers and critics were forced to identify exactly what it was that distinguished the ideal German opera from its Rossinian competitors. The debate was particularly

---

<sup>5</sup> Clive Brown, *Louis Spohr, A critical biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), p. 206.

vehement in Munich, Poissl's home city and the first in Germany to experience the Rossini craze. Poissl, at the height of his career, was uniquely well placed to intervene in this debate, and did so in word and deed. The aesthetic discussions conducted by him and his contemporaries went to the very heart of the relationship between music and drama, and still resonate in operatic practice today.

It is perhaps best said at the outset that this thesis does not aim to rehabilitate Poissl as a composer for today. As Chapter 2 makes clear, Poissl's operas were closely concerned with the specific political and cultural issues of his own day. These are often issues which would mean little to a general audience two centuries later. For example in the 'magic opera' *Die Prinzessin von Provence* (1825) his music was merely one element in a celebratory public event whose impact was largely visual, and whose purpose was the glorification of the nation as embodied in its new National Theatre. The music served a similar function to, say, the music at a modern Olympic opening ceremony. In its day Poissl's score served its purpose well and the production proved very popular, but today the music inevitably loses much of its meaning when divorced from a visual event and a cultural context that we can no longer replicate.

For similar reasons it seems wise not to attempt absolute value judgements about Poissl. His own contemporaries criticised a lack of originality in his basic musical materials, and this view has been shared by later commentators.<sup>6</sup> Anyone who spends much time with his music will notice that his melodies, though praised by his contemporaries as singable and 'Italianate', tend to fall into very conventional, predictable forms. On the other hand Poissl can show great skill when characterising a strong dramatic process. When discussing his own music it is striking how often he claims to be proud of his Finales, those sections of the operas most consistently led by the dramatic process.<sup>7</sup> So perhaps he recognised where his own strengths lay. Nonetheless, at a distance of 200 years, and removed from the operas' original theatrical context, it seems not particularly useful to pronounce on whether Poissl was a 'good' or a 'bad' composer.

What we can do is to examine Poissl's own stated aesthetic intentions and see to what extent he did or did not realise them. Indeed this process, an attempt to understand Poissl's musical

---

<sup>6</sup> *AmZ*, 15 (1813), p. 420, on *Aucassin und Nicolette*; *AmZ*, 32 (1830), pp. 63-64, on *Der Untersberg*; Max Zenger, *Geschichte der Münchener Oper* ed. by Theodor Kroyer (Munich: Verlag für Praktische Kunstwissenschaft, 1923), p. 132; John Warrack, *German opera: from the beginnings to Wagner* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 294-295.

<sup>7</sup> *Briefe*, p. 21 (27 July 1813) on *Athalia* Act I; p. 24 (3 November 1813) on *Athalia* Act III; p. 38 (10 October 1815) on *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* Act II; p. 65 (1 July 1817) on *Nittetis* Act II.

dramaturgy, is central to the present thesis. As noted above Poissl was an experimenter, for instance in his attempt to reconcile *opera seria* plots with the musical and literary sensibilities of early nineteenth-century Germany. The fact that his experiments ‘failed’ and his Metastasian operas were among the last ever written does not reduce their audacity or the possibility that his experience influenced others. The historiography of German opera has suffered from a tendency to favour success and to concentrate on the ‘genius’ rather than the mere ‘man of talent’. This is evident not least in some of the Poissl literature reviewed in Chapter 1. But with Poissl, whose operas had only a very brief career on the stage, his intentions are arguably at least as significant as his results, and his failures as interesting as his successes. Even the German writer Ludwig Schrott, author of a dissertation on Poissl in the 1930s and no stranger to the cult of genius, recognised that Poissl’s ‘importance lies partly in the fact that he established the limits of certain areas of opera and brought some genres to a conclusion, enabling his fellow-toilers and successors to know the limits of the possible.’<sup>8</sup>

The Poissl we see in his operas is also only one aspect of a complex personality, both as an artist and as a public figure. Many of these other aspects invite further study. He was, for instance, one of the few German composers before Wagner to write his own libretti. He was a translator, journalist and polemicist. He was Intendant of the Munich Court Theatre for several years, and during his term of office was closely involved in the building of the Odeon concert hall. As Intendant he introduced important reforms to the welfare and pension arrangements of the theatre’s employees. While in office he also helped to establish a prototype of the modern royalty system for composers and authors. Later he was chairman of the commission to found a conservatoire in Munich.

Despite these many enticing areas of potential research, within the scope of this thesis the main focus has to be on the content of Poissl’s operas themselves. Surprisingly, this is the aspect least well addressed by the existing literature (Chapter 1). Two essential driving forces behind Poissl’s operas emerge once one investigates the material: the realisation of certain aesthetic aspirations shared with other German composers, and the representation of political and ideological ideas in operatic form.

Because political and cultural developments in Bavaria and Poissl’s responses to them form a chronological framework for his whole career, these aspects are considered first, in

---

<sup>8</sup> ‘Tatsächlich beruht die Bedeutung des Komponisten teilweise auch darin, daß er gewisse Bereiche der Oper ausgeschritten, bestimmte Gattungen abgeschlossen hat, so daß seinen Mitstrebenden und Nachfolgern die Grenzen des Möglichen klar wurden.’ Ludwig Schrott, ‘Aus dem Ringen um die deutsche Oper: Ein Lebens- und Schaffensbild Johann Nepomuk von Poissls’, in *Die Musik*, 32 (1940), p. 303.



Chapter 2. The ideological aspect of Poissl's art emerges from a study of the works in their immediate historical context. It has already been explored in articles by Björn Kühnicke (2007) on *Athalia* and by Markus Engelhardt (2004) on *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* (see Chapter 1). However on closer inspection almost all of Poissl's serious operas, written for a theatre that declared itself to be of 'the court and the nation' [*Hof- und Nationaltheater*], can be read as state-of-the-nation pieces, reflecting specific political and cultural issues. Poissl's allusions to contemporary issues range from the satirical squibs about international affairs in *Die Opernprobe* through the coded critique of Bavaria's alliance with Napoleon in *Antigonus* and *Ottaviano in Sicilia* to the almost propagandistic treatment of Bavaria's Catholic restoration in *Der Untersberg*. Poissl did not create his operas in a political vacuum, and while this aspect of his work is more elusive than the purely musical issues which can be spelled out in words and notes, the cultural and political life of Bavaria was a constantly present context for his literary and musical choices.

Chapter 3 examines Poissl as an aesthete and explores his position in the discourses that surrounded German opera. A key text here is the *Erklärung* [Declaration] which he published in 1816 as a response to the arrival of Rossini's operas in Munich. In it Poissl not only attempted to clarify his own aesthetic position, but spoke by implication on behalf of German opera in general. This document has not been available to English-speaking readers before,<sup>9</sup> so extended extracts are provided.<sup>10</sup> An examination of this *Erklärung* alongside other writings by Poissl and his contemporaries shows how he built his operatic aspirations on certain fundamental concepts of early nineteenth-century aesthetics. These in turn gave Poissl's generation of composers a shared operatic terminology in which 'dramatic truth', 'characterisation' and the 'total effect', all ideas directly or indirectly invoked in the *Erklärung*, were the most important aspirations. This underlying conceptual framework can also be found in the writings of Mosel, Hoffmann, Spohr and (of most relevance to Poissl) Weber. Amongst other things, as Chapter 3 shows, these attitudes informed the German critique of Italian opera which reached a particular polemical intensity in the debates surrounding Rossini.

Poissl's stated aspirations to 'dramatic truth', 'characterisation' and the 'total effect' are the key to his musical dramaturgy. His most successful demonstration of these principles can be found in *Athalia*, and especially in this opera's original 1814 version. A detailed study of *Athalia* is presented in Chapter 5. It places this ideologically-charged work in its historical

---

<sup>9</sup> The *Erklärung* appeared in the *Münchener Theater-Journal (MTJ)*, a journal which was published between 1814 and 1816 under the editorship of Carl Carl. The only extant copies appear to be in Mbs, Lithogr. 173-1, Lithogr. 173-2, Lithogr. 173-3, Bavar. 2596-1.

<sup>10</sup> All translations are by the author, unless otherwise acknowledged.

context alongside the downfall of Napoleon, a figure seen by Poissl as a tyrant and a usurper like the title character of the opera. It examines the choices made by Poissl and his librettist in their adaptation of Racine's *Athalie*, choices partly guided by the opera's ideological subtext. It reconstructs for the first time the dialogue-based version in which the piece was originally performed, demonstrating its stylistic origins in French *opéra comique* and its specific debt to Méhul's biblical opera *Joseph*. Poissl's pursuit of 'dramatic truth' is explored in depth through his use of characteristic motifs and keys, different styles of vocal declamation and other musical elements.

Poissl's later revision of *Athalie* is also examined. It is argued that his changes, far from making the work more effective, actually diluted or distorted many of the most effective aspects of the original version, and may even have contributed to a cooling of public enthusiasm towards the work. This has not prevented later musicology from classifying *Athalie*, on the basis of this revised version, as a 'through-composed' opera, and indeed much that was spoken in the first version of the piece was sung as recitative in the second. However the term 'through-composed' is very problematic in this context, for reasons that Chapter 5 makes clear. So within this thesis the term 'through-composed' is generally used in quotation marks, or replaced with the more neutral 'continuously sung'.

Within the scope of this thesis it is not possible to treat all of Poissl's operas in comparable detail. However in order to put *Athalie* in the context of Poissl's wider development, the case study is preceded in Chapter 4 by shorter studies of three other works (*Ottaviano in Sicilia*, *Merope* and *Aucassin und Nicolette*) written before *Athalie*, and followed in Chapter 6 by an account of aesthetic and dramaturgical issues in some of the later operas. This chapter also touches on other promising areas for research, including Poissl's unusual status as librettist of his own operas, his relationship with the public and the musical press, and possible lines of influence between his works and the later operas of Weber.

In conclusion the thesis argues for a new view of Poissl as an important participant not only in the history of German opera but also in the wider cultural and ideological history of his time. It suggests that Poissl, 'one of the forgotten men of operatic history',<sup>11</sup> has been unnoticed for so long partly because the received view of him has been distorted by false assumptions and the cultural agendas of later times. Rather than identifying what Poissl himself was aiming to do, posterity has taken a retrospective and often judgemental view, ascribing aesthetic intentions to him which were not necessarily his. Poissl deserves a scholarly approach which places him in the biographical, ideological and artistic reality of his own time.

---

<sup>11</sup> Warrack, *German opera*, p.288.

## CHAPTER 1

### POISSL AND HIS REPUTATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Before examining the literature on Poissl we should first ask why there is so little of it. Some of the answers lie in his biography and personal characteristics rather than in the operas themselves.<sup>12</sup> Others lie in assumptions and preoccupations which dominated German musicology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If for a long time Poissl and his works remained almost invisible in the historiography of German opera, it was partly because they did not fit a prevailing view of German operatic development. This chapter will consider some of these general issues before reviewing the Poissl literature itself.

Negative personal perceptions of Poissl proved surprisingly durable in Munich, even long after his death. Most of these originated in his tenure as Intendant of Munich's Court Theatre between 1824 and 1833. Poissl failed to keep the theatre's finances under control and was eventually dismissed by King Ludwig I as 'not suitable for this post'.<sup>13</sup> His successor Karl Theodor von Küstner criticised him publicly, both at the time and later in his memoirs.<sup>14</sup> Poissl struck back in pamphlet form,<sup>15</sup> but his reputation seems to have been lastingly damaged in his home city and in the theatre that he led. Although Poissl presided over a key moment in the *Nationaltheater's* history, namely its re-opening in 1825 after destruction by fire, today (October 2011) his portrait does not hang alongside those of other nineteenth-century *Intendanten* in the theatre's foyer.

---

<sup>12</sup> Modern summaries of Poissl's life are given by Clive Brown (*Grove*, xx, pp. 3-4) and Volkmar von Pechstaedt (*MGG*, Personenteil xiii, pp. 717-719). The *Briefe* provide a wealth of biographical material, both within the letters themselves and in von Pechstaedt's annotations and appendices.

<sup>13</sup> '[...] nicht zu dieser Stelle geeignet'. Ludwig I to Eduard von Schenk, 5 May 1832. *Briefwechsel zwischen Ludwig I. von Bayern und Eduard von Schenk 1823-1842*, ed. by Max Spindler (Munich: Parcus, 1930), p. 227.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Theodor von Küstner, *Vierunddreissig Jahre meiner Theaterleitung* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1853), pp. 98-99. The King's views are preserved in a letter: 'In financial and artistic terms and in terms of audience satisfaction it is going *badly, badly and badly*. High time there was a change.' ['In finanzieller, in artistischer, in des Publicums befriedigender Hinsicht geht es *schlecht, schlecht und schlecht*. Hohe Zeit, daß Aenderung eintrete.'] Ludwig I, *Briefwechsel Ludwig I / Schenk*, p. 238 (7 November 1832).

<sup>15</sup> Anon [Johann Nepomuk von Poissl], *Beleuchtung eines Artikels in Nro. 64 des heurigen Jahrganges der "Leipziger Theater-Chronik"* (Munich: Jaquet, 1834).

Poissl also made influential enemies among the ensemble of the Isartor-Theater, the smaller of Munich's two state theatres. Before his appointment he had publicly but anonymously urged the closure of this theatre.<sup>16</sup> In the end it was dissolved under his *Intendanz* in 1825, as part of a cost-cutting exercise by the new King Ludwig I. In the 1850s two Isartor actors who had subsequently gained fame in Vienna wrote books which gave unflattering personal portraits of Poissl and blamed him for their expulsion from Munich.<sup>17</sup>

August Lewald, an influential music journalist and also a former member of the Isartor ensemble, published a highly critical account of Poissl's theatre regime as witnessed in 1832. Lewald admitted that Munich audiences had liked Poissl's opera *Die Prinzessin von Provence* but was scathing about his cantata *Vergangenheit und Zukunft* (1832) and claimed that he had left the theatre in a terrible state on his dismissal.<sup>18</sup>

Compounding the reputational damage done by his failure as Intendant, Poissl took what posterity has deemed to be the 'wrong' side in the Lola Montez affair of 1846-1848. Montez, the manipulative mistress of King Ludwig I, was shunned by most of Munich society. However a minority including Poissl continued to associate with her. In this he may have acted out of a commendable personal loyalty to Ludwig, but as recently as 1995 his behaviour has been described as that of a 'chancer and a careerist'.<sup>19</sup> His good relations with Montez certainly appeared to ease his way to a re-appointment as *Hoftheaterintendant* in January 1848. However Poissl's good fortune was not to last. Ludwig abdicated in March of the same year, and Poissl found himself not only out of office but also on a list of state officials proscribed by the new King.<sup>20</sup>

Poissl's own personality may also have contributed to this negative reputation. Although the young man encountered by Weber and Meyerbeer had considerable charm and a talent for

---

<sup>16</sup> Anon [Johann Nepomuk von Poissl], *Ideen über zweckmässige Leitung eines deutschen Hoftheaters, nebst einem Anhang zur Beantwortung der Frage: Ist der Fortbestand des Theaters am Isarthor der Kunst in München nützlich oder schädlich?* (Munich: Fleischmann, 1820).

<sup>17</sup> Franz Gämmerler, *Theater-Director Carl, sein Leben und sein Wirken* (Vienna: Wallishausser, 1854), pp. 26-27; Adolf Bäuerle, *Director Carl. Roman und Wirklichkeit* (Pest, Vienna, Leipzig: Hartleben, 1856), I, pp. 271-279.

<sup>18</sup> August Lewald, 'Das Theater zu München', in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1844), IV, pp. 334-361. The article was written and first published in 1835.

<sup>19</sup> *Ludwig I. und Lola Montez: der Briefwechsel*, ed. by Reinhold Rauh and Bruce Seymour (Munich: 1995), p. 44. The editors describe Montez's visitors, including Poissl, as 'Glücksritter und Karrieristen'. See also Ludwig Schrott, *Biedermeier in München: Dokumente einer schöpferischen Zeit* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1963), p. 385.

<sup>20</sup> Schrott, *Biedermeier*, p. 390. Montez's patronage cannot have been the only factor in Poissl's appointment, since the *AmZ* was already announcing it in July 1846, three months before Montez's arrival in Munich. *AmZ*, 48 (1846), p. 510.

making friends,<sup>21</sup> a less attractive, more arrogant side of his character is glimpsed in a letter of Franz Danzi, Poissl's teacher. In 1813 Danzi, now living in Karlsruhe, heard of the failure of Poissl's *Aucassin und Nicolette* in Munich:

They say Poissl's latest opera has had no success; apparently there are a lot of old acquaintances in it, particularly in the *forms*. Is it true that he has become so conceited and is always the first to praise his own music? – If so I am sorry for him, because that is precisely the way not to get *anywhere*.<sup>22</sup>

Poissl also seems to have had a strong streak of self-pity and a tendency in the less successful phases of his life to blame his failures on the machinations of others. When his comic opera *Dir wie mir* failed to reach the stage in 1816 because of a dispute between its librettist and the Munich theatre management, he ascribed this to a personal vendetta by the Intendant, Karl August Delamotte:

Herr Delamotte always welcomes an opportunity to hurt me by the application of pressure, and he would soon find another excuse to do so even if he didn't have this one; obviously I am bound to be defeated when a part of my life is subject to this man's arbitrary exercise of power.<sup>23</sup>

Personal antipathies aroused by Poissl in his lifetime would be unimportant if they had not continued to affect his reputation decades after his death and coloured later musicological literature. A prominent example of this is Max Zenger's early twentieth-century history of the Munich opera. Zenger's book is a useful (if not faultless) source of factual information, and still the standard history of the Munich opera in the nineteenth century. For this reason it has a significant influence on historical perceptions. Poissl is shown as an absurdly self-satisfied figure. His operas are dismissively treated and it is suggested that as Intendant he promoted his own works at the expense of other, better-qualified Munich composers. To illustrate Poissl's inflated opinion of his own worth as a composer, Zenger retails an

---

<sup>21</sup> The young Poissl is described as 'witty and cheerful' ['geistreich und heiter'] in Max Maria von Weber, *Carl Maria von Weber: Ein Lebensbild* (Leipzig: Keil, 1864), I, p. 274. Meyerbeer's diary describes Poissl on their first meeting as a 'likeable young man' ['ein liebenswürdiger junger Mann']. *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. by Heinz Becker (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1960), I, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> 'Poißel's neueste Oper soll kein Glück gemacht haben; es sollen viele alte Bekannte darinne seyn, besonders in den *Formen*. Ist es war [sic], daß er so eingebildet geworden, und seine Musik immer zuerst lobt? Es sollte mir leid um ihn thun; denn da wäre er gerade auf dem Wege *nichts* zu werden.' *Franz Danzi: Briefwechsel*, ed. by Volkmar von Pechstaedt (Tutzing: Schneider, 1997), p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> 'Eine Gelegenheit mir wehe zu thun kann Herrn *Delamotte* bey seiner Druk- und Handlungs-Weise nur willkommen seyn, und er würde, hätte er diese Ausrede nicht, um eine andre wenig verlegen seyn, so daß es mir klar vor Augen liegt daß ich nothwendig unterliegen muß, wenn ein Theil meiner Existenz in die Willkühr dieses Mannes gegeben ist.' *Briefe*, p.60 (19 November 1816).

anecdote he heard from an old Munich musician in the middle of the nineteenth century, in which Poissl appears to rate his own work higher than Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.<sup>24</sup>

In this way Poissl's image, especially in Munich, became that of a second-rate figure of little musical interest. However there were also more fundamental reasons for his neglect, and these lay in the preoccupations and prejudices of post-Wagnerian musicology. Many German musicologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the Wagnerian *Musikdrama* as the supreme and historically inevitable musical achievement of the Romantic era. In a reflection of Wagner's own attitude to his predecessors, composers of the generation before him were accorded a value based on their perceived contribution to the *Musikdrama*. As Carl Dahlhaus wrote, 'to the possessive retrospective look, history appears as pre-history'.<sup>25</sup> The search for influences and antecedents is of course perfectly legitimate, and there are features of the *Musikdrama* which can clearly be traced back to the operatic music of Weber, Poissl and their generation. Indeed, the whole theoretical foundation of Wagner's works is heavily indebted to the aesthetic discourses of the early nineteenth century. Poissl's position in these is explored in Chapter 3. But German musicology after Wagner was subject to a distorting form of hindsight. Much of this distortion sprang from a cult of genius tinged with German nationalism. Individual figures such as Weber were given a heroic status which obscured the view to their less favoured contemporaries, and non-German influences were ignored, understated or treated with suspicion.

For a long time this approach prevented an objective understanding even of Weber himself,<sup>26</sup> and left little hope for a serious investigation of 'lesser' composers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Poissl's name lived on mostly in the footnotes of

---

<sup>24</sup> Zenger, p. 132. The truth of the anecdote is questionable, and not just because of the unreliability of old musicians' tales. It shares a suspicious number of features with Spohr's anecdote in which the Grand Duke of Darmstadt declares a preference for *Athalia* over *Don Giovanni*. See *Louis Spohr's Autobiography: Translated from the German*, transl. unknown (London: Longman, Green et al., 1865), p.221. Max Maria von Weber also recycled this material, claiming that it was G. J. Vogler who preferred *Athalia* to *Don Giovanni*. See 'Reminiscences of C. M. von Weber and Rossini', in *The Musical Times*, 17, (1876), p. 423. This version is particularly suspect as Vogler died before *Athalia's* first performance.

<sup>25</sup> 'Geschichte erscheint dem besitzergreifenden Blick zurück als Vorgeschichte'. Carl Dahlhaus, 'Die Kategorie des Charakteristischen in der Ästhetik des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Die "Couleur locale" in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Heinz Becker (Regensburg: Bosse, 1976), p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Ludwig Finscher, 'Weber's "Freischütz": Conceptions and Misconceptions', in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 110 (1983-1984), pp. 79-90. Finscher describes *Der Freischütz* as 'an admirable piece of work buried slowly under an ever-growing mass of literary and critical interpretations with overtones of politics, nationalism, romanticism and the idea of opera transformed into philosophical drama' (p. 90).

writings about his more famous friend. If he and other less prominent figures were discussed at all it was in simplistic proto-Wagnerian categories. Thus Reipschläger in 1911 and Schiedermaier in 1940,<sup>27</sup> both looking through the prism of the *Musikdrama*, emphasised the importance of ‘through-composition’ in Poissl’s oeuvre even though only two of his eleven German operas were originally through-composed.<sup>28</sup>

Even if one leaves aside his works, Poissl’s life and career did not fit the retrospectively-invented model of the independent, heroic nineteenth-century composer, a model typified by Weber in the operatic sphere and Beethoven in the symphonic. Poissl was an aristocrat in a largely middle-class profession, a status which even in his lifetime made for a problematic reception. When Louis Spohr, a man of republican sympathies, heard *Athalia* in Darmstadt in 1816, his dislike of the piece seems to have been intensified by the fact that he saw the patronage of one aristocrat, the Grand Duke of Hessen, being bestowed on another, Poissl:

The Grand–Duke, who considers the music of this opera very fine, perhaps merely, because it was written by a Baron, had the vexation to find that the public considered it very wearisome, which was even loudly expressed close to the box of the Grand-Duke.<sup>29</sup>

Poissl’s later dealings with Spohr suggest that he was aware of his hostility. Writing to him in 1825 Poissl emphasised his own ‘honestly-earned’ reputation as a composer, as if to deflect charges of dilettantism.<sup>30</sup> A fear that as an aristocrat he would automatically be considered a dilettante may also account for the defensive arrogance which, as noted above, we meet in Poissl’s comments on his own work.

Another way in which Poissl’s biography does not conform to type is that he never had a performing career. This was also partly due to his aristocratic status. It is unclear to what extent he possessed performing skills as an instrumentalist or conductor, but he seems to have regarded the professional performing of music, and in particular the concert tours which were an important source of income for the likes of Weber and Spohr, as incompatible with his eminence in the Bavarian hierarchy. He was acutely aware of the financial disadvantage that this imposed on him. In one of his many begging letters to King Max I Joseph he states that he cannot make money by ‘travelling around with concerts and

---

<sup>27</sup> Erich Reipschläger, *Schubaur, Danzi und Poissl als Opernkomponisten. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der deutschen Oper auf Münchener Boden* (Berlin: Wegner, 1911); Ludwig Schiedermaier, *Die deutsche Oper: Grundzüge ihres Werdens und Wesens*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Dümmler, 1940).

<sup>28</sup> *Antigonus* and *Zayde* are the only German operas not to have included dialogue in their original versions, and even *Antigonus* is not a clear-cut case. Its score has not survived. The printed libretto, which has the heading ‘Recitativ’ over some passages of connecting verse but not others, could imply that some text was spoken. See Appendix, section 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Louis Spohr’s Autobiography*, pp. 222-223.

<sup>30</sup> *Briefe*, p. 135 (7<sup>th</sup> October 1825).

benefit performances, [...] because the necessary steps are not compatible with the honour of Your Majesty's court'.<sup>31</sup>

This limitation on Poissl's own career may have affected the careers of his works as well. Edward Dent, in his 1937-38 lectures on the rise of Romantic opera, suggests that Weber's status as a Romantic pioneer has been exaggerated partly because his performing career promoted a widespread awareness of his compositions.<sup>32</sup> Dent exaggerates for polemical effect, but there is a grain of truth in what he says. A composer of Poissl's and Weber's generation who could tour with performances of his own works was thereby able to promote a wider hearing of them, and this option was not open to Poissl.

The fact that Poissl was not a professional performer could be seen as denying him that artistic independence which was later considered the hallmark of the nineteenth-century composer. It could also be seen as an anachronism that he remained closely wedded to the court theatre system. This closeness came partly out of financial necessity. In the absence of a performing career, and after the financial failure of his family estates, Poissl was left dependent on *ex gratia* payments from the King when his operas were performed in Munich. His only prospect of a regular income was to be appointed to a senior position with the status of *Intendant* in one of Bavaria's national musical institutions. This wish was not granted until 1823.<sup>33</sup>

Poissl was also tied to the court (i.e. state-subsidised) theatre system by more than just personal need. He seems to have had a genuine belief in the ability of a court theatre to deliver artistic excellence. In a pamphlet published in 1820 he identified the court theatre as the type best equipped to fulfil the moral and educational purpose that for him was fundamental to all art:

If the refinement of taste and the education of morals, in combination with respectable entertainment, is the chief goal of institutes of dramatic art in general, then the achievement of this goal should be pursued all the more by court theatres. Much must be demanded of them because of their status, but also much can be demanded of them because of their resources.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> 'Da ich auf Reisen durch Konzerte oder *Benefice*-Vorstellungen nichts gewinnen kann, weil die nöthigen Schritte nicht mit der Ehre des Hofes Eurer Königlichen Majestaet verträglich sind [...]' *Briefe*, p. 77 (27th July 1818).

<sup>32</sup> Edward J. Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, ed. by Winton Dean (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> Poissl's appointments between 1823 and 1833 were: 2<sup>nd</sup> Court Music Intendant, 30 September 1823; Court Theatre Intendant (provisionally), 1 May 1824; Court Music Intendant, 7 June 1825; Court Theatre Intendant (confirmed), 23 April 1827; dismissed as Court Theatre Intendant (but remained as Court Music Intendant), 28 February 1833.

<sup>34</sup> 'Wenn Veredlung des Geschmacks und Bildung der Sitten, verbunden mit anständiger Unterhaltung, der Hauptzweck einer dramatischen Kunstanstalt schon im Allgemeinen ist,



The ethos of the court theatre left a strong imprint on the works themselves. In the operas we see repeated assertions of monarchical authority as well as representations of the political issues facing the Bavarian state and its royal house. This ideological content is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, but it is worth remembering as we consider Poissl's operas that most of them were written for an eighteenth-century auditorium (Figure 1) whose very architecture, with its hierarchical tiers and centrally-placed royal box, expressed the centrality of King and court within the nation.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 1: The Cuvilliés-Theater today, formerly the Hof- und Nationaltheater (photograph © Bayerische Schlösserverwaltung)**

None of this fits neatly into later views of what a German composer should have been doing in the early Romantic era. Also, as a composer who seems to have written Italian and German music with equal relish and who in 1816 even applied to become Intendant of Munich's Italian opera,<sup>36</sup> Poissl was not going to fit the simplistic nationalism of post-

---

so muß dieser Zweck um so mehr von Hoftheatern zu erreichen gesucht werden, weil von ihnen, schon ihrer Stellung wegen, viel gefordert werden muß, ihrer Mittel wegen aber auch viel gefordert werden darf.' Anon [Poissl], *Ideen*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Die Opernprobe, Antigonus, Ottaviano in Sicilia, Merope, Aucassin und Nicolette, Athalia, Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, and *La Rappresaglia* were all first performed here.

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Montgelas, 6 September 1816. *Briefe* p. 59.

Wagnerian musicology. Of course the opposition between the German and Italian aesthetic was a real feature of the operatic debate in the early nineteenth century, and for reasons examined in Chapter 3 this opposition was of particular importance in Poissl's Munich. Poissl was clearly on the German side of these debates. However in post-Wagnerian writings this phenomenon gave rise to what Stephen C. Meyer has called a 'mythology of conflict' which over-simplified the aesthetic and personal issues involved, for instance in relation to Weber's dealings with Morlacchi in Dresden.<sup>37</sup> Poissl's relationship with Italian opera is much too complex and full of nuance to be described in black-and-white terms. It is misleading, for instance, for Ludwig Schiedermair to describe him simply as a counterweight to Italian tendencies in Munich.<sup>38</sup> His sympathy for certain Italian operatic models (later even occasionally for Rossini) is clear simply from reading his writings on the subject. It is also obvious from an acquaintance with his works. Quite apart from the fact that he composed a complete Italian opera as late as 1820,<sup>39</sup> his own contemporaries noted with approval the 'Italianate' nature of his vocal lines, even in his German operas. This included Weber, writing about *Athalia* for his Prague audience:

His distinctive quality [...] is a type of melody which is very close to an attractive Italian *cantabile*, and which apart from its suppleness also has the virtue of being very singable, with that suitability for the voice which German composers are so often accused of neglecting.<sup>40</sup>

At the high point of his career, after the premieres of *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, Poissl even hoped to go to Italy and write works for the carnival season.<sup>41</sup> This never happened for lack of funds, but in Munich itself his proven ability to write Italian music for specific singers led to Italian commissions throughout his career. He re-wrote Nasolini's *Merope* in 1812, made an adaptation of Pilotti's *Antenore* for the tenor Antonio Brizzi in 1815 and composed numerous arias over the years for insertion into Italian operas, most of them after 1814 when *Athalia* had already made him a standard-bearer of the new German opera. In this equidistance between the German and Italian camps Poissl fails to fit into the simplistic narratives of later musicology.

---

<sup>37</sup> Stephen C. Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 159.

<sup>38</sup> Schiedermair, p. 139.

<sup>39</sup> *La Rappresaglia*.

<sup>40</sup> 'Rein eigentümlich ist ihm [...] eine sich sehr zu italienischer Gesanglieblichkeit hinneigende Melodieform, die neben ihrer Weichheit noch das Verdienst einer großen Singbarkeit und das gewisse Kehlgerechte hat, dessen Vernachlässigung man so oft deutschen Komponisten zum Vorwurf machen will.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 270. See also Carl Maria von Weber, *Writings on Music*, ed. by John Warrack, transl. by Martin Cooper (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), p. 185.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to King Max Joseph, 5 August 1815. *Briefe*, pp. 33-34.

The nationalist tendency of post-Wagnerian writing also made it blind to French influences on German opera. As late as 1997 Michael Fend was appealing for a historiography untainted by anti-French bias:

[...] the relationship between *opéra comique* and German Romantic opera was a politically loaded one from the start, and a systematic investigation of this relationship would have to be made on several levels. Firstly it would need to reconstruct the relevant historiography, since historical representations were overshadowed until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by emphasis on an opposition between France and Germany, and on an autonomously developed German Romantic opera.<sup>42</sup>

An ideological bias of this kind would have tended to exclude Poissl. He actually wrote a German-language *opéra comique*, *Aucassin und Nicolette*, to a libretto already set by Grétry. His *Athalia*, hailed in the wake of Napoleon's defeat as 'purely German', is profoundly indebted to French models, in particular to Méhul's *Joseph*.

Fortunately a more recent generation of scholars has taken a very different approach to this area of operatic history. Although none of them has yet tackled Poissl directly, they explicitly reject the post-Wagnerian view in their studies of Poissl's contemporaries.

Michael C. Tusa, at the outset of his monograph on Weber's *Euryanthe*, emphasises that it is 'not devoted to the question of elucidating *Euryanthe* as one important stepping stone along the path to Wagner, a point of view that has dominated the historiography of early nineteenth-century German opera in general'. Rather it aims for 'a thorough understanding of this opera on more or less its own terms'.<sup>43</sup>

Wolfram Boder takes a similar line with the operas of Spohr, rejecting a historical tendency to treat them as 'more or less failed antecedents of Wagner', in particular in relation to Spohr's use of reminiscence motifs:

What is lacking is an investigation of the phenomenon in Spohr's work in its specific dramaturgical context within the operas. So the approach needs to be to a certain extent hermeneutic, partly in order to avoid regarding the phenomenon in

---

<sup>42</sup> 'Das Verhältnis zwischen Opéra comique und deutscher romantischer Oper war darum seit ihren Anfängen politisch belastet, und eine systematische Untersuchung dieses Verhältnisses müsste auf mehreren Ebenen erfolgen. Sie müsste zum einen dessen Historiographie rekonstruieren, denn bis weit in das 20. Jahrhundert sind historische Darstellungen von der Akzentuierung eines Gegensatzes zwischen Frankreich und Deutschland, und einer unabhängig entwickelten deutschen romantischen Oper überschattet.' Michael Fend, "Es versteht sich von selbst, daß ich von der Oper spreche, die der Deutsche und Franzose will...": zum Verhältnis von Opéra comique und deutscher romantischer Oper', in *Die Opéra comique und ihr Einfluß auf das europäische Musiktheater im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Herbert Schneider and Nicole Wild (Hildesheim: Olms, 1997), p. 299.

<sup>43</sup> Michael C. Tusa, *Euryanthe and Carl Maria von Weber's dramaturgy of German opera* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp. 2-3.

Spohr from the outset as a preliminary stage to Wagner, and thus obscuring the view of its own distinctive qualities.<sup>44</sup>

These words could equally well apply to Poissl, as could Boder's 'decoding' of the ideological content of Spohr's operas. Spohr was a man of republican sympathies, Poissl a monarchist. But with both composers, and in Poissl's case particularly in *Athalia*, we can see ideological messages being expressed not only in the libretti of their operas but also in their musical dramaturgy (Chapter 5).

Reiner Nägele's study of Peter von Lindpaintner laments the musicological disparagement of 'minor' operatic composers. He attributes these attitudes to an influential but unhelpful aspect of nineteenth-century German thought, the distinction between the 'genius' and the mere 'man of talent':

Instead of conjuring up a metaphysics of music, we should demonstrate the historical conditions which led to the creation of the work; we should investigate the concrete reality of the composer; and not least we should take a look at the scores. [...] The aim of this approach to the works is not valuation – major masters here, minor masters there – but comprehension, in particular since the disqualification of 'minor masters' is frequently unhistorical, derived simply from their posthumous reception history.<sup>45</sup>

It is perhaps Stephen C. Meyer's study of Weber which best summarises this more inclusive musicological approach:

In stressing the connections between national ideology and the history of musical style [...] we must be careful not to reduce the critical and compositional impulse toward a "new German Opera" to a single voice. Carl Maria von Weber [...] may have been the most influential composer behind this impulse, but he was certainly not the only one. Louis Spohr, Johann Nepomuk von Poissl, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Franz Schubert, and other composers made important contributions to German

---

<sup>44</sup> 'Was hingegen fehlt, ist die Untersuchung des Phänomens bei Spohr in seinem spezifischen, dramaturgischen Kontext innerhalb der Opern. Insofern soll also ein gewissermaßen hermeneutischer Ansatz verfolgt werden, auch um zu vermeiden, dass das Phänomen bei Spohr von vornherein als Vorstufe Wagners betrachtet wird und so der Blick auf seine Eigenheiten verstellt wird.' Wolfram Boder, *Die Kasseler Opern Louis Spohrs: Musikdramaturgie im sozialen Kontext*, 2 vols (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2007), I, p. 103.

<sup>45</sup> 'Statt eine Metaphysik der Musik zu beschwören, gilt es, die historischen Bedingungen aufzuzeigen, die das Entstehen der Werke förderten, gilt es, den konkreten kompositorischen Alltag zu befragen und nicht zuletzt einen Blick in die Partituren zu werfen: nicht, um nach Spuren "innerer Nötigung" oder äußeren Zwangs zu fahnden, sondern um die Wirkungsmechanismen der kompositorischen Strukturen und ihre Geschichtlichkeit aufzuzeigen. Nicht Bewerten ist Ziel einer solchen Werkbetrachtung – hie Groß-, dort Kleinmeister -, sondern Verstehen, zumal gerade die Disqualifizierung als "Kleinmeister" vielfach unhistorisch ist, geurteilt allein aus Kenntnis der posthumer Rezeptionsgeschichte.' Reiner Nägele, *Peter Joseph von Lindpaintner: sein Leben, sein Werk. Ein Beitrag zur Typologie des Kapellmeisters im 19. Jahrhundert* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1993), p. 18.

opera during this period, and their works by no means always manifested the same aesthetic principles.<sup>46</sup>

In other words the German operatic debates of Poissl's time were large, complex and full of individual nuances. We will never understand the whole conversation unless we listen to all the voices, including ones such as Poissl's which have been misunderstood or even excluded from the historical narrative.

If we turn to the literature that is specifically about Poissl, the clearest view of what Nägele would call the 'concrete reality' of his life can be found in a pair of short biographical studies from his own time. These were written by personal acquaintances and so can be regarded as largely reliable on matters of fact. They date from the mid-1830s, when all but one of Poissl's operas had been composed, and so are also able to provide an overview of most of his career from a contemporary perspective. Adolph von Schaden's sketch of Poissl, included in a kind of *Who's Who* of Munich's leading artistic figures,<sup>47</sup> does not explore the compositions in any depth but provides considerable biographical detail – more than any other known source from Poissl's lifetime – and a list of musical works in all genres. In a foreword (p. vii) Schaden states that his subjects generally wrote or drafted their entries themselves, so apart from its biographical reliability this is an important source for Poissl's own account of his artistic influences and education.

Gustav Schilling's encyclopedia entry on Poissl, written around the same time, is signed 'Dr. Sch.', which identifies it as by Schilling himself, not by one of his many contributors.<sup>48</sup> He is highly sympathetic to Poissl as a composer, a theatre manager and a man. Like Schaden he provides a biographical account, but there is a much greater emphasis on the music itself. The accounts of Poissl's operas are perceptive and not uncritical. He singles out *Athalia* as the summit of Poissl's achievement but suggests that his next two operas, *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* and *Nittetis*, failed to achieve the same level of artistic unity. He reports the huge success of *Die Prinzessin von Provence* in Munich but credits this partly to the vocal qualities of the soprano Clara Metzger-Vespermann.

The unflattering portraits of Poissl in contemporary memoirs by Lewald, Gämmerler and Bäuerle have already been noted. A much more positive image is provided in Max Maria von Weber's biography of his father Carl Maria von Weber, published in the year before Poissl's death, and already mentioned above. This biography describes Carl Maria von

---

<sup>46</sup> Meyer, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> 'Poysl', in Adolph v. Schaden, *Artistisches München im Jahre 1835* (Munich: Bayer, 1836), pp.114-121.

<sup>48</sup> 'Poißl', in *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften*, rev edn, ed. by Gustav Schilling and others (Stuttgart: Köhler, 1841), v, pp. 489-495.

Weber's visits to Munich in 1811 and 1815 and his warm friendship with Poissl. Published nearly four decades after Weber's death, the book is much quoted by later writers such as Reipschläger.

However Max Maria's biography should be used with caution in relation to Poissl. Carl Maria von Weber died when his son was only four years old.<sup>49</sup> His most intensive contacts with Poissl had taken place several years earlier, before Max Maria's birth. His widow Caroline lived on till 1852 but there is no evidence that she knew Poissl, so she cannot necessarily be regarded as a reliable source for her son. Most worryingly, in his book Max Maria explicitly suppresses an important biographical source for 1815, when Weber and Poissl were together in Munich:

The publication of Weber's letters to Caroline from this period would throw an entirely false light on his inner individuality and would make him appear to be the soft, sentimental, indeed almost effeminate dreamer into which this fresh resilient character was changed for a short while by an unnerving affliction of his morale.<sup>50</sup>

Weber was often in a depressed state in the summer of 1815, but Max Maria prefers to depict his father in a manner consistent with his heroic mid-nineteenth century image. The letters have since been published,<sup>51</sup> but their suppression for many years, together with the inaccessibility of Weber's diaries, is significant for the literature on Poissl because Max Maria establishes a particular version of Poissl's relationship with Weber, one in which Weber is the dominant partner:

A particularly close friend of Weber's during this sojourn in Munich was the talented and likeable Freiherr von Poissl, who sought the advice of his fellow-artist, three years his junior and actually less experienced in the composition of operas than he was, concerning his own major musical projects, and with him went through not only his opera *Athalia*, which had been given a year previously with great and deserved acclaim, but also his earlier works *Aucassin und Nicolette*, *Antigonus* etc. At Weber's suggestion they also revised many things in the opera *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia*, in which both text and music were by Poissl and which had been given with much honour on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1815.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Max Maria von Weber was born on 25 April 1822. Carl Maria von Weber died on 4/5 June 1826.

<sup>50</sup> 'Die Veröffentlichung der Briefe Webers an Caroline aus dieser Zeit würde ein ganz falsches Licht auf seine innere Individualität werfen und ihn als weichen, sentimental, ja fast weibischen Träumer erscheinen lassen, zu dem den frischen, spannkraftigen Charakter doch nur auf kurze Zeit eine moralische, entnervende Krankheit machen konnte.' M. M. von Weber, I, p. 481.

<sup>51</sup> *Mein vielgeliebter Muks: Hundert Briefe Carl Maria von Webers an Caroline Brandt aus den Jahren 1814-1817*, ed. by Eveline Bartlitz (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> 'Besonders nahe trat Weber bei seiner diesmaligen Anwesenheit in München der ebenso talentvolle als liebenswürdige Freiherr von Poißl, der den um drei Jahre jüngeren, in der Opernkomposition sogar weit unerfahreneren Künstler bei seinen bedeutenden musikalischen Arbeiten zu Rate zog und nicht allein seine, ein Jahr vorher mit grossem und

The Weber letters and diaries, which we can now read, record many contacts with Poissl and include comments on his music. The two composers may well have collaborated – Poissl had had no inhibitions about co-composing parts of *Merope* with Meyerbeer three years previously (Chapter 4). However, there is no direct support in the diary or the letters for the kind of teacher-pupil relationship inferred by Max Maria.

Erich Reipschläger's 1911 dissertation, though only partly concerned with Poissl, is still the most substantial piece of published writing about him. It toes the post-Wagnerian line, regarding Weber as the only figure of real interest among Poissl's generation. It even declares Poissl's life and career to be insignificant after 1823, because with the premiere of *Euryanthe* 'his incomparably more gifted friend C. M. von Weber had seized the leadership of the progressives in operatic composition'.<sup>53</sup> A list of Poissl's operas explicitly omits the three staged after 1823. Reipschläger also suggests, erroneously, that the 'Romantic' opera *Die Prinzessin von Provence* was composed after *Der Freischütz*, and thus in response to it, when it is clear from Poissl's letters that it was finished early in 1821, months before the *Freischütz* premiere in Berlin.<sup>54</sup>

Reipschläger at least concedes the possibility that Poissl influenced Weber, not just vice versa, but he seems worried that the reader might accord Poissl too high a status. He criticises Schilling for over-praising *Athalia* and compares this work, with dubious relevance, to two by Weber written in the next decade:

This judgement [i.e. Schilling's], made before 1835, still bears the impression of the great success which Poissl's *Athalia* enjoyed wherever it was performed. One should not be surprised therefore if the critic was blind to certain faults which become obvious when one compares *Athalia* with, say, Weber's *Freischütz* or *Euryanthe* for their musical and musico-dramatic qualities.<sup>55</sup>

Reipschläger makes much use of Max Maria von Weber's biography. When he quotes the passage above about Poissl accepting Weber's revision suggestions, it is in association with the idea of 'through-composition'. This too betrays a subtle post-Wagnerian bias. Poissl's revisions to *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia* removed the original spoken dialogues

---

verdienten Beifall gegebene Oper "Athalia" sondern auch seine früheren Werke "Aucassin und Nicolette", "Antigonus" etc. mit ihm durchging. Ja er änderte sogar an der am 21. April 1815 sehr ehrenvoll gegebenen, von ihm sowohl gedichteten als komponierten Oper "Der Wettkampf zu Olympia" auf Webers Vorschlag mehreres.' M. M. von Weber, 1, p. 484.

<sup>53</sup> '[...] weil sein ungleich höher begabter Freund C.M. von Weber die fortschrittliche Führung in der Opernkomposition an sich gerissen hatte.' Reipschläger, p. 154.

<sup>54</sup> Reipschläger, p. 154. Cf. *Briefe*, p. 95 (9 February 1821).

<sup>55</sup> 'Dieses, vor 1835 abgegebene Urteil steht noch ganz unter dem Eindruck des grossen Erfolges, den Poissl's *Athalia* überall fand, wo sie aufgeführt wurde. Man darf sich deshalb nicht wundern, wenn der Kritiker gegen gewisse Mängel blind war, die offenbar werden, wenn man die *Athalia* in Bezug auf das rein Musikalische wie Musikdramatische etwa mit Webers "Freischütz" oder "Euryanthe" vergleicht.' Reipschläger, p. 110.

and replaced them with recitatives. In the case of *Athalia* this was done because Count Brühl, Intendant of the Berlin theatres, had requested a recitative version. We know this because Poissl's friend Heinrich Baermann said in a letter to Meyerbeer a few months later that '*Athalia* has also been set in recitatives throughout, at the wish of Count Brühl'.<sup>56</sup> Poissl himself, in a letter to Meyerbeer sent under the same cover, is less specific, but when he mentions his changes to the two operas it is in connection with productions beyond Munich, suggesting that his intention was partly pragmatic, to make the works more acceptable to other theatres. Nowhere in these letters is it suggested that Weber played a part in these revisions, even though he was a close friend of Baermann, Poissl and Meyerbeer, and so his involvement might well have merited a mention in their correspondence. But the idea that Poissl created 'through-composed' operas on the urging of Weber fits neatly into Reipschläger's post-Wagnerian perception of a progression towards the through-composed *Musikdrama* with Weber at its head.

The mythology of national operatic conflict is also central to Reipschläger's view, and language of nationalistic pathos is used to sell some questionable assertions:

As mentioned above, the German opera could not keep pace with the Italian and the French. In order to beat the opponents with their own weapons, Poissl began from now on, with the exception of his *Aucassin und Nicolette* and the comic opera *Dir wie mir*, to write only grand through-composed operas in the Italian-French style.<sup>57</sup>

Even allowing for Reipschläger's exclusion of the three post-1823 operas, two of which had spoken dialogue, this gives a subtly false impression. *Athalia*, *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, *Nittetis* and *Issipile* were not originally 'through-composed', though the first two did subsequently have recitatives added in place of their spoken dialogue. All known versions of *Nittetis* and *Issipile* have spoken dialogue.

In Reipschläger's defence it must be said that his work contains none of the belittling personal attacks found in Zenger's history. He provides a literature survey and a list of manuscript scores in various German archives, at least of the pre-1823 operas. He also makes good use of Poissl's personal file in the Bavarian State Archives and quotes extensively from contemporary reviews of Poissl's works. The earlier sections of the book, which deal with the Munich composers Lukas Schubaur and Franz Danzi, provide useful

---

<sup>56</sup>'[...] so ist auch die *Athalia* nach dem Wunsche des Grafen Brühl auch ganz in Rezitativen gesetzt worden'. Meyerbeer, *Briefe*, I, p. 286 (9 October 1815).

<sup>57</sup>'Wie schon oben erwähnt, konnte die deutsche Oper mit der italienischen und französischen keinen Schritt halten. Um die Gegner mit ihren eigenen Waffen zu schlagen, begann Poissl von nun ab mit Ausnahme seiner „*Aucassin und Nicolette*“ und der komischen Oper „*Dir wie mir*“ nur grosse durchkomponierte Opern im italienisch-französischen Stile zu schreiben.' Reipschläger, p. 122.



contextual material about operatic life in Munich and the theoretical debates that were active there before Poissl's arrival in 1805.

However a discussion of the operas themselves never materialises, even though it is promised by Reipschläger. If we read between the lines, it seems that he balked at the sheer quantity of material:

The discussion of Poissl's operas – nine operas in more than twenty fat volumes of manuscripts would fall in the period under consideration here – has had to be saved for a later date. But the author has made himself sufficiently familiar with them to incorporate an aesthetic appraisal of them into this work.<sup>58</sup>

For all these claims, Reipschläger seems only superficially acquainted with the sources. His comments on the music rarely go beyond generalities or opinions taken second-hand from contemporary reviews. There are also surprising errors of fact. For instance he claims that Poissl wrote the libretto of his first opera *Die Opernprobe*, even though Franz Danzi is clearly indicated as librettist on the Munich text book. He writes that this work had only one performance, when the playbills of the *Hoftheater* show that there were at least two. More damagingly, he seems completely unaware that *Athalia* was originally a dialogue opera and was performed as such in Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt and Prague. This fact is clear not only from the Munich performing material, which he cites in his list of manuscripts, but also from Weber's Prague introduction to *Athalia*, from which he quotes other passages. There Weber explicitly praises the librettist J. G. Wohlbrück for showing 'true devotion to the verse dialogue and the musical numbers' ['auf den versifizierten Dialog und die Musikstücke jene wahrhafte Liebe zur Sache verwendet ist'].<sup>59</sup>

So Reipschläger's dissertation is a missed opportunity. It fails to give any meaningful account of the operas themselves, and its excessively linear, nationalistic view of operatic history is a severe limitation. Its value to later scholars is confined largely to the areas of biography and reception history.

Ernst Bücken is hampered by a similar world-view.<sup>60</sup> Poissl only occupies a small part of his book, which was researched mainly in the years 1914-1915. Unlike Reipschläger, Bücken has looked at the scores, but between his pre-war research and its publication in 1924 confusion has crept in – operatic characters are wrongly named and he misrepresents

---

<sup>58</sup> '[...] die Besprechung der Poissl'schen Opern – für den hier behandelten Zeitraum kommen von ihm neun Opern in über zwanzig dickleibigen Manuskriptbänden in Betracht – musste für eine spätere Zeit aufbewahrt bleiben. Doch hat sich der Verfasser so weit mit ihnen vertraut gemacht, dass ein ästhetisches Urteil über sie mit in diese Arbeit hineingezogen werden konnte.' Reipschläger, p. vi.

<sup>59</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 271. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 185.

<sup>60</sup> Ernst Bücken, *Der heroische Stil in der Oper* (Leipzig: Kistner & Siegel, 1924), pp. 121-126.

the order of musical numbers. He concerns himself with the relative importance of Italian and German elements in Poissl's music, *bel canto* being seen as a dilution of a naturally 'heroic' German style. Bücken's attitude reflects the militaristic spirit of his times, and his equation of the German with the heroic leads him up some strange paths of aesthetic logic. For instance, Poissl is identified as a composer of very Italianate vocal lines, but is forgiven because this very Italianism was praised by Weber.

Ludwig Schrott has also demonstrably returned to the original material.<sup>61</sup> However his article about Poissl, written in 1940 in the Nazi-controlled journal *Die Musik*, is disfigured by anti-semitic remarks and an attempt to relate the villainy of *Athalia's* title character to her Jewishness. This is a bizarre piece of unlogic in itself, because *Athalia* is one of the few non-Jewish characters in the opera. Nonetheless the article is clearly the fruit of fresh research into the music, including the lesser-known early and late operas. Schrott also covers previously unexplored aspects of Poissl's biography and of his reception by his contemporaries. Like Reipschläger and Bücken he emphasises Poissl's connection with Weber, but unlike them he sees Poissl's attempt to base German opera on Classical subjects as a necessary and valuable experiment. He laments the absence of a comprehensive study of Poissl and urges the study of such minor masters alongside (in a telling phrase) 'the great ones who control the fate of our Art' ['die großen Schicksalslenker unserer Kunst'].<sup>62</sup>

In 1963 Schrott returned to the subject of Poissl in an anthology about Biedermeier culture in Munich. His contributions still betray a post-Wagnerian bias and anachronistic Wagnerian terminology, for instance when he writes that Poissl's 'efforts on behalf of the German *Musikdrama* are crowned by the through-composed opera *Athalia*'.<sup>63</sup> But the book is based on an impressive amount of research in the Munich archives and presents some interesting biographical material. In a rare published glimpse of actual music by Poissl, Schrott includes transcriptions of two chorus passages from *Die Prinzessin von Provence*.<sup>64</sup>

Poissl's varied and sophisticated use of reminiscence motifs attracted the attention of various writers in the twentieth century. The first of these was Karl Wörner in 1932.<sup>65</sup> Wörner's article is based on a systematic survey of operas from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries held in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. He proposes definitions for

---

<sup>61</sup> Ludwig Schrott, 'Aus dem Ringen um die deutsche Oper: Ein Lebens- und Schaffensbild Johann Nepomuk von Poissls', in *Die Musik*, 23 (1940), pp. 299-303. See also Postscript to this chapter.

<sup>62</sup> p. 303.

<sup>63</sup> 'Seine Bemühungen um das deutsche Musikdrama gipfeln in der durchkomponierten Oper "Athalia"'. Schrott, *Biedermeier*, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Schrott, *Biedermeier*, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> Karl Wörner, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Leitmotivs in der Oper', in *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, 14 (1932), pp. 151-172.

different kinds of motivic technique used in these operas, from the simplest form of direct repetition (e.g. Figaro repeating his song *Se vuol ballare* in a later act) to the symbolically-charged motifs used by Wagner. He analyses the motifs used in *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia*, and categorises them as 'indirect reminiscence motifs' ['indirekte Erinnerungsmotive'], where a musical motif returns with a different text, but still expresses the same dramatic idea. Andrew McCredie has provided an English-language account of Wörner's categories and findings.<sup>66</sup>

Most of the limited literature on Poissl concentrates on *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia*. An interesting exception is Anke Schmitt's study of exoticism in German opera, which devotes a few pages to Poissl's last opera *Zayde*.<sup>67</sup> Schmitt appears to have studied the manuscript score separately from the printed libretto, and this may be the reason why her synopsis of the opera's plot contains errors.<sup>68</sup> She also mistakenly states that Poissl was Intendant of the Court Theatre at the time of *Zayde*'s premiere. However she makes perceptive observations about Poissl's libretto. She praises its skilful interweaving of the historical and the fictional, and places the work in an early nineteenth-century tradition which idealised the doomed Moorish culture in Spain. Schmitt suggests on internal evidence that Poissl may have been acquainted with Washington Irving's *The Conquest of Granada*, published in German in 1829.

The start of a new musicological interest in Poissl is marked by Gerrit Waidelich's useful 1996 study of *Athalia* and its reception.<sup>69</sup> It deploys a wide range of sources, including letters from Poissl to his librettist J. G. Wohlbrück which establish a connection between the opera's subject-matter and the international politics of 1813. Waidelich is particularly concerned with the opera's reception in Berlin after its first performances there in 1817. He notes the public association of Poissl with nationalist aspirations and suggests that the success of *Athalia*, while not as negligible as has been suggested by Zenger and others, was essentially a *succès d'estime* sustained by a network of 'connoisseurs' ['Kenner'] rather than by the broader opera-going public. In his outline of the existing literature Waidelich says that a more detailed study of Poissl would be 'thoroughly desirable' ['durchaus

---

<sup>66</sup> Andrew McCredie, 'Leitmotive: Wagner's points of departure and their antecedents', in *Miscellanea Musicologica*, 14 (1985), pp. 1-28.

<sup>67</sup> Anke Schmitt, *Der Exotismus in der deutschen Oper zwischen Mozart und Spohr* (Hamburg: Wagner, 1988), pp. 169-173.

<sup>68</sup> For example *Zayde* is not Alderamon's daughter, as stated by Schmitt. She is the daughter of his dead friend. Almansor (not Almanzor), whom she loves, is Alderamon's son. See Appendix, section 14.

<sup>69</sup> Gerrit Waidelich, "'Weder Italienisch noch Französisch, sondern rein Deutsch": Johann Nepomuk von Poißls *Athalia* als Oper "ohngefähr im Genre der Gluck'schen"', in *Weber-Studien, Bd.3: Gerhard Allroggen zum 60. Geburtstag* (Mainz: 1996), pp. 318-346.

wünschenswert’].<sup>70</sup> However in an apparent change of heart ten years later, Waidelich was to express surprise that the editor of a voluminous edition of Poissl’s letters (see below) should go to so much trouble, ‘particularly when much more important and historically influential composers and their correspondence remain uninvestigated’.<sup>71</sup>

John Warrack devotes several pages to Poissl in his general history of German opera.<sup>72</sup> Warrack concentrates mainly on the three grand operas *Athalia*, *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia* and *Nittetis*, illustrating some of the motivic reminiscences in *Athalia* with music examples. He also shows first-hand knowledge of the Romantic opera *Der Untersberg*. His assessment of the composer is generally sympathetic, but he notes a tendency to prolixity and quotes Weber’s lapidary diary entry after a Munich performance of *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia*: ‘good and very beautiful music, but too long’.<sup>73</sup> Warrack finds Poissl’s craftsmanship admirable but is doubtful of the actual quality of his musical invention:

All his virtues – sympathetic to those around him who supported German opera while it remained a cause to be fought for, sympathetic to posterity – cannot really conceal a certain emptiness that prevented his operas from lasting long in the repertory.<sup>74</sup>

The last decade has seen two literary studies of Poissl operas, both of which emphasise the political messages in his work. Markus Engelhardt’s study of Poissl’s Metastasio adaptations, and in particular of *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, is over-reliant on Reipschläger as a source of general information.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps this is why he misunderstands the relationship between the Munich score and the printed libretto of *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, wrongly identifying passages of spoken text, abridged when later set to music, as over-long recitatives. Much of his work does not extend beyond diligently-compiled transcriptions and lists. However Engelhardt does recognise that the adaption process between Metastasio’s libretto and Poissl’s may sometimes have been coloured by political issues, and he provides a detailed synopsis of the whole opera incorporating a list of musical numbers.

---

<sup>70</sup> Waidelich, p. 321.

<sup>71</sup> Review in *Weberiana: Mitteilungen der Internationalen Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesellschaft*, 17 (Tutzing: Schneider, 2007), pp. 138-142. ‘[...] zumal wesentlich bedeutendere und musikgeschichtlich einflußreichere Komponisten und ihre Korrespondenz noch nicht erschlossen sind’, p. 138.

<sup>72</sup> Warrack, *German opera*, pp. 288-295.

<sup>73</sup> Diary entry for 14<sup>th</sup> July 1815. Quoted by Warrack, *German opera*, p.295.

<sup>74</sup> Warrack, *German opera*, p. 295.

<sup>75</sup> Markus Engelhardt, “außer Gebrauch gekommen” – Johann Nepomuk Poißl und seine Metastasio-Bearbeitungen’, in *Belliniana et alia musicologica: Festschrift für Friedrich Lippmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed.by Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Lindner (Vienna: Praesens, 2004), pp. 70-83.

Björn Kühnicke takes a much more analytical approach to *Athalia*, examining the adaptation process between Racine's *Athalie* and J. G. Wohlbrück's opera libretto, and identifying political agendas in many of Wohlbrück's adaptation choices.<sup>76</sup> He places *Athalia* in the wider context of German Racine reception and of the religious rhetoric of the anti-Napoleon alliance. His findings are discussed further as part of the case study of *Athalia* in Chapter 5.

The most significant contribution yet to Poissl studies is Volkmar von Pechstaedt's collection of the composer's letters, published in 2006.<sup>77</sup> This is and will remain an invaluable asset to scholars both of Poissl and of this period in general. Most of the letters relate to Poissl's activities as an official of the Court Theatre, and almost half of them were written in the period when he was its Intendant. There are a few communications with other composers including Meyerbeer, Weber, Mosel, Spohr and Chelard, but these rarely discuss creative matters. Consequently the book's subtitle ('A view of Munich's musical and theatrical history') is appropriate in that it generally illuminates Poissl the theatre manager and public official rather than Poissl the composer. But there are glimpses of his composing life, for instance in his letters to the librettist J. G. Wohlbrück and occasionally in those to Ignaz von Mosel. Von Pechstaedt also includes examples of Poissl's journalism, which are highly informative about his wider aesthetic views. Together with the editor's foreword, annotations and appendices, these letters clarify several biographical issues, and are a crucial point of factual reference for any study of Poissl the composer.

That such a study is now long overdue seems undeniable. Whatever Poissl's strengths and weaknesses as an artist may have been (and both have probably been exaggerated at times), he was an important participant in the creation of nineteenth-century German opera and in the wider cultural discourses of his times. It is unfortunate that much of the older literature gives a superficial or blinkered account of his work. More recent contributions such as those by Waidelich and von Pechstaedt have brought him back onto the musicological agenda, but deal primarily with aspects of reception and biography. Other scholars such as Schmitt, Engelhardt and Kühnicke have illuminated literary and political issues in his work, but do not cover the musical aspect. This many-sided figure deserves a fresh approach, one which gives appropriate weight not only to his music and his words but also to the world in which he lived.

---

<sup>76</sup> Björn Kühnicke, "'Vaterland' und 'Heiligthum': Jean Racines *Athalie* als national-religiöse Erlösungsphantasie auf der deutschen Opernbühne der frühen Restaurationszeit', in *Deutsch-französische Literaturbeziehungen: Stationen und Aspekte dichterischer Nachbarschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Marcel Krings and Roman Luckscheiter (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 113-130.

<sup>77</sup> *Johann Nepomuk von Poißl: Briefe (1807-1855). Ein Blick auf die Münchener Musik- und Theatergeschichte*, ed. by Volkmar von Pechstaedt (Göttingen: Hainholz, 2006).

## Postscript

In the final phase of preparing this thesis the unpublished typescript came to light of Ludwig Schrott's doctoral dissertation *Der Opernkomponist Johann Nepomuk von Poissl*. This was written in the early 1930s for the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität, Munich, but apparently never submitted. It is now lodged with the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, under the shelfmark 4 Mus.th. 2134.

The dissertation, some 400 pages long, comprises a biographical section (pp. 1-121) and a section on the works, subdivided by genre: 'Humorous and semi-serious' ['Heiteres und Halbernstes', pp. 123-197], 'The grand operas' ['Die grossen Opern', pp. 198-316] and 'Romanticism' ['Romantik', pp. 317-382]. A supplementary volume of music examples is promised in the table of contents but not provided.

It was possible to read the dissertation over two days in Munich in September 2011. This reading confirmed the impression gained from Schrott's later publications (see above) that he made an industrious study of the Munich scores. Where no score was available in Munich he used material from elsewhere (Darmstadt for *Issipile* and Berlin for *La rappresaglia*). The fruits of his work consist mainly of a systematic overview of the contents of the operas. This includes plot synopses, lists of musical numbers with their instrumentation, and verbal descriptions of musical content. In this respect Schrott's work overlaps with some of the systematic work presented in the Appendix of the present thesis.

However despite some perceptive individual observations, his analyses of the operas (which take up considerably less space than his verbal accounts of their contents) are of limited value, being essentially an attempt to squeeze Poissl's works retrospectively into a Wagnerian aesthetic. He uses terminology that is both anachronistic and coloured by cultural nationalism. For example he criticises Poissl for being insufficiently Wagner-like in two of his Mestastasio adaptations:

The German spirit was badly compromised. Not only had Poissl in his preceding work [i.e. *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*] already undermined the end-to-means relationship of words to music; in *Nitettis* he removed the second pillar of the complete work of art [*Gesamtkunstwerk*]: continuous music.<sup>78</sup>

Schrott classifies both *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* as 'through-composed'. This description is questionable anyway (see Chapter 5), but on this basis he constructs a vision

---

<sup>78</sup> 'Der deutsche Geist litt dagegen empfindlich Einbusse, denn, hatte Poissl im vorigen Werke bereits an dem Verhältnis von Wort zu Ton als dem von Zweck zu Mittel gerüttelt, so entzog er in der "Nittetis" dem Gesamtkunstwerk seine zweite Säule: die fortlaufende Musik.' Schrott, Dissertation, p. 298.

of *Athalia* as an antecedent of the through-composed Wagnerian *Musikdrama*. Subsequent works are seen as missed opportunities to build on its proto-Wagnerian qualities:

This shows how after *Athalia* our poet-composer descended, step by step and opera by opera, from the heights of an ideal which he was obviously not ultimately destined to bring to life.<sup>79</sup>

On other factual matters, especially in the biographical section, the dissertation will be a useful source for future Poissl studies. Most significantly, Schrott was able to study the score of the lost opera *Issipile*, together with some associated correspondence between Poissl and the Grand Duke of Darmstadt, for whom it was written. This material was destroyed in the Second World War. The information gathered by Schrott has been gratefully incorporated into the Appendix of this thesis. Where relevant, other contributions by Schrott have been incorporated into footnotes.

Nonetheless, on the issues which are central to this thesis and in particular the nature of Poissl's musical dramaturgy, Schrott is generally too limited by the aesthetic assumptions of his own time to provide real insights. His self-imposed limitations reinforce the feeling that a new approach to Poissl is both desirable and necessary.

---

<sup>79</sup> 'Daraus ergibt sich das Bild, wie unser Dichterkomponist seit der "Athalia" stufenweise Oper für Oper von den Höhen eines Ideals herabstieg, dessen endgültige Verlebendigung ihm ganz offenkundig doch nicht vorbehalten war.' Schrott, Dissertation, p. 298.

## CHAPTER 2

### POLITICS, IDEOLOGY AND NATIONHOOD IN POISSL'S OPERAS

On 1 January 1806 Bavaria was proclaimed a kingdom, and Napoleon and his Empress Josephine attended the celebrations in Munich. Bavaria's new status was a result of the French Emperor's European *Realpolitik*. Until then the territory had been an electorate of the Habsburg-ruled Holy Roman Empire, which was itself to be dissolved later in 1806. The raising of Bavaria's Elector Max Joseph to the status of a king, together with territorial gains and the promise of full sovereignty, was his reward for allying himself with Napoleon and helping to defeat Austria at the battles of Ulm and Austerlitz late in 1805.<sup>80</sup>

A few weeks after the proclamation, on 23 February 1806, Poissl's operatic career began with the premiere of *Die Opernprobe* at the Court Theatre. The coincidence of dates is significant, because if there is a single overriding theme running through Poissl's operas it is the celebration and vindication of the monarchical principle and of the legitimacy of royal rule. This vindication was perhaps considered particularly necessary in a kingdom whose origins lay in a controversial alliance. The theme is identifiable in all of Poissl's serious operas, from *Antigonus* (1808), in which the legitimate monarch is threatened by an outside invader, through *Die Prinzessin von Provence* (1825) and *Der Untersberg* (1829), in which legitimate rule is restored by the toppling of a usurper, to *Zayde* (1843), where a great kingdom is doomed because of moral corruption within.<sup>81</sup>

In Poissl's five operas in *opera seria* form,<sup>82</sup> this content is unsurprising – arguably, the ethos of monarchical legitimacy is intrinsic to the form of *opera seria*. It is certainly often central to the plot. By Poissl's time *opera seria* also incorporated much more stage spectacle than it had in its austere Metastasian form, so the monarchist message could be spelled out for the eye, not just for the ear. All the Poissl *opere serie* incorporate large-scale triumphal scenes in honour of the on-stage ruler. In *Athalia* too large stretches of operatic time are taken up with ceremonial scenes glorifying the boy King Joas. Even in the late *Zayde* (1843)

---

<sup>80</sup> Eberhard Weis, 'Die Begründung des modernen bayerischen Staates unter König Max I. (1799-1825)', in *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, ed. by Max Spindler, 4 vols (Munich: Beck, 1974), IV/1, pp. 16-20.

<sup>81</sup> Full plot synopses of Poissl's operas are provided in the Appendix.

<sup>82</sup> *Antigonus*, *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, *Nittetis* and *Issipile*.



the Moorish King Boabdillah greets his guests with a grand procession whose constituent parts are precisely detailed in the published libretto:

Bodyguards, princely attendants, pages and crown officials of the King of Granada. Moorish and Asiatic dancers. Warriors, bodyguards, pages and princely attendants of the Emir of Mauretania.<sup>83</sup>

Many of these ceremonial scenes have an essentially decorative function, in that they are not necessary for the furtherance of the plot. Their common purpose is the theatrical representation of royal power, some of whose glory, by implication, rubbed off on the real-life ruler sitting in the theatre.

Beyond this general theme, if we look at Poissl's operas individually we find that they engage with very specific political and cultural issues in Bavarian public life. The operas written during the Bavarian alliance with Napoleon (1805-1813) reflect the internal tensions caused by the King's choice of France as a protecting power. The internal opposition was inspired by ideology as well as by patriotism. Napoleon, though a self-proclaimed Emperor, was politically the heir of the French Revolution, and represented for many an affront to the idea of legitimate monarchy. The constitutional changes introduced to the German states under Napoleon's aegis seemed to some like the triumph of an alien French rationalism over more deep-seated German traditions.

Poissl's works written after the end of the alliance, in the period around Napoleon's downfall and the Congress of Vienna, take a view beyond the specifically Bavarian situation to a wider vision of German nationhood. Four of the operas, *Athalia*, *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, *Der Untersberg* and *Zayde*, assert the importance of religious faith as an element of national identity. This message is clothed in the dramatic guise of four different nations and four different religions, but the underlying principle is the same. This idea had considerable political resonance in Bavaria, where issues of religion and politics were closely entwined in Poissl's lifetime. The secularism of King Max I Joseph, which had thrived politically under Napoleon's protection, was opposed by sections of society including the King's own son Ludwig, who as King Ludwig I pursued an equally controversial policy of Catholic restoration after his succession in 1825.

In relation to these ideological themes, as in many other respects, *Athalia* (1814) occupies a pivotal position in the sequence of Poissl's works, being both an allegorical depiction of the

---

<sup>83</sup> 'Leibwachen, fürstliches Gefolge, Pagen und Kronbeamten des Königs von Granada. Maurische und asiatische Tänzer und Tänzerinnen, Krieger, Leibwachen, Pagen und fürstliches Gefolge des Emir von Mauretanien.' *Zayde: romantisch-tragische Oper in vier Akten* (Munich: Franz, 1843), p. 39.  
Available online: < <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055287/images/> > [accessed 1 May 2012].

downfall of Napoleon and a meditation on the kind of Bavarian (or even German) nation that might emerge from the War of Liberation. For this reason a fuller individual case study is devoted to *Athalia* in Chapter 5. However we can only understand Poissl's overall approach to opera if we see how *Athalia* was embedded in a career and an oeuvre which constantly reflected the nation around him. Poissl, as has already been mentioned, never enjoyed an independent performing career, had only limited connections with other theatrical centres and never seems to have achieved his ambition of working in Italy. The circumstances which tied him so closely to Bavaria, however unwillingly, mean that he left a series of operas which reflect the fortunes of his nation with unusual closeness and sensitivity.

### **The Franco-Bavarian alliance: *Die Opernprobe*, *Antigonus*, *Ottaviano in Sicilia***

*Die Opernprobe* (1806) is a humorous response to a significant event in Munich's cultural history: the re-introduction of Italian *opera seria* to the Court Theatre. In 1788 the Bavarian Elector Karl Theodor had banished Italian opera from his theatre, largely for reasons of expense. His successor Max IV Joseph re-introduced it in 1805, a royal decision greeted with some concern by the Court Theatre Intendant, Josef Marius Babo. In a memorandum to the King he pointed out that one of the Italian operas required a total of 230 people on stage, including some on horseback.<sup>84</sup> Apart from the cost of all this, Babo also argued on aesthetic and moral grounds:

This is not to mention the fact that the spectacular Italian operas, these lovable monsters, give a quite false direction to the taste of the wider public, blunting its capacity for the simple, sincere enjoyment of art, and transforming its delight in naturalness and truth into hollow curiosity.<sup>85</sup>

Poissl's opera is a comedy about an opera company putting on an *opera seria*. The composer's teacher Franz Danzi, himself a staff member of the Court Theatre, adapted the libretto from Francesco Gnecco's *La prova di un' opera seria*. The Italian company of the original becomes a German one, struggling with the practical and artistic difficulties of putting on a new piece, *Ettore in Trabisonda*.

---

<sup>84</sup> Franz Grandaur, *Chronik des Königlichen Hof- und National-Theaters in München: Zur Feier seines hundertjährigen Bestehens* (Munich: Ackermann, 1878), p. 62.

<sup>85</sup> 'Es soll nichts davon gesagt werden, dass solche liebenswürdigen Ungeheuer, wie die italienischen Prachtopern sind, dem Geschmacke des grösseren Publikums eine ganz falsche Richtung geben, indem sie es für einfachen inneren Kunstgenuss abstumpfen und das Wohlgefallen an Natur und Wahrheit in hohle Schaulust verwandeln [...]'. Babo memorandum to King Max Joseph (1806), quoted by Reipschläger, p. 70.

The re-location to a German city not only gives the story topical spice but allows for added jokes about nationality and the perceived prestige of Italian music: the composer Campanone is really a German called Glockenspiel, who has adopted the Italian name for career reasons. The libretto satirises the wider subjects of operatic debate. Campanone is obsessed with ever-louder orchestral effects, a fault regarded as typical of German opera composers. Meanwhile the *prima donna* insists on changing the order of the arias so that hers can have greater prominence, the kind of victory of personal vanity over dramatic truth abhorred by German critics of Italian opera. There are in-jokes specifically for the Munich audience, too. Several members of the *Opernprobe* cast were themselves singing in Italian operas later that year.<sup>86</sup> The singer performing the composer Campanone, Joseph Hanmüller, was previously known in the city as an instrumentalist, and the audience would have been amused to hear him singing, in character, an aria about the instrumental effects in his compositions.<sup>87</sup>

However amid the satire on operatic politics and the caricatures of theatrical mores the piece also refers to events affecting Bavaria on the international stage. In Gnecco's original the characters, a company of Italians based in Portugal, receive gossipy letters from operatic colleagues back home in Italy. In the Danzi/Poissl version the letters arrive from German cities which include Pressburg, Vienna and Innsbruck. Although the letters are ostensibly about operas, the names of these particular cities point to recent events in the European theatre of war. A few weeks previously, on 26 December 1805, Pressburg had been the scene of a treaty which sealed Austria's military defeat at Austerlitz. Under the terms of this treaty Innsbruck, together with the rest of the Tyrol and the Vorarlberg, had been removed from Austrian rule and ceded to Bavaria.

The slightly rough nature of the German texts at this point – grammatically loose and partly dispensing with the usual rhymes – suggests that they were cobbled together quickly in an attempt to squeeze jokes out of some very new topical material. It is hard to decipher the jokes precisely, but the 'operatic' news from Vienna is that things are very subdued there (Figure 2). A traditional proverb ('a man goes out for wool but comes home shorn') appears to refer to the Austrians' recent military humiliation on the battlefield. The letter is read in a

---

<sup>86</sup> Of the seven singers, all German, in the cast of *Die Opernprobe* (playbill for 23 February 1806, Deutsches Theatrumuseum, Munich), three can be found in the cast of Paër's *Achille* on 17 June and four in Cimarosa's *Gli Orazi ed i Curazi* on 5 September. Playbills for these are in Mbs, Film 2° Bavar 827.

<sup>87</sup> No. 3 Aria: *Meine Damen, meine Herren*. Hanmüller, a horn virtuoso and formerly a member of the Munich orchestra, made his singing debut on the Munich stage in 1805 having undergone a short period of training with Danzi. He apparently made the change because his orchestral position was so badly paid. *Sängerlexikon*, II, p. 1495.

monotone by the tenor Blumenau, while the more melodic orchestra part suggests the ‘little songs’ that are all that the Viennese can now sing (bars 5-12).

BLUMENAU (reads):

‘Vienna, 1 April: things are quiet around the opera – they are only singing little songs. My last role was: many a man goes out for wool but comes home shorn.’

The image shows a musical score for 'Die Opernprobe, Sextet No. 13'. It is marked '[Allegro molto]' and is in 4/4 time. The score is divided into two systems. The first system features a vocal line for 'BLUMENAU' and an orchestral accompaniment ('Orch.'). The vocal line begins with the lyrics: 'Wien, am er-sten Tag Ap - ril, von der O - per ist's jetzt still, sin-gen nur noch klei - ne'. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: 'Lieder, doch hieß mei - ne let - zte Rol - le, Man-cher geht nach Wol-le, und kommt ge - scho-ren wie - der.' The orchestral accompaniment consists of piano and bass staves with various chordal and melodic textures.

Figure 2: *Die Opernprobe*, Sextet No. 13

The political references in *Die Opernprobe* are little more than a dash of topical colour in a piece that is primarily an opera about opera. However they point to the function of operas in the Court Theatre as a forum for comment on current affairs. The newly-established relationship between Bavaria and Napoleon, so light-heartedly touched on here, was to be more seriously and critically reflected in subsequent works by Poissl.

Never fully accepted by some sections of Bavarian opinion, the Franco-Bavarian alliance was essentially an act of national self-preservation by Max Joseph. Bavaria, caught between the two great powers Austria and France, did not have the option of neutrality, so the Francophile King and his first minister Count Montgelas, both men of the Enlightenment, threw their lot in with the French, while negotiating a ‘full sovereignty’ in the Pressburg treaty which enabled them to enact internal constitutional reforms.<sup>88</sup> Opposition to the alliance centred round the Crown Prince Ludwig. Ludwig kept up a good personal relationship with his father but was profoundly resentful of Napoleon and uncomfortable at being obliged to serve the French Empire as a soldier. He leaned towards German nationalism, saw Austria as Bavaria’s more natural ally, and maintained discreet contacts

---

<sup>88</sup> Weis, pp. 19-20.

with the Austrian ambassador in Munich throughout the period of alliance with France.<sup>89</sup> In the six years following the Pressburg treaty, the wider Bavarian public also gradually lost its enthusiasm for Napoleon. The requisitions made by French troops stationed in Bavaria, the enforced military service by Bavarian troops in Napoleon's armies and later the economic privations caused by the Continental System all played their part in this process.<sup>90</sup>

Poissl's *Antigonus*, premiered on 12 February 1808, reflects some of these tensions. The music of this opera has been lost, but we still have the libretto which was adapted, probably by Poissl himself, from Metastasio's *Antigono*.<sup>91</sup> In Metastasio's *opera seria* the ancient kingdom of Macedonia, under its King Antigonus, is invaded by a neighbouring potentate, Alexander of Epirus. There are tensions between Antigonus and his son Demetrius because they both love the same woman, the Egyptian princess Berenice. In the Munich of 1808 it would have been natural to see in Alexander an image of the invading neighbour Napoleon and in the troubled relationship of Antigonus and Demetrius a representation of Max Joseph and his son Ludwig.

The parallels between Demetrius and Ludwig are reinforced by a scene which has no equivalent in Metastasio's original scenario and was created by Poissl for his Munich version. This scene is inserted into the story at a point when Antigonus has been captured by the victorious Alexander. In a valley outside the capital Demetrius secretly rallies Macedonians who remain loyal to King and fatherland:

Oh you who faithfully endured the rage inflamed by adverse destiny, now join together resolutely to rescue the fatherland! Gather up your scattered brethren. Then, when the unsuspecting victor thinks he can enjoy his spoils, let us courageously attack him and risk our lives to save our beloved King, our revered father. But let us be led by shrewdness and strict silence. Swear by this sword to respect me as the army's choice, as its commander.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Richard Bauer, 'König Ludwig von Bayern – Eine Lebensskizze', in *Glyptothek München 1830-1980*, ed. by Klaus Vierneisel and Gottlieb Lenz (Munich: Prestel, 1980), p. 18. See also Heinz Gollwitzer, *Ludwig I. von Bayern: Königtum im Vormärz* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1986), pp. 139-146.

<sup>90</sup> Weis, pp. 23, 31-34.

<sup>91</sup> *Antigonus, ernsthafte Oper in drei Akten nach Metastasio* (Munich: Hübschmann, 1808). Online: <<http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00061995/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>92</sup> 'O ihr, die treu des widrigen Geschickes / Entflamten Zorn ertrugt, entschlossen zu / Des Vaterlandes Rettung euch vereint! / Versammelt die zerstreuten Brüder; dann / Wenn er in ahnungsloser Sicherheit / Die Beute zu genießen glaubt, laßt uns / Den stolzen Sieger muthig überfallen, / Zur Rettung unsres theuren Königs, des / Verehrten Vaters, unser Leben wagen. / Doch Klugheit leite uns, und strenges Schweigen. / Schwört hier bei diesem Stahl / In mir des Heeres Wahl, / Als Feldherr zu verehren.' *Antigonus* libretto, p. 16 (Act I, Sc. vii).

The addition of this scene broadens the nature of the Antigonus/Demetrius relationship from the personal to the political. Demetrius becomes, like Ludwig, the leader of a loyal opposition rescuing a vulnerable King captured by the enemy.

In Poissl's next opera *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, written during 1811 but not performed until July 1812, there are more echoes of Napoleon's imperial hegemony and of a Bavarian opposition inspired by patriotism. Although the authorship of the libretto itself is unclear,<sup>93</sup> this drama about the ascent to power of the emperor Octavian (Augustus) and his turn from bloody persecution to clemency must have been chosen at least partly for its contemporary relevance.<sup>94</sup> The opera's Roman setting itself suggests Napoleon, Roman Imperial being the preferred aesthetic style of Napoleon's court. There is also a scene at the end of the opera when Octavian, formerly a Consul, is persuaded by the people and a group of his former enemies to remain Emperor. To an audience in 1812 this could hardly fail to suggest the former Consul Bonaparte, who had organised his own elevation to Emperor in 1804.

Ostensibly the libretto represents a positive view of Ottaviano. As in Metastasio's *La clemenza di Tito* the ruler forgives those who have plotted to kill him. However it is clear that he himself has blood on his hands. Ottaviano compares his past actions to those of the dictator Sulla, whose proscriptions and purges resulted in the deaths of thousands of opponents:

If till now I have imitated Sulla in his crimes, from now on I wish to imitate him in his virtues.<sup>95</sup>

The Finale of Act I, in which shepherds and shepherdesses flee as Ottaviano's troops lay waste to the countryside, must have had particular resonance for an audience living through the depredations of Napoleon's wars.

Ottaviano's ultimate conversion to clemency is presented as a conversion to the more humane values of the true Rome. Livia, whom he seeks to marry, is a member of the Pompey family, opponents of the Caesars. She says she will only love Ottaviano if he first proves himself a true Roman by showing mercy:

---

<sup>93</sup> See Appendix. section 3. The plot is based on the story of Octavian and Cinna in Seneca's *Of Clemency*, Book 1 Chapter 9. Some reference works suggest that the libretto is based on Metastasio, but there is no Metastasio libretto of this name and the text's dramatic crudity would suggest another source. The reviewer in the *AmZ* described the libretto as 'cobbled together in a very clumsy and unhistorical way' ['sehr ungeschickt und ungeschichtlich zusammengestoppelt'], and pointed out that such low dramatic standards were only accepted in Italian operas, not in German ones. *AmZ*, 14 (1812), pp. 658-660.

<sup>94</sup> *Ottaviano in Sicilia / Oktavian in Sicilien: Heroische Oper in drei Aufzügen* (Munich: Hübschmann, 1812).

<sup>95</sup> '[...] se nei delitti / Silla imitai fin'ora, / Nelle virtù voglio imitarlo ancora.' *Ottaviano* libretto, p. 68.

So show yourself to be a Roman. Then perhaps in the love of the people you can hope to deserve the heart of Livia.<sup>96</sup>

This concept of Roman-ness as a moral and political ideal recurs frequently in the libretto. When Scribonia, another of the conspirators against Ottaviano, fears that she may be betrayed by Livia, Livia declares proudly that she will never forget that she 'is a Roman'.<sup>97</sup> Scribonia's own motivations for opposing Octavian are less idealistic. She is piqued at being repudiated as his wife in favour of Livia. However when she needs to rouse her lover Cinna to action she does so with an appeal to patriotism as well as to personal loyalty:

You must prevent this outrage, must be deserving of me; and you must avenge both of us if you are a Roman, if you are still Cinna.<sup>98</sup>

Despite Octavian being the title role, the characters representing the opposition to him – Scribonia, Cinna and Livia – are more prominent in the opera than the Emperor himself. This is particularly true in the original two-act version which Poissl wrote in 1811, and which includes a scene in which the conspirators attempt to assassinate Ottaviano. It remains true even in the revised version eventually performed in 1812, even though this assassination scene disappears and the role of Livia is considerably reduced.<sup>99</sup> In his music Poissl makes a limited but telling use of musical reminiscences, and the motifs associated with the conspirators Cinna and Scribonia not only form the foundation of the piece's overture, but are more pervasive in the opera itself than the musical material associated with Ottaviano (Chapter 4). Even in his musical structures Poissl seems to be shifting the perspective from the Napoleon figure to his opponents.

Both *Antigonus* and *Ottaviano in Sicilia* end with reconciliation and thus, by implication, with an acceptance of the Napoleonic *status quo*. It would of course have been impossible to put an explicitly oppositional work on the stage of the Court and National Theatre during the alliance. But it is significant that Poissl should stage the idea of opposition and insurgency at all, and should emphasise the disinterested, idealistic nature of the opposition's motives. As an aristocrat with close connections to the court he would have been more aware than most of conflicting attitudes to the alliance within the Bavarian

---

<sup>96</sup> 'Roman dunque ti mostra. Allor potrai / Forse aspirare nel commune amore, / Così di Livia a meritar il cuore.' *Ottaviano* libretto, p. 28.

<sup>97</sup> '[...] non scorderò giammai d'esser Romana'. *Ottaviano* Act I Sc. iv (1811 version).

<sup>98</sup> 'L'oltraggio / Dei prevenir, dei meritarmi; e dei / Entrambi vendicarci, / Se ancor Roman, se Cinna ancor tu sei.' *Ottaviano* libretto, p. 14.

<sup>99</sup> The original two-act version written in 1811 can be detected in the Munich score (Mbs, St.th. 177-1). However Poissl revised the opera before its first performance on 1 July 1812. The revised version is in three acts but contains less music. One of the cut scenes was restored when the piece was revived in German in 1826. See Appendix, section 3.

establishment and the royal family itself. In his operas he seems to reflect these conflicts in coded form.

### **Napoleon and after: *Athalia*, *Andromache*, *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia***

While in *Antigonus* and *Ottaviano in Sicilia* the operatic representation of the anti-Napoleon cause had to remain largely encoded, the crumbling support for the alliance in the early months of 1813 seems to have emboldened Poissl and J. G. Wohlbrück, the librettist of *Athalia*, to create a much more overt allegory of tyranny and freedom. The genesis of *Athalia* and its ideological subtext will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5, but as noted above, its dramatic themes make it a bridge between Poissl's Napoleonic operas and his post-Napoleonic ones. In the unfolding context of Napoleon's downfall, *Athalia's* story of the ancient Hebrews throwing off the foreign usurper had great contemporary resonance. Indeed, delays to its premiere meant that by the time the opera was staged the French Emperor had already abdicated, an outcome Poissl and Wohlbrück could not have foreseen when they started work on the piece a year earlier.<sup>100</sup> The on-stage end of the usurper *Athalia* became a representation of a liberation freshly accomplished, not merely of a pious hope.

However *Athalia* also touches on the more general issues of German nationhood that were in the air as Napoleon withdrew from the German lands. The Jews in the opera are divided into tribes but unite to throw off the oppressor. Even the peaceable Priests and Levites, 'used to raising their arms only in supplication',<sup>101</sup> take up weapons against *Athalia*, an echo of the widespread mobilisation of the German population in the closing stages of the Napoleonic wars.<sup>102</sup> The national identity of the Jews in *Athalia* is also largely defined by their religion, a fact emphasised not only by the status of the High Priest Joad as *Athalia's* principal antagonist, but also by the essentially undramatic, oratorio-like scenes of ceremonial which dominate sections of the opera. The close entwining of religion and nation was to be an important dramatic theme in Poissl's last three operas.

A purely literary work of Poissl's from the period immediately after *Athalia* provides further insight into his ideas of German nationhood and national character. This is *Andromache*, his

---

<sup>100</sup> Napoleon abdicated on 11 April 1814. The first performance of *Athalia* was on 3 June.

<sup>101</sup> '[...] gewohnt, den Arm nur flehend zu erheben': Josabeth, *Athalia*, Act I Sc. 3.

<sup>102</sup> In the so-called *Landsturm* decree of 21 April 1813, King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia called on the civilian population to resist Napoleon's invasion by any means available, a change from the prevailing rules of war which commanded the civilian population to co-operate with an occupying power.



adaptation of Racine's *Andromaque*, which he wrote during 1814<sup>103</sup> and which was first performed at the Court Theatre in Stuttgart on 28 March 1815.

If *Athalia*, written against the background of Napoleon's downfall, was a celebration of German nationhood and the triumph of legitimacy over usurpation, *Andromache* deals with the complex moral issues of a post-war settlement, and in particular with the opposing claims of magnanimity and vengeance. This seems to have been a question that interested Poissl himself as Napoleon's defeat loomed towards the end of 1813:

If the allies stick to their fine principles and truly fight for human happiness, and if they prove by their actions that France is not to be dismembered, but rather *Napoleon's* ambition opposed, and the object of his usurpation torn away from him [...], then we can be almost certain that the good cause will triumph completely!<sup>104</sup>

The play takes place against the background of a congress of victorious Greek states after the Trojan War. Poissl's version was written as the Congress of Vienna (September 1814 – June 1815) worked towards a European settlement after the defeat of Napoleon. The Greeks in the play can be seen as an allegorical version of the victorious German states in Vienna. At one point the Greek leader Pyrrhus demands Andromache's love. In return for this he offers to save her son Astyanax from the vengeance of his fellow-Greeks. Andromache, who represents the moral compass of the drama, insists that mercy should be a moral imperative, not something that can be traded for reward:

ANDROMACHE: No, no; you will honour the suffering of your enemy, protect the unfortunate, save my son, courageously defy a hundred nations; you will not demand a reward for your actions; you will prove how great you are, if needs be despite yourself; you will show that you are worthy to be Achilles' son.<sup>105</sup>

Poissl's adaptation also shows a particular ideological slant related to perceptions of the German national character. His version stays mostly very close to Racine's original, but

---

<sup>103</sup> The Stuttgart theatre censor Friedrich von Matthisson passed the manuscript for performance in November 1814 and marked this date on the manuscript. *Andromache / Trauerspiel in 5 Akten von Racine / für die deutsche Bühne bearbeitet / von / dem Freyherrn von Poißl*. MS copy in the Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart (Cod. theatr. 79). There is a second copy incorporating Matthisson's changes (Cod. theatr. 80).

<sup>104</sup> 'Wenn die Allirten in ihren schönen Grundsätzen, wahrhaft für Menschenglück zu kämpfen, beharren; in ihren Unternehmungen beweisen daß nicht Frankreich zerstückelt, sondern nur *Napoleons* Ehrgeiz bekämpft, und ihm was er *usurpirte* entrissen werden soll; [...] so muß der vollste Triumph der guten Sache schon so gut als entschieden seyn!' *Briefe*, p. 24 (3 November 1813).

<sup>105</sup> 'Nein, nein; du wirst des Feindes Leiden ehren, / Unglückliche beschützen, meinen Sohn / erhalten, muthig hundert Völkern trotzen; / wirst keinen Lohn für deine Thaten fodern; / du wirst, wenn's seyn muß, wider deinen Willen, / wie groß du bist, beweisen; du wirst zeigen, / daß du verdienst der Sohn Achills zu seyn.' *Andromache*, Act I Sc. iv. Cf. *Andromaque*, I. 4. 305, in Jean Racine, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

where he does depart from it he appears to wish to mitigate its overly 'French' characteristics. These characteristics are summarised in the *Münchner Theater-Journal*'s review, which praised Poissl's version but expressed reservations about the Racine:

The main shortcomings of the French original are as follows: that the main role from which the tragedy takes its name is of much less interest than Hermione, who is the best sustained character; that Pyrrhus and Orestes are depicted as too wavering, I might almost say too *French* to appeal to a German sensibility; and that ultimately too much is narrated and too little acted out. If one discounts these shortcomings, the piece has stirring moments and splendid poetical passages.<sup>106</sup>

Poissl himself was to echo these ideas in the same journal a year later, writing of Mozart:

He knew that the Germans would be attracted to something that required strength and security, because as a people they are all full of strength in mind and body.<sup>107</sup>

Poissl's alterations to *Andromaque* seem intended not only to redress the general balance between talk and action in a more 'German', action-based direction, but also to make the Greek heroes fit more closely into the 'German' mould.

Thus Hermione, whose suicide happens off-stage in Racine and is reported later, conforms to 'German' theatrical aesthetics and kills herself in view of the audience. Poissl also substitutes completely new text for Racine's original words if these do not fit a 'German' concept of heroism. This happens for instance in the scene in which Hermione tells Orestes to assassinate Pyrrhus. She senses reluctance in him and threatens to do the deed herself. Orestes, in love with her, is forced to acquiesce:

ORESTE: No, I shall deprive you of this gloomy pleasure, my lady. He will die only at Orestes' hand. Your enemies will be sacrificed to you by me, and if you wish you may recognise my service. But what am I saying? Permit me to hope. Excuse a lover who is troubled by his misery who, ready for happiness, still envies the fate of a villain whose sentence of death comes from you.<sup>108</sup>

Poissl's version is completely different:

---

<sup>106</sup> 'Die Hauptfehler des französischen Originals bestehen darinn: daß die Hauptrolle, von welcher das Trauerspiel den Namen hat, an Interesse bey weitem der Rolle der Hermione, welches der bestgehaltene Charakter ist, nachsteht; daß Pirrus und Orest zu schwankend, ich möchte mich des Ausdrucks bedienen, zu *französisch* gezeichnet sind, um ein deutsches Gemüth wohlthuend anzusprechen, und daß endlich zu viel erzählt und zu wenig gehandelt wird. Diese Fehler abgerechnet hat das Stück ergreifende Momente und herrliche poetische Stellen.' *MTJ*, 2 (1815), pp. 166-167.

<sup>107</sup> '[...] er wußte, daß den Deutschen das sicher anspricht, was Kraft und Sicherheit voraussetzt, weil das ganze Volk voll Kraft an Geist und Körper ist'. *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 455.

<sup>108</sup> 'Non, je vous priverai de ce plaisir funeste, / Madame : il ne mourra que de la main d'Oreste. / Vos ennemis par moi vont vous être immolés, / Et vous reconnaîtrez mes soins, si vous voulez. / Mais que dis-je? Ah plutôt! permettez que j'espère. / Excusez un amant qui trouble sa misère, / Qui tout prêt d'être heureux, envie encor le sort / D'un ingrat condamné par vous même à la mort.' *Andromaque*, Act IV Sc iii, lines 1253-1260. The last four lines are omitted in some editions of the play, but are given here as reproduced in the *MTJ*.

OREST: Stop! your thirst for vengeance drives you too far. You do not know the terrible torments with which a murder punishes us. The murderer is abandoned to the Furies. Their army of serpents pursues him vengefully through a life which daily brings new tortures. So keep your hand free of blood. Let me complete the deed. I will bravely sow the bloody seed. I will defy the horror and disregard the law of kings and peoples, for when the deed is accomplished my reward will be to possess you.<sup>109</sup>

In Racine Orestes is more passive, driven by his destructive passion for Hermione and by the moral blackmail she is exerting over him. In Poissl's version he has a more 'heroic' motivation, taking on the murder in order to save Hermione from the Furies whose persecution he himself has experienced.<sup>110</sup> He has more resolution and more moral backbone. The *Münchner Theater-Journal* quotes these parallel passages by Racine and Poissl in full, as an illustration of how positive and 'German' Poissl's alterations are.

Poissl's next opera *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* (1815) is also set in classical Greece and also shows a gathering of the ancient city-states, in this case for the Olympic Games. If the Jews throwing off the usurper-queen in *Athalia* represented the Germans in their War of Liberation and the Greeks in *Andromache* invited comparisons with the congress of victors, then the Greeks in this opera represent the Germans enjoying the post-Napoleonic fruits of peace and freedom. Even the historicising costumes (Figure 3), not so distant from contemporary 'Greek' fashion, would have created for the audience a visual connection between the opera on stage and the real world outside the theatre.

Written in the period after Napoleon's first defeat and abdication but before his escape from Elba, at a time when peace in Europe seemed to be likely after years of conflict, *Der Wettkampf* is Poissl's first opera since *Die Opernprobe* not to be set in a time of war. Nonetheless in the composer's adaptation of Metastasio's *l'Olimpiade* there are echoes of the wartime rhetoric of liberation used by the anti-Napoleon coalitions. Thus in Metastasio's original the heroine Aristeia, contemplating not only the loss of her true love but also an arranged marriage to someone else, laments the blows of fate:

---

<sup>109</sup> 'Halt ein! Dich treibt zu weit dein Durst nach Rache. – / Du kennst sie nicht, die fürchterlichen Qualen, / mit denen sich ein Mord in uns bestraft; / Der Mörder ist den Furien Preis gegeben. / Ihr Schlangenheer folgt rächend ihm durchs Leben, / das täglich neue Martern ihm erschafft. / Drum halte rein vom Blute deine Hände, / mir überlass es, daß ich es vollende. / Ich säe muthig aus die blut'ge Saat; / Ich will des Ungeheuern mich vermessen, / der Könige, der Völker Recht vergessen, / denn dein Besitz lohnt die vollbrachte That.' *MTJ*, 2 (1815), p. 167.

<sup>110</sup> In the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus, Orestes himself is pursued by the Furies after murdering his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus.

I myself am oppressed by fate. I lose him, lose myself, and do not even possess the unhappy freedom to mourn.<sup>111</sup>

In Poissl's version a wider 'freedom' is hinted at, and the language has a Romantic pathos closer to Schiller or Kleist than Metastasio:

Freedom is worth a human life, and Aristeia will know to die rather than lose the precious gift of freedom.<sup>112</sup>



**Figure 3: Costume for *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia*<sup>113</sup>**

---

<sup>111</sup> 'Io dal fato, io sono oppressa: / perdo altrui, perdo me stessa, / né conservo almen del pianto / l'infelice libertà.' (*l'Olimpiade* Act II Sc. 3, lines 55-58). Pietro Metastasio, *Opere*, ed. by Elena Sala di Felice (Milan: Rizzoli, 1965), p.390.

<sup>112</sup> 'Die Freyheit ist ein Menschenleben werth; / Und Aristeia wird zu sterben wissen, / Eh' sie der Freyheit köstlich Gut verliert.' *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia oder die Freunde* (Munich: Storno, 1815), p. 28 (Act II Sc. 3).  
Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055155/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

This implied equation of ancient Greeks with modern Germans was nothing new in German literature. The comparison was particularly common among those writers interested in the idea of a German national culture, because the Greeks were perceived to have produced one of the world's great civilisations despite their political and geographical fragmentation. As Constanze Güthenke has written, 'the parallel between the multiplicity of German principalities and the city-states of ancient Greece had been a topos of German writings since Wieland.'<sup>114</sup>

The image was even more common in writings which invoked German political integration. In Gerhard von Halem's dramatic fragments *Blüthen aus Trümmern* (*Blossoms from Ruins*, 1798) we see Germany through the eyes of a fictional Greek visitor, arriving from France:

I crossed the Rhine and saw the archipelago of German principalities, separated in dangerous currents, exposed to the stormy sea of their rulers' interests. Its inhabitants, distinguished by their respectability, prudence, and industriousness, deserve to be united one day in the greater interest of humankind. Yet it is more likely that the islands of our [Greek] archipelago will join up to become a solid land-mass than that Germany should see such unification.<sup>115</sup>

A political interpretation of Poissl's 'Greek' works is reinforced by the particularly strong association between cultural Hellenism and German nationalism in Munich, and especially in the circles round the Bavarian Crown Prince. Klaus Vierneisel suggests that a key experience for Ludwig was his visit to Berlin as a reluctant member of Napoleon's entourage after the battle of Jena (1806) and that the Prince saw the neo-Grecian style of the Brandenburg Gate as a symbol of German freedom in contrast to the Roman style favoured by the French Emperor.<sup>116</sup>

Winckelmann had already made the association between Greek art and national freedom in his influential *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (*History of the Art of Antiquity*, 1764). He maintained for example that the Belvedere Torso, a work which Ludwig later tried to acquire, was 'one of the last perfect works of art produced in Greece before it lost its

---

<sup>113</sup> Published in *MTJ*, 2 (1815), costume plate No. 30.

<sup>114</sup> Constanze Güthenke, *Placing modern Greece : the dynamics of Romantic Hellenism, 1770-1840* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 64-65.

<sup>115</sup> 'Ich ging über den Rhein und sah den Archipel deutscher Staaten, die durch die Wogen des Interesses ihrer Gebieter in manchen gefährlichen Strömungen getrennt sind. Die Bewohner, ausgezeichnet durch Biedersinn, Besonnenheit und Fleiß, verdienen es, daß einst das größere Interesse der Menschheit sie vereine. Aber eher versammeln sich unsers Arichipelagus Inseln zu festem Lande, ehe Deutschland jene Vereinigung sieht'. Gerhard von Halem, *Blüthen aus Trümmern* (Bremen: Witman, 1798), p. 14. Online: <<http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/resolve/display/bsb10110241.html>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>116</sup> Klaus Vierneisel, 'Ludwigs I. Verlangen nach dem "Reinen griechischen Stil"', in *Bayerns Philhellenismus*, ed. by Gerhard Grimm and Theodor Nikolaou (Munich: Institut für Orthodoxe Theologie der Universität München, 1993), p. 135.

freedom'.<sup>117</sup> Ludwig collected impressive amounts of Greek sculpture during the Napoleonic years. In 1814-1815, the period when Poissl was working on *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, the Crown Prince sponsored an open architectural competition for a sculpture museum in Munich, later known as the Glyptothek, to be built 'in the purest antique style'.<sup>118</sup> The link between the Greek aesthetic and German nationalism is even clearer in another of Ludwig's grand projects, Walhalla. As early as 1807 he planned a national shrine to house busts of the greatest Germans in history, situated on the banks of the Danube near Regensburg. For this too he required of the architect 'the purest antique taste, after the models of the most beautiful ancient Greek temples.'<sup>119</sup>

The representations of the anti-Napoleonic cause in *Antigonus* and *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, and the more full-blooded depiction of it in *Athalia*, suggest that Poissl was aware of Ludwig's political positions, and quite possibly sympathised with them. Even if we have little direct evidence of Poissl's closeness to the Crown Prince, the Greek settings of *Andromache* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* reflect a cultural scene in Munich which was dominated by Ludwig and his Hellenic tastes, and thus by association with the cause of German nationalism. In retrospect Poissl's belated excursion into Metastasian *opera seria* may seem a conservative, even anachronistic choice, but in Poissl's mind *Der Wettkampf* could well have been intended as the exact opposite – a highly topical reference to the cultural and political concerns of the moment.

To this end there are several signs that Poissl wanted to give the piece a contemporary feeling, to neutralise the eighteenth-century associations of the libretto and allow his audience to make direct, unmediated connections between the mythical Greece shown onstage and their own experience. This is true not only of the musical forms employed, but also of the language, as seen above in Aristeia's invocation of freedom.<sup>120</sup> In John Warrack's words, Poissl's Metastasio-based texts are 'expertly written to suit the kind of opera he sought, with the narrative preserved in considerable detail but entirely dispensing with the archaic Metastasian forms'.<sup>121</sup> Even the full version of the opera's name, *Der Wettkampf zu*

---

<sup>117</sup> '[...] eines der letzten vollkommenen Werke, welche die Kunst in Griechenland vor dem Verlust in Griechenland vor dem Verluste der Freiheit hervorgebracht hat'. Quoted in Gottlieb Leintz, 'Baugeschichte der Glyptothek 1806-1830', in *Glyptothek München 1830-1980*, ed. by Klaus Vierneisel and Gottlieb Leintz (Munich: Prestel, 1980), p.95.

<sup>118</sup> '[...] im reinsten antiken Styl'. Leintz, p. 98. The competition was announced on 4 February 1814. The deadline for submissions, originally set for 1 January 1815, was eventually moved to 1 January 1816. See Leintz, pp. 125-127.

<sup>119</sup> 'Das Ganze im reinsten antiken Geschmack, nach den schönsten Mustern altgriechischer Tempel'. Quoted in Sigrid von Moisy, *Von der Aufklärung zur Romantik: Geistige Strömungen in München* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1984), p. 193.

<sup>120</sup> See Chapter 6 for a discussion of some of the more problematic aspects of this.

<sup>121</sup> Warrack, *German opera*, pp. 293-294.

*Olimpia, oder die Freunde* (*The Contest at Olympia, or The Friends*), reads more like the title of a *Singspiel* or *opéra comique* than an *opera seria*. Poissl's preface to the published libretto talks of the text as 'my poem', and Metastasio's name is mentioned neither there nor on the title page. Poissl's intention seems to have been to camouflage the fact that the piece's dramatic origins lay in a libretto first performed more than eighty years previously,<sup>122</sup> and to steer his audience towards its implicit allegory of contemporary Germany.

### **Theatre of the nation: *Die Prinzessin von Provence***

One reason why the Crown Prince took the lead in matters of 'high' culture in Munich is that King Max Joseph's own tastes tended towards the popular. He was known to prefer the lighter fare of the Isartor-Theater to the more high-minded repertoire at the Court and National Theatre. The re-introduction of Italian *opera seria* in 1805 is said to have reflected the Queen's tastes rather than his. Anecdotally he is said to have given Delamotte, the Intendant of the Court Theatre, free rein as long as 'every week I have a couple of things to laugh at and my wife has a couple of things to cry at – beyond that you can do what you like'.<sup>123</sup>

However as a man of the Enlightenment Max Joseph was wedded to the ideal of a National Theatre, one which would symbolically gather together a socially and geographically diverse nation. Claudia Ulrich has summarised this aspiration:

Understood under what was then called 'national feeling' was the identity of the Bavarian state. The National Theatre was meant to contribute to this 'national feeling' in that the barriers between nobility and bourgeoisie, and between Old Bavaria and New Bavaria should retreat, at least for the duration of the performance.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> The first setting of *l'Olimpiade* was by Caldara (Vienna, 1731).

<sup>123</sup> 'Sorge Er mir, dass ich alle Wochen ein paar Mal etwas zum Lachen und meine Frau etwas zum Weinen bekomme – im Uebrigen kann Er machen, was Er will.' Quoted in *AmZ* (new series), 17 (1882), p. 436. See also Nägele, p.65.

<sup>124</sup> 'Unter dem, was "Nationalgefühl" genannt wurde, war die bayerische Staatsidentität gemeint. Das Nationaltheater sollte zu diesem "Nationalgefühl" beitragen, indem zumindest während der Aufführung die Grenzen zwischen Adel und Bürgertum, zwischen Alt- und Neubayern zurücktreten sollten.' Claudia Ulrich, *Das königliche Hof- und Nationaltheater unter Max I. Joseph von Bayern. Vorgeschichte, Entwicklung und Wirkung eines öffentlichen Theaters* (Munich: Beck, 2000), p. 180.

On his accession in 1799 the then Elector made all performances at the Court Theatre accessible to non-aristocratic audience members, and the theatre was renamed the 'Royal Court and National Theatre'.<sup>125</sup>

In the course of time Max Joseph felt that his ideals could only be achieved by the building of a new theatre, one whose architecture was less defined by the class structures of the *ancien régime* (cf. Figure 1 above). There were also practical reasons for a new building. The old Cuvillies Theatre was too small for a city with a rapidly growing population, and its technical resources were antiquated.<sup>126</sup> So a 'New Royal Court and National Theatre' was built and opened in 1818. With two theatres now available, Italian opera played on under a separate *Intendanz* in the old Court Theatre while German-language repertoire was performed in the new building.

Poissl's *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, to his own libretto, was the first piece that he wrote for the new theatre. The opera seems to have been written in and before 1821, although it was not performed until 1825. On 9 February 1821 Poissl wrote to Ignaz von Mosel that his 'new fairy opera' ['meine neue Feen-Oper'] was almost finished,<sup>127</sup> and the work's overture was performed at a concert in Munich's Odeon on 26 March, six weeks later.<sup>128</sup> After the 1825 premiere a review made clear that the piece had been in existence for a few years previously and had already been approved by the previous management:

The score of this opera had already been purchased and was ready to be performed under the previous *Intendanz*.<sup>129</sup>

One thing that contributed to the delay was the destruction of the new theatre by fire in 1823. The sets for *Die Prinzessin von Provence* had already been made, and they too were destroyed in the fire.<sup>130</sup> The opera was eventually premiered as part of a festival marking the re-opening of the theatre in January 1825.

Already written with the technical resources of the 1818 theatre in mind, *Die Prinzessin von Provence* proved particularly well suited to this festive occasion because it was designed to show off the full range of special effects available to modern theatre technology.

---

<sup>125</sup> Ulrich, p. 137. The 'National' element of the title was not always printed on playbills, but as Ulrich points out (p. 181), Max Joseph's ideals were not necessarily shared by those around him, including the management of the Court Theatre.

<sup>126</sup> Ulrich, p. 182.

<sup>127</sup> *Briefe*, p. 95.

<sup>128</sup> Reipschläger, p. 152.

<sup>129</sup> 'Bereits unter der vorigen Intendanz war die Partitur der gennanten Oper angekauft, und lag zur Aufführung vor.' *Flora*, No. 17 (30 January 1825), p. 68.

<sup>130</sup> Schrott, Dissertation, p. 51.



Poissl's 1821 letter to Mosel had already spoken of the opera's 'greatest scenic pomp'.<sup>131</sup> In 1825 the Munich journal *Flora* recognised this as particularly appropriate to the consecration of the new house:

Ultimately there was probably hardly any other new work in the category of dramatic music which corresponded as this one did to the main criteria applied to the choice of opening works, namely to provide a worthy demonstration to the public of the technical and material resources of the institution as well as its intellectual and artistic ones.<sup>132</sup>

Poissl's libretto required a wealth of spectacular natural and 'magic' effects including a storm, a shipwreck, a ball of fire descending from the sky and a flying seashell. Some idea of the lavishness of the decor is given by a surviving set design (Figure 4), which appears to be for Act II Scene 6i:<sup>133</sup>

In the moment when Alfred enters the cave the stage is transformed to show the fairy's palace. The walls of the hall are of ruby. Crystal columns with emerald pedestals and capitals carry the vaulted ceiling. Pink transparent clouds separate the background from the foreground. In the far background we see through the mist the fairy's throne, on which she is sitting. On its steps Blanka and Godwin stand to each side in ducal regalia.<sup>134</sup>

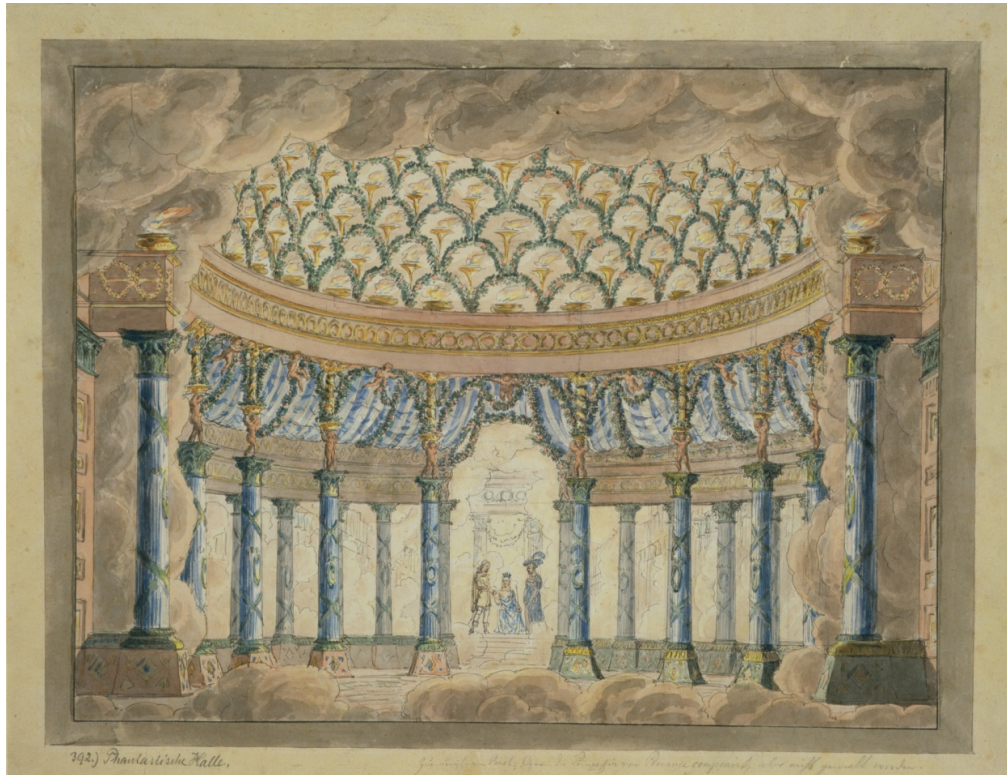
---

<sup>131</sup> '[...] dem größten szenischen Pompe'. *Briefe*, p. 95.

<sup>132</sup> 'Endlich möchte wohl kaum ein anderes neues Werk im Fache der dramatischen Musik vorhanden gewesen seyn, das, wie unser in Rede stehendes, den Ansichten und Zwecken entsprochen hätte, die man bei der Wahl der Eröffnungswerke vorzüglich im Auge gehabt hat, nämlich: die gesammten technischen und materiellen Mittel der Anstalt, gleich den intellektuellen und artistischen, würdig vor das Publikum zu führen.' *Flora*, No. 17 (30 January 1825), p. 69.

<sup>133</sup> Set design in pen and watercolour, ascribed to Joseph Quaglio, Deutsches Theatrumuseum, Munich, Slg.Qu.543 (F 2587).

<sup>134</sup> 'Die Bühne verwandelt sich in dem Augenblicke wo Alfred den Eingang der Grotte betritt und stellt den Palast der Fee vor. Die Wände des Saales sind von Rubin; Säulen von Krystall mit Piedestalen und Kapitälern von Smaragd tragen das Gewölbe. Rosenfarbene durchsichtige Nebelwolken scheiden den Hintergrund von dem Vorgrunde. Im tiefen Hintergrunde sieht man durch den Nebel den diamantnen Thron der Fee, auf welchem sie sitzt, und auf dessen Stufen Blanka und Godwin in herzoglichem Schmucke zu beyden Seiten stehen.' *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, MS Directionsbuch, Mbs, St.th. 159-5, Act II Sc. 6.



**Figure 4: Set design for *Die Prinzessin von Provence***

Proposing the piece to the King as a suitable work for the re-opening festival, Poissl stressed how it would also show off the human resources of the theatre:

Among the works available we could hardly have found one which better suited the individuality of all the singers here, and which simultaneously, with the chorus and the ballet but without exaggerated numbers of supernumeraries, had more chance of coming over to the public as a self-contained work of art.<sup>135</sup>

It will not have escaped the King's notice that Poissl's libretto also expressed the very ethos of Max Joseph's 'national feeling' and of the building itself: the free, inclusive nation under a benevolent monarch.

The plot is loosely based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, that archetypal story of the legitimate ruler ousted but restored. The outline of Shakespeare's play was also to be seen in Poissl's next opera *Der Untersberg*, and it was a subject which had appealed to many previous German composers of *Zauberoper*. In fact Poissl may have seen himself in this tradition of German adaptations rather than in a direct line from Shakespeare. The name of

---

<sup>135</sup> '[... daß] unter den zu Gebote stehenden Werken kaum eines zu finden sein dürfte, welches sich glücklicher der Individualität der hiesigen Sänger und Sängerinnen aneignete, und zugleich mehr Gelegenheit böte, vereinigt mit Chor und Ballett, aber ohne übertriebene Statisterei, als abgeschlossenes Kunstwerk auf das Publikum zu wirken.' Letter of 30 September 1824, quoted in Zenger, pp. 189-190.

his heroine Blanka, the equivalent of Shakespeare's Miranda, recalls Bianka, the heroine of Wenzel Müller's opera *Der Sturm* (Vienna, 1798).<sup>136</sup>

The legitimate ruler, Godwin, is the very model of an enlightened monarch. He is at ease living among the humblest of his subjects. They do not know his true identity but they respect him for his wisdom. The national community is defined by a solidarity across borders of class and status. When the young hero Alfred is shipwrecked it is these common people who collectively rescue him, guided by Godwin and his daughter:

Godwin and Blanka come on stage with some peasants who are carrying rescue equipment. The peasants divide into two groups, one of which, led by Godwin, appears to run away across the stage to the invisible side of the rocky reef. The other group however, led by Blanka, climbs the side of the reef which is visible on stage, lowers ropes and rope-ladders into the sea and appears to be signalling to people swimming. The remains of a shipwrecked ship appear on the sea; some of the peasants climb down quickly from the reef to the beach, throw ropes into the sea and give signals. At last Alfred appears, clinging to a rope which has been thrown to him. He is pulled to shore by the peasants.<sup>137</sup>

In this libretto written some five years after Waterloo, the defeat of the usurper Branor brings inevitable echoes of the downfall of Napoleon. Indeed there is a feeling that the pragmatic alliance with France has been written out of Bavarian history, and that the Wars of Liberation have been incorporated into the national founding myth. This tendency to rewrite the history of 1806-1813 was to continue under Ludwig I. His memorial to the 30,000 Bavarians who died in Napoleon's Russian campaign, erected in 1832, bears the inscription that 'they too died for the liberation of the Fatherland' ['Auch sie starben für des Vaterlandes Befreiung'].<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> Helen Geyer-Kiefl, *Die heroisch-komische Oper ca. 1770-1820* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1987) lists several operatic adaptations of *The Tempest* (pp. 103ff). Apart from Müller's work, at least four others appeared in 1798: Peter Winter's *Der Sturm*, and settings by Haack, Reichardt and Zumsteeg of Gotter and Einsiedel's libretto *Die Geisterinsel*. See also Warrack, *German opera*, pp. 182-187. In 1831 Felix Mendelssohn accepted a commission from Poissl to write an opera for Munich. The opera was never written, but Mendelssohn and his chosen librettist Karl Immermann discussed a version of *The Tempest*. *Briefe*, pp. 273-275; Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, *Sämtliche Briefe*, ed. by Helmut Loos and Wilhelm Seidel (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2009), II, p. 424.

<sup>137</sup> 'Godwin und Blanka kommen mit einigen Landleuten, welche Rettungswerkzeuge tragen, auf die Bühne. Die Landleute theilen sich in zwey Abtheilungen, daran eine von Godwin geführt, über die Bühne weg nach der nicht sichtbaren Seite des Felsenriffs zu eilen scheint, die andern aber mit Blanka den auf der Bühne sichtbaren Thiel des Felsenriffs besteigt, Thauen und Strickleiters ins Meer hinabläßt, in die See hinauswinkt, und Schwimmenden Zeichen zu geben scheint. Auf der See erscheinen Trümmer eines gescheiterten Schiffes; einige von den Landleuten eilen schnell vom Felsenriffe herab an den Strand, werfen Thau ins Meer, und geben Zeichen. Endlich erscheint Alfred, an ein ihm zugeworfenes Thau sich festhaltend, und wird von den Landleuten ans Ufer gezogen.' *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, MS Directionsbuch, Act I Sc. v.

<sup>138</sup> The obelisk stands on the Karolinenplatz in Munich.

Poissl's libretto evokes detailed aspects of the anti-French struggle. The peasants not only perform rescues on the seashore but are also mobilised to fight Branor alongside the nation's knights and warriors, an echo (also seen in *Athalia*) of the move towards civilian mobilisation in the closing phase of the Napoleonic wars:

GODWIN: Let me offer you some of the peasants of this country to accompany you. They are bold men, the inhabitants of this valley; you will get to know them in the heat of battle.<sup>139</sup>

The anti-Branor coalition, like the anti-Napoleon coalitions, not only embraces all classes but also several nations. There may even be a deliberate reference to the Waterloo coalition and its military leader Wellington when Alfred, the British knight, is offered command over the loyal Provençals:<sup>140</sup>

THE OLD CAPTAIN: Hail to you, heroic youth! Hail to your great King! Hail to the famed company of the round table! The undertaking which has brought you among us is one worthy of you. Accept this general's staff from my hand, for you are the promised leader of this army and I will gladly be the first to place myself under your command.<sup>141</sup>

Alfred, in his reply, claims to be fighting for 'justice and glory and love'. This also recalls the moralistic rhetoric of the anti-French coalitions in the Napoleonic wars. Poissl himself had written in 1813 of the anti-Napoleon alliance having 'fine principles' ['schöne Grundsätze'] and claiming to fight 'for human happiness' ['für Menschenglück'].<sup>142</sup>

Even stronger than this moral rhetoric is the idea that the nation is defined by its religious faith. This idea was already strong in *Athalia*, with its image of the persecuted and divided Jewish nation finding strength and victory through its shared faith. It was also to be found in Poissl's last two operas, *Der Untersberg* and *Zayde*. In *Die Prinzessin von Provence* Branor

---

<sup>139</sup> '[...] gestatte, [...] daß ich das Landvolk dieser Gegend aufbiete, dich zu geleiten. Es sind kühne Männer, die Bewohner dieses Thals; du wirst sie kennen lernen, im Gedräng der Schlacht'. *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, MS Directionsbuch, Act I Sc. ix.

<sup>140</sup> Wellington seems to have acquired folk-hero status in Bavaria in the years after Waterloo. In Poissl's unperformed comic opera *Dir wie mir* (composed in 1816), the very unheroic bookseller Dünndorn boasts of possessing 'Roland's courage, Samson's audacity, Wellington's perseverance' ['Rolands Tapferkeit, Samsons Kühnheit, Wellingtons Ausdauer']. *Dir wie mir*, I, 5. MS *Soufflierbuch*. Mbs: St.th. 146-3.

Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007738/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>141</sup> 'Heil dir, du Heldenjüngling! Heil deinem großen König! Heil der ruhmgekrönten Tafelrunde. Was dich in unsre Mitte leitet, ist ein Beginnen, deiner würdig. Nimm hier den Feldherrnstab aus meiner Hand, denn du bist der verheißne Führer dieses Heeres, und ich der erste, der mit Freuden dir sich unterordnet.' *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, MS Directionsbuch, Act III Sc. 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Briefe*, p. 24 (3 November 1813).

is not merely a usurper but a devil-like figure, a sorcerer surrounded by evil familiars. The opposition to him takes on not just the language of legitimacy but also that of faith.

Alfred, as a knight of the Round Table, appeals to a Christian deity:

Thou God by whom the sun moves, the oak stands resplendent, the gentle rose blossoms – Thou knowest what stirs in my heart, and that it burns for justice and virtue!<sup>143</sup>

However the ‘divine’ figure in the dramatic scheme of the opera is really the fairy Lucinde, whose name cannot be uttered and who is the embodiment of love and virtue. The term *Vertrauen* (trust) is used throughout the text as an equivalent for the Christian concept of *Glaube* (faith). *Vertrauen* is invoked alongside hope and love:

CHORUS: What you will never build through tears is easily achieved through trust. Hope, love and trust!<sup>144</sup>

*Vertrauen* is the virtue that brings victory to the righteous cause. Godwin commends it repeatedly to his daughter:

There is no better way to begin this auspicious day than with trust in the protection of the higher powers.<sup>145</sup>

Even the usurper Branor recognises it as a powerful weapon of his opponents:

Your trust could easily deprive me of this victory.<sup>146</sup>

The opera proved genuinely popular in Munich. *Die Prinzessin von Provence* achieved sixteen performances between 1825 and 1832, a large number in a city with a much smaller opera-going population than, say, Vienna or Berlin.<sup>147</sup> Poissl himself recognised that his ‘original magic-opera’ was a particularly audience-friendly introduction to his work, and urged the Kapellmeister of the Court Theatre in Braunschweig to perform it in a letter written seven months after the Munich premiere:

---

<sup>143</sup> ‘Du Gott! durch den die Sonne sich beweget, / Die Eiche prangt, die sanfte Rose blüht – / Du weißt, was sich in meinem Herzen reget, / Und daß es nur für Recht und Tugend glüht!’ Libretto: *Die Prinzessin von Provence: Original Zauber-Oper in drey Akten* (Munich: 1825), p. 35.

Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0001/bsb00016754/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>144</sup> ‘Was du durch Thränen / Nie wirst erbauen, / Ist durch Vertrauen / Spielend gethan. / Hoffe, liebe / Und vertraue!’ *Die Prinzessin von Provence* libretto, p. 20.

<sup>145</sup> ‘[...] besser als im Vertrauen auf den Schutz der höhern Mächte kannst du diesen verhängnißvollen Tag nicht beginnen.’ *Die Prinzessin von Provence* MS Directionsbuch, Act I Sc. 2.

<sup>146</sup> ‘Es bringt ja dein Vertrauen / Mich leicht um diesen Sieg.’ *Die Prinzessin von Provence* libretto, p. 26.

<sup>147</sup> By comparison *Athalia* only ever achieved five performances in Munich.

[...] I honestly admit that it is a little vanity of mine to establish a connection with theatres where my works have not yet been performed only with those works of mine whose success with any audience I am sure of in advance; and so I must recommend *Die Prinzessin von Provence* above all others, even though I believe that *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* would also be suitable, each in their own way, and would keep their place in the repertoire; but *Die Prinzessin* is the most certain of success because of the Romanticism on which it is founded, the charm of its melodies, and its great variety of situations and emotions.<sup>148</sup>

This tactic seems to have been successful, and the work was accepted by the Braunschweig theatre. Its first performance there, on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1826, marked the opening of the refurbished Ducal Court Theatre, thus serving a similar function in Braunschweig to its first performances in Munich. It went on to have seven performances there.<sup>149</sup> Poissl even persuaded Spohr, not previously an admirer, to take *Die Prinzessin von Provence* for his theatre in Kassel. It had at least three performances there in 1827, though not conducted by Spohr himself.<sup>150</sup>

The success of *Die Prinzessin von Provence* is slightly baffling to modern eyes, which see only a derivative libretto and a not particularly gripping score. Some of the opera's popularity can be explained by its stage spectacle. However this spectacle itself served a nationalistic purpose, conveying a comforting image of peace, freedom and morality restored after the tumultuous changes of the preceding decades. Although it is very different in style from *Athalia*, Poissl's other most successful work, *Die Prinzessin* has an ideological subtext which is not dissimilar. Both appealed to the founding myth of the post-Napoleonic era in Germany, showing a usurper overthrown by the power of faith, a legitimate regime restored and a vision of an inclusive, almost classless nation under a benevolent monarch. The audience in Munich's new National Theatre saw not only a celebration of the building itself, but also a positive image of themselves and their nation, reflected back from the stage.

---

<sup>148</sup>[...] indessen gestehe ich aufrichtig, daß es eine kleine Eitelkeit von mir ist, mit jenen Bühnen, auf welchen noch keines meiner Werke gegeben ist, nur durch diejenigen meiner Arbeiten in Verbindung zu kommen, von deren Erfolg ich im Voraus vor jedem Publikum überzeugt seyn kann, und so kömmt es denn, daß ich die "Prinzessin von Provence" vor allen anderen empfehlen muß, wenn ich gleich glaube, daß "Athalia" und der "Wettkampf zu Olimpia", jede in ihrer Art, auch zweckmässig wären, und sich auf dem Repertoire gewiß erhalten würden; allein die "Prinzessin" ist durch die Romantik welche ihr zu Grunde liegt, durch den Reiz der Melodie, und durch die grosse Mannichfaltigkeit der Situationen und Empfindungen wohl doch ihres Erfolges am sichersten. *Briefe*, p. 131 (14 August 1825).

<sup>149</sup> See report from Braunschweig in *AmZ*, 28 (1826), p. 624.

<sup>150</sup> See letter to Spohr in *Briefe*, pp. 134-136 (16 September 1825); also report from Kassel in *AmZ*, 29 (1827), p. 139.

### **Nationhood and religion: *Der Untersberg, Zayde***

When the Crown Prince acceded to the throne on Max Joseph's death in October 1825 he began to shape the Kingdom in his own image. Religion was central to Ludwig I's view of kingship and of Bavaria as a nation. In Heinz Gollwitzer's words, Ludwig's conception of the monarchical principle was that it lived from 'the synthesis of throne and altar'.<sup>151</sup> Reacting against the Enlightenment secularism which had shaped the rule of Max Joseph and Montgelas,<sup>152</sup> the newly-enthroned Ludwig set about re-asserting Bavaria's Catholicism. The most prominent manifestation of this was his policy of restoring the monasteries that had been dissolved by his father.<sup>153</sup>

The librettist of Poissl's opera *Der Untersberg*, Eduard von Schenk (1788-1841), was the man in charge of this policy. Though a Protestant Rhinelander by birth, Schenk was largely educated in Bavaria and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1817. He became a close friend of King Ludwig I, and his energetic ascent through the Bavarian civil service saw him overseeing the transfer of Landshut University to Munich and the reorganisation of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. At the time of the opera's premiere (30 October 1829) he was Minister of the Interior, and it was in this capacity that he oversaw the restoration of the monasteries. Schenk was a controversial figure, and has at times been painted as something of a Catholic zealot.<sup>154</sup> However more recent accounts have tended to view him as someone who combined a devotion to the monarchy and to Catholicism with a spirit of political liberalism and religious tolerance, at least in the early years of the reign.<sup>155</sup> Schenk's own stated aim was 'to unite religion and the principles of monarchy with freedom, faith with knowledge'.<sup>156</sup> In this he was at one with Ludwig himself, who was described by a close acquaintance as 'destined above all others to prove by his actions that the appropriate

---

<sup>151</sup> 'Das monarchische Prinzip lebte nach seiner Auffassung von der Synthese Thron und Altar'. Gollwitzer, p. 513.

<sup>152</sup> Ludwig and his allies had engineered Montgelas' downfall in 1817. Gollwitzer, pp. 201-212.

<sup>153</sup> For the secularisation policy of Max Joseph see Weis, pp. 39-46. For the restoration of the monasteries under Ludwig and Schenk, see Max Spindler, 'Die Regierungszeit Ludwigs I. (1825-1848)', in *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, ed. by Max Spindler (Munich: Beck, 1974), IV/1, pp. 129-130.

<sup>154</sup> 'Eduard von Schenk', in *ADB*, XXXI, pp. 37-44; Karl Goedeke, 'Eduard von Schenk', in *Grundriß zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung aus den Quellen* (Dresden, Stuttgart, Tübingen: Ehlermann and others, 1885-1960), VIII, pp. 571-584.

<sup>155</sup> Spindler, 'Regierungszeit Ludwigs I.', pp. 119-121; Gollwitzer, pp. 369-373.

<sup>156</sup> Letter of 29 February 1828. Quoted in Spindler, 'Liberale Reformperiode', p. 121.

freedom of thought and the press is very much compatible with Catholicism and monarchy.’<sup>157</sup>

Schenk’s libretto for *Der Untersberg* presents on stage the kind of idealised Catholic Bavaria that inspired Ludwig’s policies. Poissl was a particularly appropriate collaborator in this ideologically-coloured work. At the time of composition he was Intendant of the Court Theatre, and thus in particularly close contact with the political establishment and the circles around the King. He was a member of the Catholic aristocracy among whom Schenk found his natural political allies. He had also contributed music to two previous Schenk projects.<sup>158</sup> Most significantly, he himself appears to have been critical of the previous King’s secularisation policy, at least insofar as it affected musical and educational standards. In a long article of 1841 entitled ‘My views on the gradual decline of music, the causes of this, and the means of stopping this process’ (*Ansichten*), Poissl was to attribute a decline in Bavaria’s musical life to the abolition of the monastic education system, which had not only given a solid musical education to all its pupils but also promoted good taste in the wider population:

A further essential reason for the decline of music lies in the complete lack of public educational institutions for music, at least in the greater part of Catholic Germany, which has prevailed since the dissolution of the monasteries and the re-organisation of the seminaries for boys which once existed. This lack has had a negative influence, and will have an increasingly negative influence, not only on the training of good musicians but also on the maintenance of reliable taste and of a love of music in the whole of today’s younger generation.<sup>159</sup>

Poissl’s idea of religion as a crucial element in national culture has identifiable roots in his own biography. Volkmar von Pechstaedt has established that the monk and composer Father Evermod Groll was on the staff of the *Gymnasium* in Straubing during Poissl’s years as a pupil there, and may have been an early composition teacher of his.<sup>160</sup> The presence of monks on the staff of *Gymnasien* is specifically cited in the *Ansichten* as a side-benefit of the old monastic system. The Poissl family themselves also benefited at home from a strong ecclesiastical and monastic culture. The libretto exists of an operetta written for private

---

<sup>157</sup> Joseph Hormayr, quoted in Gollwitzer, p. 369.

<sup>158</sup> Poissl composed the original music for Schenk’s play *Belisar* and for his festive piece *König Ludwigs Traum* in honour of the King (both 1826).

<sup>159</sup> ‘Ein fernerer wesentlicher Grund des Verfalles der Musik liegt in dem, wenigstens im größeren Theile des katholischen Deutschlands, seit der Aufhebung der Klöster und veränderten Organisation der vormals bestandenen Knaben-Seminarien eingerissenen gänzlichen Mangel an öffentlichen musikalischen Bildungsanstalten, der nicht nur auf Nachbildung guter Musiker, sondern auch auf Erhaltung eines soliden Geschmacks und der Liebe zur Musik der ganzen gegenwärtigen jüngeren Generation höchst nachtheilig influirt hat, und immer noch nachtheiliger einwirken wird.’ Poissl, *Ansichten*, p. 122.

<sup>160</sup> *Briefe*, pp. 9-10.



performance by Poissl's older sisters at the castle in Loifling in 1785, with a text by a local priest and music by a friar from the nearby monastery of Oberalteich.<sup>161</sup> The musical life which surrounded Poissl in his formative years, far away from the great urban centres, seems to have been shaped to a great degree by the church and its institutions.

The libretto of *Der Untersberg* presents Catholicism as a natural part of the texture of South German life, alongside traditional folk legends and historical reminiscences. Like *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, the opera has a plot loosely based on *The Tempest*. In fact it includes more of Shakespeare's plot than the earlier work. The deposed Duke Odorich, unlike Godwin but like Prospero, has magical powers. Like Prospero, at the end of the story he relinquishes the nature spirits that he has commanded in his exile. In Schenk's original script (though not in the version set by Poissl) Odorich even breaks his staff like Prospero:

Farewell, you spirits! I untie the bonds which I gave you! The Master himself breaks his magic staff! (*He throws away his magic staff, which shatters on the ground.*)<sup>162</sup>

However, discernible among the *Tempest* material there is also a more archetypally German source. This is the Rübzahl legend of the kingdom beneath the earth, already treated operatically by Weber in *Rübzahl* (comp. 1804-1805) and by Spohr in *Der Berggeist* (1825). Schenk was tapping into the early nineteenth-century interest in folk-tales, their association with German national identity, and the already established traditions of German Romantic opera. In the final lines of his original libretto (again not set by Poissl) he acknowledges the continuing fascination of folk traditions:

The magic of the mountain subsides at its master's command, but its echo lives on in the sagas of the people, and the magic of love continues to hold sway everlastingly.<sup>163</sup>

The real-life Untersberg, between Berchtesgaden and Salzburg, had its own tradition of Rübzahl-like legends. Charlemagne or (in other versions) Frederick Barbarossa was said to lie sleeping beneath the mountain. This use of folk elements is part of Schenk's projection of a Bavarian national identity embedded in the people, their landscape and their traditions.

The opera is set in the middle ages, and Schenk the monarchist conservative depicts this as a benevolent, paternalistic era with clear distinctions of status. The aristocratic principle is

---

<sup>161</sup> J. A. Gansmeir, *Der glückliche Zufall für die Rechtschaffenheit* (Straubing: Betz, 1785). A copy is preserved in the Staatliche Bibliothek Regensburg, Art. 1611.

<sup>162</sup> 'Lebt wohl, ihr Geister! / Die Bande lös' ich, / Die ich euch gab! / Selbst bricht der Meister / den Zauberstab. (*Er wirft den Zauberstab weg, der am Boden zersplittert.*)' *Schauspiele von Eduard von Schenk*, (Stuttgart: 1833), II, p.247.

<sup>163</sup> 'Es sinkt des Berges Zauber / Durch seines Meisters Wort, / Doch lebt in Volkessagen / Sein Nachklang ewig dort, / Und unvergänglich waltet / Der Liebe Zauber fort!' Schenk, *Schauspiele*, II, p. 248.

reflected in linguistic form: the peasants converse in prose while the noble and royal characters speak verse. The linguistic distinction is maintained even when conversations are conducted across the social divide. Thus when the Duke and his companions discuss the Untersberg legends with the peasant Ottwalt the peasant speaks prose, the aristocrats pentameters:

OTTWALT: Denn ihr seyd des Todes, wenn ihr auf dem Untersberg jagt, der ganze Berg ist voller Geister und Gespenster.

GEFOLGE DES HERZOGS:  
Voll Geister?

HERZOG (lachend):  
Ah! das alte Märchen wieder,  
Das ich schon oft gehört und stets verlacht.

OTTWALT: Nein, gnädiger Herr, kein Märchen. Alle diese Leute hier haben die Geister zu verschiedenen Zeiten gesehn und erst vor wenigen Augenblicken haben wir ihren Gesang im Berge drinnen gehört.

FLORESTAN  
Ihr hörtet sie? Vor wenig Augenblicken?<sup>164</sup>

In fact the peasant characters, initially quite prominent, disappear after the the first Act of the opera. Their scenes feel rather as if they have been grafted on to the beginning of a *Zauberoper* which, once the story gathers momentum, is not so different from *Die Prinzessin von Provence*. The peasant scenes are in part a homage to the success of *Der Freischütz*, with its cast of foresters and gamekeepers. However in the specific context of Bavarian politics and in particular of Schenk's restoration agenda, they also embody an idealised historical South Germany, a land which is peaceful, prosperous and Catholic.

The very setting would have resonated with questions of national identity for the Munich audience. At the time of the opera's premiere the Untersberg massif straddled the national border between Bavaria and Austria, but Salzburg had been Bavarian territory in the early Middle Ages (before the period of the opera). It returned to Bavarian rule at Napoleon's behest in 1810, only to be returned to the Austrians in 1816 under the terms of the Congress of Vienna. Berchtesgaden, on the south side of the mountain, had also been Austrian for a part of the Napoleonic period, but returned permanently to Bavaria in 1810.

---

<sup>164</sup> OTTWALT: You are doomed if you go hunting on the Untersberg; the whole mountain is full of spirits and ghosts. DUKE'S ENTOURAGE: Full of spirits? DUKE (laughing): Ah! The old fairytale again, which I have often heard and always laughed at. OTTWALT: No, good Sir, it is not a fairytale. All these people here have seen the spirits at various times, and a few moments ago we heard them singing inside the mountain. FLORESTAN: You heard them? A few moments ago? *Der Untersberg*, MS Directionsbuch, Mbs St.th. 383-3, Act I Sc. 2. Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007737/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

Schenk, though a convert, was thoroughly assimilated into the Catholic aristocracy which, in the Bavarian alliance strategies of the post-Napoleonic period, leaned towards Austria rather than Protestant Prussia.<sup>165</sup> So in the idealised Middle Ages of the opera, although the Bavarians and Salzburgers have cultural differences, relations are peaceful and familial. The peasant Ottwalt, hailing from the northern Bavarian plains, is gently teased by the Salzburgers:

Down in the plains where you live, the people are as flat and empty as the land itself, so the spirits are probably like that too, without any courage or conscience. Where we live in the mountains it is different. Here the spirits are as daring and fearless as the people<sup>166</sup>

The Duke of Bavaria 'has hunting rights all round the Untersberg, even though the land and the people are not his'.<sup>167</sup>

The specifically Catholic nature of this nation is also established from the start. In the opening Chorus the peasants are called to prayer by the Angelus bell. The peasant woman Walburg compares the chanting of the spirit chorus inside the mountain with that of the monks in the abbey of Berchtesgaden, over in Bavaria. Moreover the opera is set in a time and a place in which religious leaders exercise worldly power. Ottwalt tells a story of the Duke of Bavaria travelling to visit the Bishop of Freising, and it is pointed out that of the three territories bordering on the mountain two are ecclesiastical states:

That is the Untersberg, the great boundary stone where the territories of three rulers meet: where the lands of the Bishop of Salzburg and the Abbey of Berchtesgaden and Bavaria all divide and unite.<sup>168</sup>

The invisible presence in the opera is Ludwig himself. One of the characters is an ancestor of his: Welf II, Duke of Bavaria from 1101 till 1120.<sup>169</sup> However Ludwig had an even more personal connection with the opera's setting. He had been Governor-General of Salzburg

---

<sup>165</sup> Gollwitzer, pp. 281-287.

<sup>166</sup> 'Bei euch draußen in der Ebene sind die Menschen flach und leer wie das Land, da mögen auch die Geister darnach seyn, keinen Muth und kein gutes Gewissen haben. Bei uns in den Bergen ist's anders. Da sind die Geister ohne Scheu und Furcht wie die Menschen.' *Schenk: Schauspiele*, II, p.187.

<sup>167</sup> 'Denn er hat Jagdrecht um den ganzen Untersberg, obgleich ihm Land und Leute nicht gehören.' *Schenk: Schauspiele*, II, p.191.

<sup>168</sup> 'Das ist der Untersberg, der große Markstein, / An dem die Lande dreier Herr'n, des Bischofs / Von Salzburg und des Berchtesgadner Stifts / Und Bayerland sich scheiden und vereinen.' *Schenk: Schauspiele*, II, p. 193.

<sup>169</sup> *ADB*, 41 (1896), pp. 670–671. Welf II was known as Welf the Fat, and there are hints in the libretto and the score that he is to be played as a comic character. These include the musical marking 'Eroico non troppo' at a point when he has just fled from the mountain spirits.

from 1810 to 1814, forming a great affection for the city which was reflected in his letters to Max Joseph:

Ah, dear Father, how beautiful Salzburg seemed once again, so ravishing, such a masterpiece!<sup>170</sup>

At the Congress of Vienna Ludwig fought passionately but unsuccessfully to keep Salzburg for Bavaria in the post-war settlement.<sup>171</sup> Ludwig also had close personal connections with Berchtesgaden, the town on the Bavarian side of the mountain. The palace there, seat of its ecclesiastical rulers until secularisation in 1803, had become the summer residence of the Bavarian royal family.<sup>172</sup> The Untersberg itself had a significance for Ludwig, too. He decreed that Walhalla, his architectural monument to Germanic culture on the banks of the Danube, should be built with marble from the Untersberg quarries.<sup>173</sup>

The third performance of *Der Untersberg* was disrupted by a protest in the auditorium and the planned run of performances was suspended.<sup>174</sup> It is unclear what the substance of the protest was, but given the nature of the piece it seems most likely that it was politically motivated. Although Schenk's name did not appear on the playbill, the identity of the opera's librettist was common knowledge<sup>175</sup> and there were powerful forces opposed to him in the Bavarian political class, the press and the universities.<sup>176</sup> *Der Untersberg* must have seemed like an operatic apologia for a particularly controversial public policy, and with the King himself absent from the performances (the Court was in mourning) the protesters felt free to vent their dissatisfaction. However, Ludwig's personal support for the piece and for Schenk is suggested by the fact that when it returned to the Court Theatre repertoire nearly a year later, the playbill declared the performance to be 'by royal command'.<sup>177</sup>

Fourteen years separate the premiere of *Der Untersberg* from that of *Zayde* (9 November 1843). Poissl wrote his own original libretto for this, his last opera, and its themes of nationhood and religion are if anything even stronger than in his previous works. The nation in question is the medieval Moorish Kingdom of Granada, together with the North African Moors who come to the aid of their beleaguered brethren in Spain. The religion that defines their identity is Islam. In fact in a reversal of the traditional operatic paradigm of, say,

---

<sup>170</sup> 'Ah, mon cher Père, comme Saltzbourg me parut de nouveau si beau, si ravissant, quel chef d'œuvre!' Letter of 12 August 1814. Quoted by Gollwitzer, pp. 182-183.

<sup>171</sup> Gollwitzer, pp. 181-183.

<sup>172</sup> It remains to this day a residence of the Wittelsbachs, Bavaria's royal family.

<sup>173</sup> The Wittelsbachs kept ownership of the Untersberg marble quarries even after the restitution of Salzburg to Austria.

<sup>174</sup> *AmZ*, 32 (1830), p. 69.

<sup>175</sup> *Flora*, No. 220 (1829), p. 893.

<sup>176</sup> Gollwitzer, p. 524.

<sup>177</sup> 'Auf allerhöchsten Befehl'. Playbill for 3 October 1820, Mbs Film 2° Bavar 827.

Mozart's *Die Entführung* or Spohr's *Jessonda*, this is not a piece about an exotic culture seen, with however much tolerance and enlightenment, from the European point of view. It is a story narrated almost entirely from the perspective of the Moors themselves, at a point in history when they are in mortal conflict with the Christian monarchs of Spain. Apart from Almansor's Spanish betrothed Elvira, all the main characters are Muslims. The villain Omar may seem to represent the archetype of the scheming, lecherous Moor as seen in Mozart's Osmin or Monostatos, but he is outnumbered by admirable Muslim characters, including the young hero Almansor, his father Alderamon and the self-sacrificing prophetess Zayde. Boabdillah the King of Granada is portrayed as a proud ruler, one who refuses to compromise his nation's honour and its ancestral faith even in the face of overpowering force.

It is not possible to identify a single literary source for Poissl's libretto, though as already mentioned Anke Schmitt has pointed out a general Romantic fascination with the doomed Moorish culture of medieval Spain. This had already found expression in German operas such as Schubert's *Fierrabras* (1823), Spohr's *Der Alchymist* (1829/30) and Kreutzer's *Das Nachtlager in Granada* (1834).<sup>178</sup> Poissl also drew on other literary archetypes to emphasise the sense of threatened nationhood. When Zayde dons armour and sacrifices herself in battle she resembles Schiller's Joan of Arc. Like Joan she is also revered for her prophetic gifts. Close to the chronological centre of the opera, in Act II, she has an extended monologue in which she sees the seeds of future disaster in the nation's present corruption:

O Granada, how low you have fallen! You were like a paradise, a land where a noble, pious people lived, rich in virtue and in earthly goods; a land of heroes, whose deeds lived on in the songs of your people. The paradise has become a desert; where cities blossomed, the snake and the salamander make their nests. Instead of noble warriors I see gangs of robbers; the murderer's dagger threatens even within the Alhambra itself!<sup>179</sup>

Schmitt (pp. 171-173) has identified possible sources of this passage in Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra*. However there is probably an even older archetype behind these words, and one which again emphasises the universality of religious feeling. This is the Lamentations of Jeremiah, with their emphasis on the destruction of the nation as a punishment for sin.

---

<sup>178</sup> Schmitt, p. 171.

<sup>179</sup> 'O Granada, wie tief bist du gesunken! / Ein paradiesisch Land warst du, bewohnt / Von einem edlen, glaubenstreuen Volke, / An Tugend, wie an Erdengütern reich; / Ein Land voll Helden, deren Thaten / In deines Volkes Liedern lebten, / Und neue Helden fort und fort erzeugten! / Zur Wüste ist das Paradies geworden; / Wo Städte blühten, nistet Schlang' und Molch! / Statt edler Kämpen seh' ich Räuberhorden, / In der Alhambra selbst droht Meuchlerdolch!' *Zayde* libretto, pp. 36-37.

This dark dramatic tone is unprecedented in Poissl's works, and *Zayde* is his only opera to end tragically – *Zayde* dies of her wounds in the final scene, having sacrificed herself to save Almansor. Poissl himself categorised the work as a *romantisch-tragische Oper*. Given this distinctive dramatic colour it is tempting to look for specific parallels in the current national situation, particularly since Poissl's previous works had so often reflected specific aspects of national life. Among the issues topical in 1843 were the troubles of the Bavarian-dominated administration in Greece, which culminated in a constitutional crisis a few weeks before *Zayde*'s premiere. In the assistance offered by the African Moors to their beleaguered brethren in Spain there may be an echo of the assistance which Hellenist Germans, in particular Bavarians, had previously offered the Greeks in their struggle against the Ottoman Empire.

However it seems more likely that the pessimism of the piece had its origins in Poissl's personal emotional state and his general unhappiness at what he saw as Bavaria's artistic, moral and cultural decline. Apart from his dismissal from the Court Theatre in 1833 and the collapse of his operatic career,<sup>180</sup> he had been struck by a series of family misfortunes. Schilling reports that between the mid-1820s and the mid-1830s he lost not only his first wife but also four grown-up children of his first marriage and two younger ones from his second marriage.<sup>181</sup> Aged 60 when *Zayde* was premiered, he must have suspected that this would be his last opera. His *Ansichten* of 1841, while specifically concerned with 'the gradual decline of music', also show him deeply disappointed with the state of cultural life, and suggest a reckoning with the 'egoism' and 'materialism' of the age in general.

For all this air of doom, in *Zayde* Poissl remains true to his vision of religion as a crucial element of national identity and its source of moral strength. The fact that these qualities could be embodied by Islam on the stage of the Court Theatre is in itself a reflection of the general religious and intellectual tolerance cultivated in the circles around the devoutly Catholic Ludwig. Poissl himself, alongside much Catholic church music, also wrote a cantata for Munich's Jewish Synagogue.<sup>182</sup> One of Schenk's closest friends was the Jewish playwright Michael Beer, brother of Giacomo Meyerbeer. Ludwig explicitly encouraged Schenk's friendship with this 'distinguished Israelite' even after Schenk took on ministerial responsibilities for religious policies.<sup>183</sup> Ludwig's own Queen Therese was a Protestant. In

---

<sup>180</sup> In the years 1833-1842 there appear to have been no performances of Poissl's operas anywhere in Germany.

<sup>181</sup> Schilling, p. 492. Poissl's first wife Walburga, Countess of Heggenberg, died in 1826. In 1828 he married Catharina von Frank. *Briefe*, p. 408.

<sup>182</sup> *Die Macht des Herrn* (1826).

<sup>183</sup> Quoted in *AdB*, 31, pp. 38-39.

the opera *Elvira*, a Christian, worries whether her faith will bar her from marrying Almansor, the Emir's heir, but is reassured by her Muslim companion Fatime:

Your faith cannot be a barrier; for marriages between Christian women and Muslim have long been no rarity.<sup>184</sup>

This open-hearted form of Islam provides the religious and moral framework for the nation in *Zayde* much as Judaism did in *Athalia*, Catholicism did in *Der Untersberg*, and the fanciful cult of the guardian fairy did in *Die Prinzessin von Provence*.<sup>185</sup> The Moorish army is blessed by an Imam before it sets off for Spain, and Almansor, departing for war, makes it clear that the values of obedience and chivalric honour are closely entwined with religion:

The Muslim follows the Prophet's call; the son obeys his dear father; the knight must fulfil the duty of honour which solemnly commands him to leave you.<sup>186</sup>

Faith is seen, as in *Athalia* and *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, as a virtue in itself which will protect the nation's warriors. King Boabdillah is as much a defender of his faith as his antagonists the Spanish 'Catholic monarchs'. He rejects a humiliating peace offer from them which demands that the Moors abandon their religion.<sup>187</sup>

Most importantly, the Muslim faith is the basis of all morals in this society. The villain Omar's most shocking crime is that he swears to a lie on the name of the Prophet. Justifying his abduction of Elvira, Omar swears that he has only done this in order to undermine the morale of her uncle, the Spanish commander. In fact, as the audience knows, Omar's real motives are lust and revenge. The honourable Alderamón, in front of whom the oath is sworn, regards perjury as a line which no Muslim, even the duplicitous Omar, would cross. As a result he is deceived, with fatal consequences:

ALDERAMON: I can barely discern whether he speaks lies or truth! But I have to trust his oath – a Muslim would never dare commit perjury!<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> 'Dein Glaube kann als Hinderniß nicht gelten; / Denn Ehen zwischen Christinnen und Mauren / Sind von jeher keine Seltenheit.' *Zayde: romantisch-tragische Oper in vier Akten* (Munich: 1843), p. 14.

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055289/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>185</sup> Schrott likens *Zayde* to *Athalia*, saying that in both operas Poissl placed words and music in the service of 'a profoundly religious idea' ['einer tief religiösen Idee']. Schrott, Dissertation, p. 378.

<sup>186</sup> 'Der Moslim folgt dem Rufe des Propheten; / Der Sohn gehorcht des theuren Vaters Willen; / Der Ritter muß der Ehre Pflicht erfüllen.', *Zayde* libretto, pp. 18-19.

<sup>187</sup> *Zayde* libretto, p. 41.

<sup>188</sup> 'Kaum vermag ich zu durchschauen / Ob er Trug oder Wahrheit spricht! / Doch dem Schwure muß ich trauen, – / Meineid wagt ein Moslim nicht!' *Zayde* libretto, p. 57.

The most striking signal of the ideological continuity between this opera and Poissl's previous ones is given by his music. As in the libretto, there is little sense in *Zayde*'s score that the Moors and their religion are something strange, quaint or picturesque. Indeed one of the more surprising aspects of the music, given its setting in exotic North Africa and Spain, is its lack of *couleur locale*. We know that Poissl willingly provided picturesque musical colour in other contexts. We see this for instance in the *Alma-Lied*, a pseudo-Austrian yodelling song he inserted into Kauer's *Das Donauweibchen* in 1826, and in the 'Alpine' music of *Der Untersberg* (Chapter 6). As has already been mentioned, there were existing precedents for operas set in this very locale of Granada, operas in which the composers understandably seized the opportunity to inject elements of the picturesque. In *Der Alchymist* for example, as Clive Brown has said, Spohr took pains to 'sustain the exoticism throughout the opera'.<sup>189</sup>

In *Zayde* Poissl hardly ever attempts to sound Moorish, or even Spanish. Also many of the religious references in the text, if the name of Allah were removed, could serve equally well in a Christian context. The hymn we hear from the mosque before the Moorish forces set off for war, a four-part chorale, could plausibly serve as Christian religious music (Figure 5).

CHORUS: Allah, your people, surrounded by perils, looks trustingly to you! May your spirit hover round it and protect it! As you direct, so let it be done.

The musical score is for a chorus in the mosque, marked 'Andante moderato'. It is in 4/4 time and features four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are in German. The score includes an orchestration part for Trumpets, Horns, Trombone, and Ophicleide, marked 'p' (piano). The score is divided into two systems, with the first system starting at measure 1 and the second system starting at measure 8. The lyrics are: 'Al - lah, dein Volk von Ge - fah - ren um - ge - ben, Blic - ket ver - trau - end zu dir hin - an! Mö - ge dein Geist es be - schüt - zend um - schwe - ben!'.

<sup>189</sup> Brown, *Louis Spohr*, p. 204.



The image displays a musical score for a chorus. The top system is for the vocal part, labeled 'Ch.' on the left. It features a treble clef and a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The lyrics are: 'Wie du es len-kest, sei wohl es ge-than! Was du ver-sprachst wird wie'. The bottom system is for the orchestra, labeled 'Orch.' on the left. It features a bass clef and the same key signature. The orchestral part begins with a rest for the first four measures, followed by a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and a series of chords and melodic lines. A measure number '15' is indicated at the beginning of both staves.

**Figure 5: *Zayde*, Chorus No. 5**

Far from betraying a lack of musical imagination, this use of an archetypally Christian musical form in conjunction with an ‘Islamic’ text enables Poissl’s German audience to identify and empathise with the nation depicted on stage without the barrier of picturesque musical gestures. There is a fundamental seriousness to his purpose here. As in so many of his operas, from *Antigonus* onwards, he is inviting his audience to look beyond the specific scenic metaphor to fundamental, universal truths about nationhood, community and faith.

## CHAPTER 3

### POISSL'S OPERATIC AESTHETICS

Aesthetic theory was important to Poissl. Weber describes him as 'equipped with scholarly knowledge'.<sup>190</sup> Von Schaden, basing his biographical sketch on Poissl's own account, attests to his acquisition of a 'profound self-education in harmony, counterpoint and aesthetics' during his years on his country estate in Loifling.<sup>191</sup> He also reports in the mid-1830s that Poissl was working on a scholarly work of his own:

He is currently occupied with a large theoretical work which he is labouring at with complete devotion, and which he hopes might lead to the cultivation of a musical field which until now has unfortunately remained largely untilled, and on which many weeds proliferate. This work is an "Attempt at an Aesthetics of Music", and despite the fact that it is only intended as an attempt, it is so comprehensive and rich in content that more than a year will surely pass before it can go to print.<sup>192</sup>

This book seems never to have appeared.<sup>193</sup> In the *Ansichten* of 1841 Poissl talks of a 'treatise of my own' which he has still not had time to write. However the *Ansichten* themselves re-assert the importance of the subject to Poissl. He ascribes a decline in musical culture not so much to poor musical training as to a lack of aesthetic understanding in musicians:

Young musicians educating themselves in composition should not stint in the effort they devote to the serious and comprehensive study of theory in its entirety, and should seek to acquire that general aesthetic education without which they will never have a true understanding of how to use their theoretical knowledge correctly and to certain effect.<sup>194</sup>

---

<sup>190</sup> 'Mit wissenschaftlichen Kenntnissen [...] ausgerüstet'. Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 311. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 290.

<sup>191</sup> 'Diese Zeit benützte er mit dem anhaltendsten Eifer zu tiefem Selbststudium der Harmonie, des Contrapunktes und der Aesthetik.' Von Schaden, p. 115.

<sup>192</sup> 'Gegenwärtig beschäftigt ihn ein großes theoretisches Werk, an dem er mit ganzer Liebe arbeitet, und von dem er hofft, daß es Veranlassung zu emsiger Bebauung eines Feldes im Gebiete der Musik geben soll, welches leider bis jetzt so ziemlich unbebaut liegt, und auf dem viel Unkraut wuchert. Es ist dies Werk ein „Versuch einer Aesthetik der Musik“; trotz dem aber, daß es nur für einen Versuch gelten soll und wird, ist es so umfassend und inhaltreich, daß wohl noch mehr als ein Jahr hingehen wird, ehe es dem Druck übergeben werden kann.' Von Schaden, p. 119. See also Schilling, p. 492.

<sup>193</sup> Hermann Arnold, in *Bayerisches Musiker-Lexikon Online*, suggests that the book was published anonymously but has since been lost. <<http://www.bml.o.lmu.de/p0909>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>194</sup> 'Junge, sich für die Composition bildende Musiker sollen sich die Mühe nicht gereuen lassen, der gesammten Theorie in ihrem ganzen Umfange ein ernstes und umfassendes

Elsewhere in the *Ansichten* he makes an even clearer distinction between the technical mastery of music and the aesthetic appropriateness or inappropriateness with which its expressive power can be used:

For example we only need to consider the decisive influence which the character, flow and development of a chosen melody, then the choice of a main key and the modulations into subsidiary keys, can have on the expressivity of a piece of music, and how easily this piece can express something other than the required feeling if these means of expression are inadequately or (still worse) wrongly used. Then we have to admit that a knowledge of harmony in its narrower, school-taught sense, and the contrapuntal skill which we acquire from a teacher and through our own practice, are both totally insufficient if we are to convey emotions and passions expressively.<sup>195</sup>

In the absence of Poissl's intended theoretical *magnum opus*, his most explicit statement of aesthetic principle and practice is his sixteen-page *Erklärung* [Declaration], published in the *Münchener Theater-Journal* in 1816.<sup>196</sup> The immediate occasion for this was the debate surrounding the operas of Rossini, which had been introduced to Munich that summer. The *Erklärung* was written in the heat of this debate and shares some of its vehemence. There are also passages of nationalist polemic against *Rossinismus*. But at the core of the article is a considered statement of Poissl's fundamental views on 'music itself and dramatic music in particular'. This offers us an invaluable aesthetic framework, Poissl's own, in which to approach his own compositions and understand his artistic choices.

The *Erklärung*, relatively brief though it is, also tells us enough to place Poissl within a wider community of German operatic theory which, with individual differences of emphasis, was shared by a number of his prominent contemporaries. Of particular relevance to Poissl, because they were active as journalists and theoreticians as well as composers, were Mosel, Hoffmann, Spohr and Weber. Concepts such as 'dramatic truth', 'characterisation' and the 'total effect', all invoked in the *Erklärung*, are illuminated by the

---

Studium zu widmen, und sollen suchen, jene allgemeine ästhetische Bildung zu erlangen, ohne welche sie über die richtige und sicher wirksame Anwendung des theoretisch Erlerneten schwerlich jemals mit sich selbst ins Klare kommen können.' *Ansichten*, p. 131.

<sup>195</sup> 'Betrachten wir z. B. nur den entscheidenden Einfluß, welchen Charakter, Fluß und Durchführung einer gewählten Melodie, dann Wahl der Haupttonart und die Ausweichungen in Nebentonarten auf die Ausdrucksfähigkeit eines Tonstücks ausüben, und wie leicht durch eine unzweckmäßige oder gar verkehrte Anwendung dieser Mittel ein solches ganz etwas anderes als die eben darzustellende Empfindung oder Leidenschaft ausdrücken kann; so werden wir einräumen müssen, daß Kenntniß der Harmonie im engern Sinne, wie die Schule sie lehrt, und kontrapuntistische Gewandheit, die durch Unterricht des Lehrers und eigene Uebung erworben werden kann, durchaus nicht hinreichen, um ausdrucksvoller musikalischer Darsteller von Gemüthsbewegungen und Leidenschaften zu seyn.' *Ansichten*, p. 114.

<sup>196</sup> *MTJ* (1816), pp. 446-458, 503-507.

writings of these other figures. In particular Weber, personally the closest to Poissl, used a shared conceptual language which contributes to our understanding of both artists.

This language of German operatic aesthetics was also the language of opposition to Italian opera. In the *Erklärung* Poissl promises to expound on ‘the essential nature and relationship of German and Italian opera’. What he means by the ‘nature and relationship’ is essentially their opposition. To understand Poissl’s operatic aesthetic vocabulary we have to understand the polemical context in which it was honed. These oppositional attitudes did not arrive with Rossini. The creation and reception of Poissl’s *Merope* in 1812, for example, had already inspired journalistic polemics around conflicting German and Italian ideals of opera (see Chapter 4). However the resistance of certain German musical circles to Rossini, and perhaps especially the first skirmishes in Poissl’s Munich in 1816, crystallised the opinions on both sides with particular clarity.

### **First principles: The Rossini debates and Poissl’s *Erklärung* of 1816**

The first ever performance of a Rossini opera in Germany was in Munich: *L’Italiana in Algeri*, which opened the season given by the Antonio Cera company at the Court and National Theatre on 18 June 1816. Cera’s company had been granted a contract to perform in Munich for six weeks. However, such was the popularity of the new Italian style that his contract was repeatedly extended, and the season eventually lasted well into the autumn. Though other Italian composers were represented, Rossini’s works seem to have been especially well-received, in particular *Tancredi* and *L’inganno felice*. The latter was a piece not even included in the original planned repertoire, but it appears to have been quickly added to the company’s programme within the first week.<sup>197</sup> This was the start of what Susanne Ulrich has called Munich’s ‘Rossini fever’, a craze which was to extend beyond the opera house to fashions in parties, clothes and food.<sup>198</sup>

However the enthusiasm for Rossini was not shared by those in musical and journalistic circles who feared for the future of German opera in the face of this shift in public taste. On 21<sup>st</sup> August Poissl, whose latest German opera *Dir wie mir* was finished but remained unperformed, lamented in a letter to the King that the production of German operas had come to a standstill ‘because of the operation of the Italian Opera that is here’.<sup>199</sup> It may have been as a sop to him that one of the few German operas performed during the Cera

---

<sup>197</sup> Zenger, pp. 144-146.

<sup>198</sup> Ulrich, p. 153.

<sup>199</sup> ‘[...] wegen Betreibung der anwesenden italienischen Oper’. Letter to King Max Joseph, *Briefe* p. 56.

residency was an isolated performance of *Athalia* on 27 September.<sup>200</sup> A correspondent reporting from Munich for the Weimar *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode* depicted the pro-German party as a beleaguered minority:

The public is split into two camps over the guest appearance of an Italian troupe which sings excellently, brilliantly accompanied by the Court Orchestra. The supporters of German opera may be opposed to it, but the majority of the public is enraptured.<sup>201</sup>

In Munich itself, one of the earliest journalistic responses to the Rossini phenomenon can be found in the *Münchener Theater-Journal*. There the opposing sides of the debate are presented in a satirical correspondence between two fictional characters. One of them, the landowner Ulrich Lebeschlicht (the surname has suggestions of simplicity, even stupidity) is the ignorant, slavish admirer of all that is foreign:

Italian music is excellent because, as is well known, they have a monopoly on genius there which excludes the rest of the world.<sup>202</sup>

He treats the shortcomings of Italian opera – its dramatic absurdity, its musical and textual unoriginality and its subservience to the vanity of singers – as if they were virtues to be celebrated:

If the whole energy of the opera is invested in the singer, then all the composer needs to do is to ascertain which kinds of decorations and runs the singer does best, on which notes it is best for him to sing ‘O Dio’, ‘addio’, ‘io manco’, ‘io moro’, ‘vado alla tomba’, ‘dolce mio bene’ and other such powerful and universal expressions, and how high his ‘felicità’ can go at the end. Then the opera is finished, and will be a guaranteed success.<sup>203</sup>

On the other side of the debate is Harmonikus Derbohr (the surname means ‘coarse-ear’), a self-styled ‘connoisseur and contrapuntalist’ who gives his address emphatically as ‘in a small city, near a large city, but both in Germany’. Derbohr is a caricature of the contemporary German composer – nationalistic, arrogant and over-intellectual. For him the

---

<sup>200</sup> Playbill in the Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich.

<sup>201</sup> ‘Das Publikum ist in zwei Lager gespalten, über das Gastspiel einer wälschen Truppe, die vortrefflich singt, glänzend begleitet vom Münchner Hoforchester. Die Anhänger der deutschen Oper sind zwar dagegen, aber die Mehrzahl des Publikums ist begeistert.’ *JLM*, 31 (1816), pp. 675-676.

<sup>202</sup> ‘Die italienische Musik ist vortrefflich, weil dort bekanntlich ein Monopol mit dem Genie getrieben wird, von dem die übrige Erde ausgeschlossen ist.’ *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 460.

<sup>203</sup> ‘Wird die ganze Schwungkraft der Oper dagegen in den Sänger gelegt, so braucht sich der Komponist bloß zu merken, welche Verzierungen aller Art und Rouladen dem am besten gelingen, auf welchen Tönen es am entsprechendsten: *O Dio, Addio, io manco, io moro, vado alla Tomba, dolce mio bene* und dergleichen Kraft- und Universalausdrücke singt, wie hoch gegen Ende seine *Felicità* geht, so ist die Oper fertig, und macht sicher Furor.’ *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 462-463

very popularity of Italian music, its universal ability to communicate, is a sign of its degeneracy:

The Hottentot and the Lombard, the Greenlander and the Portuguese feel the ingratiating quality of sweet melodies. Is that Nationality? Ha! In this respect we Germans are way ahead! We have a *National* music, because outside Germany nobody understands it. By this of course I mean our new music, because the sentimental tinkling of Haydn, Handel, Gluck, Mozart and other dead bunglers has unfortunately been claimed equally by the whole of humanity.<sup>204</sup>

The ideal German opera strives to be as complex and incomprehensible as possible:

I do not wish to boast, but this has often happened to me. In fact my excentral [sic] compositions are not even understood in the city where I write them. So I am thoroughly original, thoroughly idiosyncratic and compose for myself. What greater triumph could there be for a composer?<sup>205</sup>

In a mirror-image of Lebeschlicht's love of clichéd vocal effects, Derbohr, like the German composer Campanone in *Die Opernprobe*, prefers to ignore the vocal aspect of opera altogether and concentrate on having a loud orchestra:

The Italians put all the energy of their operas into the sung line. The fools – as if opera existed because of singing! We Germans understand this better. The human voice is merely an accessory, merely accompaniment. The orchestra, good Sir, the orchestra is the main thing. It is the orchestra which makes a composer immortal. There lies the art, the strength, the power and the glory! The most powerful Italian voice cannot compete with the weakest German orchestra. That is why we have trumpets and timpani. When our orchestra thunders out in powerful combination to accompany a soulful aria, the audience just needs to look at the singer's mouth to check that she is singing. The true stamp and criterion of a good German opera is that if necessary it could be performed without singers. But the uninitiated do not understand this.<sup>206</sup>

It could possibly have been this caricature of a modern German composer which stung Poissl into clarifying his own position in his *Erklärung*. The first part of Poissl's article was

---

<sup>204</sup> 'Der Hottentot und der Lombarde, der Grönländer und der Portugiese fühlen das Schmeichelnde süßer Tonreihen. Ist das Nationalität? Ha! da sind wir Deutsche weit voraus! – wir besitzen eine *National-Musik*, denn außer Deutschland versteht sie niemand. Ich spreche von der neuen Musik, denn Haidn's Händel's, Gluck's, Mozart's und anderer verstorbener Stümper empfindsames Geklingel gehört leider ebenfalls dem ganzen Menschengeschlecht an.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 384.

<sup>205</sup> 'Bei mir war dieß, ohne Ruhm zu melden, schon mehrmahls der Fall. Ja, selbst in der Stadt, wo ich schreibe, werden meine exzentralen Kompositionen nicht verstanden. Ich bin also ganz originell, ganz eigenthümlich, und schreibe für mich selbst. Kann ein Kompositeur einen größeren Triumph erleben?' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 385.

<sup>206</sup> 'Die Italiener legen alle Schwungkraft der Oper in den Gesang. Die Bethörten, als ob die Oper des Gesangs wegen da wäre! Das verstehen wir Deutsche besser. Die menschliche Kehle ist nur Nebensache, nur Akkompagnement. Das Orchester, mein Herr, das Orchester ist die Hauptsache. Das wahre Gepräge und Kennzeichen einer guten deutschen Oper ist, wenn man im Nothfall gar keines Sängers bedürfte, um sie aufzuführen. Aber dafür haben die Ungeweihten keinen Sinn.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 385-386

published in the next issue of the same *Münchener Theater-Journal*, meaning after the first letter from 'Derbohr' but before the first one from 'Lebeschlicht'. Whatever the immediate stimulus, Poissl declares that his reported criticisms of Rossini have been misrepresented in the press. He does not want to be depicted as a fanatic:

When something very unusual, particularly in the realm of art, appears before a large public which is hungry for novelty, this rarely occurs without factions forming for and against, and without comparisons being made with the existing products of earlier times. So it is unsurprising to find such frictions here at a time when a completely new phenomenon, the Italian comic opera (for that is what it essentially has been until now) is starting to establish itself among us. Also, nowhere in the world is it considered remarkable if a country holds fast to what is distinctive to itself, and if, rightly conscious of the excellence it has produced and can yet produce in science and art, it is unwilling to concede immediate superiority to the foreign phenomenon, simply because some people from its own midst, oblivious to the previous achievements of their dead or living compatriots, are happy to present the palm to any new arrival that comes along.<sup>207</sup>

One would think, Poissl writes, that people would respect him for his honestly-expressed views:

However here to a certain extent the opposite seems to be true, and there are people who, either from fanaticism or from envy and ill-will, try to pick up every word that one has said about the foreigners' music and their performances, and pass it on in a twenty times more negative light.<sup>208</sup>

Poissl feels that he must publicly clarify what have been perceived as his criticisms of the Italian company. In order to explain the theoretical basis of his opinions, he must first present his 'overall opinions on music, and dramatic music in particular, and then on the

---

<sup>207</sup> 'Wenn etwas ganz Fremdartiges, besonders im Gebiete der Kunst, vor einem großen, nach Neuheit lüsternen Publikum erscheint, so läufte es selten ohne Parthie dafür und dagegen, ohne Vergleiche mit dem früher Bestandenen ab, und Niemanden konnte es daher wundern ähnliche Reibungen hier zu einer Zeit wahrzunehmen, wo eine ganz neue Erscheinung, die komische italienische Oper, (denn das ist sie bis jetzt noch im Wesentlichen) unter uns sich festzusetzen anfängt. Eben so wenig erregt es irgendwo in der Welt Aufsehen, wenn jedes Land and dem ihm Eigenthümlichen festhält, wenn es im gerechten Bewußtsein dessen, was es Ausgezeichnetes in Wissenschaft und Kunst hervorgebracht hat, und noch hervorzubringen sich fähig hält, nicht gleich willig dem Fremden die Ueberlegenheit einräumt, weil es Einigen aus seiner Mitte gefällt, uneingedenk aller frühern Leistungen ihrer todten oder noch lebenden Landsleute, die Palme jedem neuen Ankömmlinge entgegen zu tragen.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 446.

<sup>208</sup> 'Allein hier scheint sich einigermaßen das Gegentheil zu bewahren, und es giebt Menschen die entweder aus Fanatismus, oder aus Neid und Scheelsucht, begierig jedes Wort aufzufassen, und im zwanzigmal schwärzerem Licht wieder zu verbreiten bemüht sind, das man über die Musik der Fremden und die Darstellung ihrer Werke ausspricht.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 446-447.

essential nature and relationship of German and Italian opera'. As in his 1820 defence of the Court Theatre system,<sup>209</sup> Poissl begins by asserting the moral, educative purpose of art:

The purpose of the arts in general is the ennoblement of feeling and the refinement of morals, and this main purpose must be applied to all the arts. That they may amuse and entertain at the same time is an effect, but it must never become their purpose.<sup>210</sup>

Among the arts music is the 'most universal and most highly intensified language of passion, [...] designed to penetrate to the innermost depths of the soul'.<sup>211</sup> However the application of this powerful language is subject to rules:

The experience of past ages with regard to certain physical and mathematical abstractions has given it grammatical rules, while our sense of what is fitting and beautiful has given it aesthetic ones, rules which it willingly follows because through them it has been able to move from chaos to defined forms, from a low, mean nature to a higher, nobler one.<sup>212</sup>

As already seen, the distinction between 'grammatical', technical rules and a more general aesthetic sensitivity was to be reiterated by Poissl in his *Ansichten* of 1841. In the *Erklärung* he argues that both principles, the grammatical and the aesthetic, must be observed in a work of art. He draws a comparison with spoken language, where effectiveness of utterance must be allied with an underlying correctness of thought:

Just as speech requires rhetoric and thought requires logical form in order to be simultaneously beautiful and true, so music cannot abandon these rules if it is to be sure of achieving its aim. I have not a moment's doubt that all this is true, nor any doubt that these general principles must be applied in all separate cases.<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Anon [Poissl], *Ideen*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>210</sup> 'Der Zweck der Künste im Allgemeinen ist Veredlung des Gefühles, Verfeinerung der Sitten, und dieser Hauptzweck muß allen Künsten überhaupt vorliegen. Daß sie gleichzeitig erheitern und unterhalten können, ist Wirkung, darf aber nie Zweck werden.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 447-448.

<sup>211</sup> 'Die allgemeinste und auf's Höchste potenzierte Sprache der Leidenschaft, [...] ganz dazu gemacht, in die innersten Tiefen der Gemüther einzudringen'. *ibid.*, p. 448.

<sup>212</sup> 'Die Erfahrung aller Zeiten mit Berücksichtigung sicherer physikalischer und mathematischer Abstraktionen hat ihr grammatische, das Gefühl des Schicklichen und Schönen aber aesthätische Regeln gegeben, die sie gerne befolgt, weil sie dadurch aus dem Chaos in bestimmte Formen, aus der niedrigen, gemeinen Natur in die höhere und edlere übergegangen ist'. *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 448.

<sup>213</sup> 'So wie die Sprache ihrer Rhetorik und der Gedanke der logischen Form bedarf, um schön und richtig zugleich zu seyn, so kann auch die Musik ihrer nicht entbehren, wenn sie ihren Zweck mit Gewißheit erreichen will. Ueber die Richtigkeit des gesagten bin ich nicht einen Augenblick im Zweifel, und eben so wenig darüber, daß diese allgemeinen Grundsätze ihre Anwendung auch in den besondern Fällen finden müssen.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 448.



Applying these principles to dramatic music, Poissl sees the aesthetic crux of the composer's work in a truthful relationship between his music and the 'poetic characters' provided by the author:

Just as in any dramatic work it is imperative to have correctness of characterisation, a consistent approach to the characters portrayed and a psychological motivation of their passions, so it is also absolutely necessary that the composer should not only know how to portray musical characters and depict powerful passions in music of arresting truthfulness, but also that he should never stray from correct declamation. For it is he who dictates this to the performer; the singer does not enjoy the same control over his performance as the actor does. Dramatic truth is the essential thing.<sup>214</sup>

This concept of 'dramatic truth' was central to the German operatic aesthetic. Here Poissl relates it to 'correct declamation', the idea that a character's form of musical utterance must be true to his dramatic individuality. But 'dramatic truth' is also a more general aesthetic principle, one which is threatened if individual musical elements, such as melody or harmony, become too important in themselves or unbalance each other:

If for a very few moments it should seem necessary to subordinate melody to the power of harmony, the composer must consider carefully beforehand whether the resulting effect is great enough to justify such a great sacrifice.

On the other hand he must also beware of turning means into ends, chasing after pleasant melodies at the expense of dramatic truth or, even worse, introducing startling modulations and very full-voiced accompaniments in places where they are motivated neither by the characterisation of the *dramatis personae*, nor by the course of the action, nor by the fluctuation of passions. Once again: truth, sensitivity and depth of feeling are the main thing, and a melody which, however ingratiating to the ear, does not convey the character which it should convey in the given situation, or a forceful but unmotivated harmony, in my eyes merely resembles an ornately gilded frame round a badly painted picture.<sup>215</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> 'So wie dem dramatischen Produkte überhaupt Richtigkeit der Charakterzeichnung, Haltung der aufgestellten Charaktere und psychologische Motivierung der Leidenschaften nie erlassen werden kann, so ist es auch unumgänglich nöthig, daß der Komponist nicht nur musikalische Charaktere aufzustellen, und die Gewalt der Leidenschaften durch seine Töne mit ergreifender Wahrheit zu schildern wissen muß, sondern auch sich nie von der Richtigkeit der Deklamation entfernen darf, weil er es ist, der sie dem ausübenden Künstler vorzeichnet, und der Sänger nicht mit derselben Freiheit, wie der Schauspieler, Herr seines Vortrages bleibt. Dramatische Wahrheit ist daher die Hauptsache.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 449.

<sup>215</sup> 'Wenn für einzelne wenige Momente es ihm nöthig seyn sollte, die Melodie der Kraft der Harmonie völlig unterzuordnen, [muß der Komponist] vorher wohl erwägen, ob die hervorgehende Wirkung groß genug sey, um ein so großes Opfer zu verdienen.' 'Auf der andern Seite aber muß er sich auch sehr hüten, nie die Mittel zum Zwecke selbst zu machen, und nie auf Kosten der dramatischen Wahrheit nach angenehmen Melodien zu haschen, oder, was noch ärger ist, frappante Modulationen und sehr vollstimmige Begleitungen da einzuführen, wo sie weder durch die Charakteristik der Personen, noch durch den gang der handlung und Wechsel der Leidenschaften motivirt sind.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 450.

In this passage and elsewhere Poissl also touches on the idea of music which ‘characterises’, and suggests that the drama has a ‘character’ which the composer must capture with his music. ‘Characterisation’, both of the individual figure in the drama and of the dramatic situation, was seen by Poissl as being at the heart of dramatic truthfulness. As we shall see later in the *Erklärung*, the concept was also central to his critique of Rossini.

Having set out his fundamental principles, Poissl provides a short history of German opera, which he says hardly existed before 1760. He cites Hiller as a pioneer of German comic opera, and Holzbauer and Schweitzer as the first composers to try and write serious ones. He notes the lack of support given to the idea of a distinctively German opera in its own country. He cites the example of Gluck, a German and ‘the foremost dramatic composer who ever lived’, who was forced to establish his reputation abroad, and Mozart, who ‘only achieved general recognition and a position worthy of his achievements shortly before his death’. Nonetheless the nation can be proud of what Germans have achieved in this short time, although much more might they have done with greater support.

He compares this with the generous financial, educational and practical resources available for opera in Italy. It would be small wonder if that country brought forth supreme operatic achievements. And yet the current state of Italian music is anything but good:

Where in Italy now are Allegri, Palestrina, Leo, Durante, Pergolesi, Scarlatti, Porpora and Jomelli? Where can we find a Paisiello or a Cimarosa? Where are the singers who could compare with Pacchiarotti, Marchesi, Crescentini and Davide, or with Mara (who incidentally was German by birth), Bandi and Billington? [...] In that country artistic education seems not only to have not gone forward, but actually to have gone backward; as a result it is incomprehensible that all of a sudden it should set up its own taste, the works which are currently popular there, as a model for other nations!<sup>216</sup>

Poissl alludes back to his initial point that art has a higher moral purpose than mere entertainment:

Perhaps this is because these works are most pleasantly entertaining, a fact which no intelligent person will deny? Then one would have to accept that *the very art* which is the most moving of all, which can raise man above himself, indeed which can carry him into the realm of the spirits, has no better purpose in the world than to fill

---

<sup>216</sup> ‘Wo ist denn jetzt in Italien ein Allegri, Palestrina, Leo, Durante, Pergolesi, Scarlatti, Porpora und Jomelli, oder wo ist denn ein Paisiello oder Cimarosa zu finden? Wo sind denn die Sänger und Sängerinnen, die einem Pacchiarotti, Marchesi, Crescentini, Davide, einer Mara (die übrigens von Geburt eine Deutsche war), Bandi und Billington die Wage halten? [...] Jenes Land scheint also in seiner Kunstausbildung im Allgemeinen nicht nur nicht vorwärts, sondern rückwärts gegangen zu seyn, und es wird dadurch unbegreiflich, warum man auf einmal seinen Geschmack, seine jetzt dort beliebten Werke als Muster für andere Völker aufstellen will!’ *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 453.

up our hours of leisure and entertain us, something equally well achieved by any of life's commonplace amusements.<sup>217</sup>

This may be good enough for the Italians but not for the Germans. The two national characters are fundamentally different, and express themselves in different ways.

Expanding on this thought, Poissl gives a glimpse of the burgeoning nationalism and self-confidence felt by German artists at the end of the War of Liberation:

The German resents any external intervention in his political organisation, and rightly wishes to be autonomous; should he not also be allowed autonomy in the products of his intellect and in the expression of his feelings? The German, deeply emotional and sensitive but serious, will always express his feelings in a different way from the excitable, passionate Italian; but that does not mean that the German, though more serious, is less inclined to have feelings and emotions than the vehement Italian. It is simply up to us to present to the German a genuinely German work of art conveying the character of the nation, and to do this with the same perfection with which the Italians produce theirs, if we are to fulfil the highest purpose of art.<sup>218</sup>

As a model of this kind of 'national' work of art Poissl cites Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. It is obvious from this opera, he says, that Mozart knew the German national character. He invokes the same perception of the German character as 'full of strength' which we see reflected in his *Andromache* adaptation (Chapter 2):

He knew that the German likes to reflect, and catered for this inclination by so correctly drawing and maintaining the characters in this opera; he knew that the German is sure to be pleased by anything that requires strength and security, because the whole nation is full of strength in body and mind, and so he made his singers overcome the huge and manifold difficulties which they have to overcome in that opera.<sup>219</sup>

---

<sup>217</sup> 'Vielleicht darum, weil, was kein vernünftiger Mensch läugnen wird, diese Werke höchst angenehm unterhalten? – Da müßte vor allem erst ausgemacht seyn, daß *die Kunst*, die die ansprechendste unter allen ist, die den Menschen über sich selbst zu erheben, ja ins Reich der Geister hinüber zu ziehen fähig ist, zu nichts besserm in der Welt wäre, als müßige Stunden auszufüllen und zu unterhalten, was doch jede andere der gewöhnlichen Vergnügungen des Lebens ebenso gut kann.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 453. Emphases in the original.

<sup>218</sup> 'Der Deutsche rügt jede äußere Einmischung in seine politische Gestaltung, und will mit Recht selbstständig seyn; soll er dieß in den Schöpfungen seines Geistes, im Ausdrucke seiner Empfindungen nicht seyn dürfen? – Der tief fühlende und gemüthliche, aber ernste Deutsche wird ewig seine Empfindungen auf eine andere Art aussprechen, als der reizbare leidenschaftliche Italiener; damit ist aber gar nicht bewiesen, daß deswegen der ernstere Deutsche weniger aufgelegt ist, zu fühlen und zu empfinden, als der heftige Italiener, und es wird uns nur darauf ankommen, den Deutschen ein gediegenes, den Charakter seiner Nation tragendes deutsches Kunstwerk mit derselben Vollendung darzustellen, wie die Italiener häufig die ihrigen darstellen, um die höchsten Zwecke der Kunst sicher zu erreichen.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 454.

<sup>219</sup> 'Er wußte, daß der Deutsche gerne reflectirt, und gab dieser Neigung den ersten Stoff dadurch, daß er in jener Oper seine Charaktere so richtig zeichnete und hielt; er wußte, daß

On an aesthetic level too, Poissl says, Mozart remained true to the (implicitly German) virtues of a balance between melody and harmony, keeping these elements in the service of characterisation. What is more, this was achieved at no detriment to the piece's attractiveness and popularity:

He was convinced that melody and harmony must go hand in hand if a musical work is to fulfil its purpose, so he created the splendid, characteristic melodies which will always keep that piece in the affection of the public, and constructed harmonic sequences which are just as natural and correct as they are new and striking.

The enthusiasm engendered by this work throughout Germany [...] gave plentiful proof that a national work of this kind was welcome.<sup>220</sup>

Poissl acknowledges that a handful of original and excellent works were produced after the death of Mozart. He names Winter's *Das unterbrochene Opferfest*, Danzi's *Die Mitternachtsstunde* and Weigl's *Die Schweizerfamilie*. However German opera faced three great problems. Firstly, German composers had to compete with a flood of foreign works. Theatre managers found it cheaper and less risky to put these on in translation than to commission new German pieces. Good composers, seeing little chance of their operas being performed, concentrated instead on music for concerts or the church.

Secondly, the lack of a strong continuing tradition of German opera meant that German singers, constantly expected to switch styles and national genres, never had a chance to master any particular one. Moreover, in the absence of public training institutions for music, young singers who lived a long way away from the few great teachers never had a chance of achieving their potential.

Thirdly, the opera-going public itself was disorientated and, in the absence of new German operas, could not develop an informed taste or a true understanding of the native art-form. Foreign operas could by their very nature never be as well-appreciated in Germany as they were on their own native soil, but there was no German opera to fill the gap:

---

den Deutschen das sicher anspricht, was Kraft und Sicherheit voraussetzt, weil das ganze Volk voll Kraft an Geist und Körper ist, und darum ließ er seine Sänger so ungeheure Schwierigkeiten umwinden, als sie in jener Oper in mannichfaltiger Art zu überwinden haben.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 455.

<sup>220</sup> 'Er war überzeugt, daß Melodie und Harmonie Hand in Hand gehen müssen, wenn ein musikalisches Werk seinem Zwecke entsprechen soll, und darum schuf er die herrlichen und charakteristischen Melodien, die jenes treffliche Werk immer in der Liebe des Publikums erhalten werden, und stellte Harmoniefolgen auf, die eben so natürlich und regelrecht, als neu und frappant sind.'

'Der Enthusiasmus, in den dieß Werk ganz Deutschland versetzte, [...] hat wohl zur Genüge dargethan, daß dem Deutschen ein solches Nationalwerk willkommen kam.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 455.

The German public [...] eventually reached the point where it constantly felt a great void, but without being able to say what it actually wanted. That is the point which we have reached now, and although with the encouragement of some art-loving rulers and the efforts of some good theatre managements it has been possible in this or that city to establish good German opera and to steer taste in a particular direction, this has not yet had the positive effect that it should have had on Germany as a whole. As a result German opera is like high and low tides: when it prospers in one city it declines in another.<sup>221</sup>

The decline in Italian opera is harder to explain. Poissl ascribes this partly to a decline in public taste, which impresarios, composers and singers are obliged to follow in order to make a living. Even the most talented composers may be forced to 'write against their own convictions' ['gegen ihre eigne Ueberzeugung zu schreiben'].

However Italian opera has also suffered from the dominance of the star singer. This militates against dramatic truth and characterisation. The operatic experience becomes a matter of individually striking moments, often applause-inducing arias chosen for their musical attractiveness ('melodically-defined forms') rather than for their dramatic relevance. This process sabotages any possibility that the opera might be experienced as an integrated work of art, or what Poissl calls a 'purely dramatic totality'. This idea that opera can create an integrated, 'total effect' which is greater than the sum of its parts is another key concept in German operatic aesthetics:

The Italian opera has long been more a sequence of vocal pieces in a concert than a real opera, if one posits that characterisation of the story in general and of the *dramatis personae* and their passions in particular is the essential and pre-eminent condition of an opera's existence. The absolute obligation to emphasise the virtues of the leading singers, and to introduce *seconde Partie* [secondary parts] so that the leading singers could have points of rest; and the desire of the public only to listen attentively to some of the numbers, deprived the composers of any possibility of constructing a purely dramatic totality; and the characterisation of individual situations was destroyed by the melodically-defined forms, required whether or not they fitted the action or the person performing them.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>221</sup> 'Das deutsche Publikum [...] mußte am Ende dahin gelangen, daß es immer eine gewaltige Leere fühlte, ohne im Grunde bestimmt angeben zu können, was es denn wolle? Dahin kam es denn auch richtig, und wenn es gleich den Aufmunterungen einiger kunstliebenden Regenten und den Bemühungen einiger guten Direktionen gelungen ist, in dieser oder jener Stadt eine gute deutsche Oper festzusetzen und dem Geschmacke eine bestimmte Richtung zu geben, so hat das bis jetzt doch noch nicht den wünschenswerthen Einfluß auf ganz Deutschland gehabt, den es billig haben sollte, und die deutsche Oper ist wie Ebbe und Fluth; wenn sie in einer Stadt sich bessert, verschlimmert sie sich in einer andern.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 457-458.

<sup>222</sup> 'Die italienische Oper war von jeher mehr ein Konzert vieler aufeinanderfolgenden Gesangsstücke, als eine eigentliche Oper, wenn man nemlich zur unerläßlichen Bedingung einer Oper den richtigen Satz aufstellt, daß Charakteristik der Handlung im Allgemeinen, und der Personen und wirkenden Leidenschaften in's Besondere das sey, was vor allem ihre Existenz konstituiert. Durch die absolute Nothwendigkeit, die individuellen Vorzüge der

Italian composers are perhaps not to be blamed if the star system has prevented them from achieving 'the fundamental precondition of opera' ['die Urbedingung der Oper'].

Composers such as Paisiello, Cimarosa, Mayr and others at least created fine examples of vocal music, and in some cases showed that they understood the necessity of characterisation. However among more recent composers, with the exception of Generali (whose works were also performed in the Cera season), Poissl sees no-one who could stand beside these figures of the past,

[...] not even Rossini, whose melodies may delight me as they do every other susceptible person, but who is too often guilty of a lack of theoretical study, of the unscrupulous acquisition of other people's ideas (particularly Generali's), and of a complete neglect of characterisation, which causes me much more displeasure in him than in someone of lesser intelligence, because he has it in his power to be whatever he wants.<sup>223</sup>

Finally, after this general survey, Poissl turns his attention to the Cera company itself. He commends them for the polished quality of their performances and joins in the general praise for the leading singers. At the same time he is keen to distance himself from the novelty-obsessed Italophiles (like Lebeschlicht in the *Theater-Journal's* satire), 'who can never praise something without simultaneously denigrating something else' ['die nie etwas loben können, ohne etwas anders dabei herunter zu setzen']:

If one goes down this road in artistic matters then not only are talents suppressed but one also ruins a lot of one's own artistic pleasures, and runs the risk next year, when one hears something even more exquisite, of having to take down the thing that one fanatically exalts today from the heights on which one has placed it.<sup>224</sup>

---

ersten Sänger geltend zu machen, und, damit diese Ruhepunkte haben, *seconde Partie* einzuführen, war dem Komponisten eben so sehr, als durch den Willen des Publikums, nur einige Stücke mit Aufmerksamkeit anzuhören, jede Möglichkeit benommen, ein rein dramatisches Ganzes aufzustellen, und durch die melodischen bestimmten Formen, die einmal verlangt wurden, sie mochten für die Handlung oder Person, die sie vorzutragen bekam, passen oder nicht, wurde auch noch die Charakteristik einzelner Situationen zerstört.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp 504-505.

<sup>223</sup> '[...] selbst Rossini nicht, dessen herrliche Melodien mich zwar wie jeden anderen empfänglichen Menschen unendlich erfreuen, der aber auch Mangel an theoretischem Studium, arge Zueignung fremder Ideen, (besonders von Generali) und gänzliche Vernachlässigung der Charakteristik sich gar zu oft zu Schulden kommen läßt, was mich bei ihm als einem höchst genialen Menschen weit unangenehmer anspricht, als bei einem untergeordneten Geiste, weil es nur bei ihm stünde, so viel zu seyn als er nur will'. *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 505-506.

<sup>224</sup> 'Geht man in der Kunst auf diesem Wege, so werden nicht nur Talente unterdrückt, sondern man verdirbt sich selbst eine Menge Kunstgenüsse, und kömmt in die Gefahr, das was man heuer fanatisch erhebt, übers Jahr, wenn man etwas noch Vollkomm[n]eres zu hören bekommt, selbst wieder von der Höhe herunterziehen zu müssen, worauf man es gestellt hat.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 506.

There is praise for the works by Generali and Paer in the company's repertoire, and a final swipe at Rossini for his lack of dramatic truth:

*Tancredi* is full of marvellous melodies, and one only wishes that some of them were more appropriate to their subject-matter.<sup>225</sup>

With typical touchiness about his own status and reputation, Poissl signs off with a reference to his original purpose:

Now I have expressed my opinions freely, and I confess that I would never have done so if absurd statements which were circulated as coming from me had not challenged me to this step. For, however indifferent it may be to the public what I think of the Italian opera, it can never be indifferent to me what the public thinks of me.<sup>226</sup>

### **German operatic aspirations: 'Dramatic truth', 'characterisation' and the 'total effect'**

When Poissl speaks of 'arresting truthfulness' and declares that 'dramatic truth is the essential thing', he is invoking a fundamental principle in the relationship between drama and music. The example that he gives in the *Erklärung* is concerned with 'correct declamation', and for him this was indeed an important aspect of 'truthfulness', as it was for Weber. Weber praises Mozart's *Entführung* for its 'perfect understanding of dramatic truth and characterising declamation'.<sup>227</sup> Elsewhere he declares it the 'first, most sacred duty of song to be as faithful and true in declamation as possible'.<sup>228</sup> But other passages in the two men's journalism show that 'dramatic truthfulness' could also be understood in a much wider sense, as the appropriate, dramatically correct and therefore aesthetically proper application of music in all its aspects. 'Dramatic truth' is, for instance, the criterion by which Poissl judges Aiblinger's *Rodrigo und Zimene* in a review of 1821:

Offences against dramatic truth: Zimene's first aria in which, hoping for little and fearing the worst, she communicates her state of mind to her friend – and does so using the form of a quite ordinary Italian cavatina, richly provided with ornaments

---

<sup>225</sup> 'Tancredi ist voll herrlicher Melodien, von denen nur zu wünschen bleibt, daß manche mehr ihrem Sujet angemessen seyn möchten.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 507.

<sup>226</sup> 'Ich habe nun meine Ansichten frei bekannt, und gestehe, daß ich es nie gethan haben würde, wenn nicht absurde Aeüßerungen, die man als von mir kommend cirkuliren ließ, mich dazu aufgefordert hätten, weil, wenn es dem Publikum auch noch so gleichgültig ist, was ich von der italienischen Oper denke, es mir keineswegs gleichgültig seyn kann, wie das Publikum von mir denkt.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 507.

<sup>227</sup> '[...] die vollkommenste Auffassung dramatischer Wahrheit und charakteristischer Deklamation'. Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 303. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 264.

<sup>228</sup> 'Nach meiner Ansicht ist es die erste und heiligste Pflicht des Gesanges, mit der möglichsten Treue wahr in der Deklamation zu sein.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 372. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 240.

and runs. Also contradicting this truth is Don Gormaz' aria after the triumphal procession, where the most powerful four lines in the middle of the aria are sung in an unsuitable Adagio, even though they should obviously be in the same spirit as the other verses.<sup>229</sup>

Here the untruthfulness lies in the use of music whose emotional import contradicts the dramatic content of the sung lines. However, 'Dramatic truth' can also be threatened by an incorrect structural decision:

The Terzetto in the first Act, a very beautiful piece in itself but wrongly placed, also works against dramatic truth because it holds up the action, and disturbs the illusion by eclipsing people who have very recently presented themselves as important and taking a powerful hand in the overall situation; it eclipses them to the extent that for this moment they take on the character of supernumeraries, excluded from joining in the action or even from reflecting on it.<sup>230</sup>

Similar principles are applied, in praise and in criticism, by Weber. When he watches Cherubini's *Les deux journées* in Munich in 1811, possibly in Poissl's company, he praises the score for the 'all-embracing truth in its interpretation of the situations' ['eine alles ergreifende Wahrheit in Auffassung der Situationen'].<sup>231</sup> He describes Poissl's *Athalie* as 'full of dramatic truth' ['voll dramatischer Wahrheit'].<sup>232</sup> His review of Hoffmann's *Undine* in 1817 approves of the composer's 'striving always to be truthful and to intensify the opera's dramatic life' ['von dem Streben geleitet, nur immer wahr zu sein und das dramatische Leben zu erhöhen'].<sup>233</sup> Rossini, by contrast, is chided for a lack of truthfulness:

Who does not enjoy listening to *Rossini's* vibrant storm of ideas, to the piquant titillation of his melodies? But who is so deluded as to credit him with dramatic truthfulness? Or does the author of these comments think that such truth is not

---

<sup>229</sup> 'Gegen die dramatische Wahrheit sind: die erste Arie der Zimene, worin sie, wenig hoffend, aber das Ärgste fürchtend, ihre Stimmung der Freundin mittheilt, und dazu sich der Form einer ganz gewöhnlichen, mit Verzierungen und Rouladen reich versehenen italienischen Cavatine bedient; ferner ist gegen diese Wahrheit, die Arie des Don Gormaz nach dem Triumphzuge, wo er gerade die vier kraftvollsten Verse in der Mitte der Arie in einem unpassenden Adagio singt, welche doch offenbar in einer Stimmung mit den übrigen Strophen gedacht werden müssen.' *AmZ(W)*, 5 (1821), p. 438. The review is reprinted in *Briefe*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>230</sup> 'Das Terzett im ersten Acte, an sich ein sehr schönes Musikstück, aber völlig unrecht placirt, ist seiner Wirkung nach ebenfalls gegen die dramatische Wahrheit, weil es den Gang der Handlung hemmt, und dadurch die Illusion stört, dass es Personen, die sich kurz vorher als wichtig und ins Ganze mächtig eingreifend angekündigt haben, dergestalten in Schatten stellen, dass sie, als ganz von allem Mithandeln, ja sogar vom Mitreflectiren ausgeschlossen, für den Augenblick den Charakter von Comparsen annehmen.' *AmZ(W)*, 5 (1821), pp. 438-439; *Briefe*, p. 98.

<sup>231</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 107. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 77.

<sup>232</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 270. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 185.

<sup>233</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 132. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 203.



necessary in a dramatic composer? That would be a fine compliment to pay to old Italian masters such as Paesiello, Cimarosa etc.<sup>234</sup>

Other German composers also placed dramatic truth at the heart of the operatic aesthetic. Even before the arrival of Rossini, E. T. A. Hoffmann had criticised the Italian theorist Sachini, who seemed to favour musical prettiness over truth:

In the opera Sachini rejects everything that is powerful and stirring in music and banishes it to the church; in the theatre he wishes only to have pleasant feelings, or rather ones which are not deeply moving; he does not want astonishment, only gentle sentiment; [...] but therein lies precisely the highest art, or rather the true art, of the composer: that he touches everyone, stirs everyone through the truth of his expression, as the momentum of the narrative requires, indeed creating this momentum as much as the poet does.<sup>235</sup>

For the Viennese composer and theorist Ignaz von Mosel too, truth was an indispensable element of operatic music, one of the qualities which can silence the sceptic:

If the composer refuses to be swayed by the caprices of fashion or the vanity of a popular singer, and dedicates his abilities to *narrative*, *expression* and *truth*, then all the objections that cold reason might have to the *essence of opera* are swept away.<sup>236</sup>

Like Poissl in his *Erklärung*, Mosel speaks of 'arresting truthfulness'.<sup>237</sup> Expressivity in operatic music should not be imposed from the outside but should result from a truthful relationship with the drama:

Dramatic music will be *expressive* if the composer fills his mind completely with the emotions which inspired the poet, [and] when devising melodies and choosing

---

<sup>234</sup> 'Wer wird nicht gern *Rossinis* lebendigem Ideensturme, dem pikanten Kitzel seiner Melodien lauschen? Wer wird aber auch so verblendet sein, ihm dramatische Wahrheit einräumen zu wollen? oder meint der Herr Bemerkter, daß diese ein dramatischer Komponist nicht brauche? Da würde er den ältern italienischen Meistern Paesiello, Cimarosa usw. ein schönes Kompliment machen.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 397. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>235</sup> 'Sachini verwirft in der Oper alles Starke, Erschütternde der Musik, welches er in die Kirche verweist; er hat es im Theater nur mit angenehmen oder vielmehr nicht tief eingreifenden Empfindungen zu tun; er will nicht Erstaunen, nur sanfte Rührung erregen. [...] allein das ist ja eben die höchste oder vielmehr die wahre Kunst des Komponisten, daß er durch die Wahrheit des Ausdrucks jeden rührt, jeden erschüttert, wie es der Moment der Handlung erfordert, ja diesen Moment der Handlung selbst schafft wie der Dichter.' Anon [E. T. A. Hoffmann], 'Ueber einen Ausspruch Sachini's und über den sogenannten Effect in der Musik', in *AmZ*, 16 (1814), p. 478.

<sup>236</sup> 'Huldigt der Tonsetzer nie den Launen der Mode, oder dem Eigensinn eines beliebten Sängers; sondern widmet er alle seine Kräfte der *Handlung*, dem *Ausdruck*, der *Wahrheit*: so wird alles, was kalte Vernunft gegen das *Wesen der Oper* einwenden könnte, wegfallen.' Ignaz von Mosel, *Versuch einer Aesthetik des dramatischen Tonsatzes* (Vienna: Strauss, 1813), p. 31.

<sup>237</sup> '[...] ergreifende Wahrheit'. Mosel, p. 32.

accompaniments is guided purely by the desire to represent these, faithfully and truly but intensified.<sup>238</sup>

If we further examine this idea of ‘dramatic truth’ as used in the writings of Poissl and his contemporaries, we find that it is commonly associated with concepts of ‘character’ and ‘characterisation’.<sup>239</sup> As Carl Dahlhaus has pointed out, the meanings of terms such as ‘character’, ‘characterisation’ and ‘the characteristic’ fluctuated within the writings of the period, depending on the context and the polemical intention of the writer,<sup>240</sup> but around the turn of the nineteenth century the ‘characteristic’ work of art was understood as one in which form follows content, without any superfluity of expression. In his *Aesthetics* Hegel defined ‘the characteristic’ as

the degree of appropriateness with which the particular detail of the artistic form sets in relief the content it is meant to express. [...] According to the principle of the ‘characteristic’, nothing is to enter the work of art except what belongs to the appearance and essentially to the expression of this content alone; nothing is to be otiose or superfluous.<sup>241</sup>

This is not to be confused with mimesis, the imitation of reality. In fact the idea of ‘characterisation’ reflected early Romanticism’s turning away from the imitative aesthetic of the eighteenth century towards expression of the inward, the spiritual and the emotional. In one of his fragments in the 1798 *Athenäum* Friedrich Schlegel, the leader of the Jena Romantics, contrasted ‘spiritual characterisation’ with mere ‘sensory imitation’.<sup>242</sup>

Hegel, like Poissl in the *Erklärung*, identified in operatic music an antithesis between the ‘characteristic’ and the ‘melodic’, between music which, in E. T. A. Hoffmann’s words, ‘arises directly from the poem, as a necessary product of it’ [‘unmittelbar aus der Dichtung als notwendiges Erzeugnis derselben entspringt’],<sup>243</sup> and music defined by what Poissl called ‘the melodic forms’. Unlike these composers, when choosing between the two

---

<sup>238</sup> ‘*Ausdrucksvoll* wird die dramatische Musik seyn, wenn der Tonsetzer sein Gemüth ganz mit den Empfindungen erfüllt, die den Dichter begeistert haben; wenn ihn nur das Bestreben, diese Gefühle treu und wahr, aber verstärkt wiederzugeben, bey der Erfindung der Melodien, bey der Wahl des Accompagnements leitet.’ Mosel, p. 34.

<sup>239</sup> For a discussion of *Charakter*, see Meyer, especially pp. 77-115; for Weber’s approach to ‘dramatic truth’ in *Euryanthe*, see Tusa, especially pp. 181-210.

<sup>240</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, ‘Die Kategorie des Charakteristischen in der Ästhetik des 19. Jahrhunderts’, in *Die Couleur Locale in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Heinz Becker (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1976), pp. 9-21.

<sup>241</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, transl. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), I, p. 18. Hegel’s *Lectures* were originally given in 1823, and this passage refers to an essay by A.L. Hirt published in 1797. Original in *G. W. F. Hegel’s Werke*, ed. by H. G. Hotho, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1842), X/I, pp. 24-25.

<sup>242</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, ‘Charakteristiken und Kritiken I’, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. by Hans Eichner (Munich: Schöningh, 1967), II, p. 208.

<sup>243</sup> Anon. [E. T. A. Hoffmann], ‘Der Dichter und der Componist’, in *AmZ*, 15 (1813), p. 800.

principles, Hegel came down down firmly on the side of the melodic. He was disturbed by the violence of the musico-dramatic contrasts in Weber's *Der Freischütz*, and felt that characterisation had gone too far:

In this respect the main requirement seems to me that the melodic, as the element which binds things together, should always be victorious rather than the splitting apart into individual, scattered characteristic features.<sup>244</sup>

Hegel was by no means alone in his suspicions of 'characterisation', particularly after Weber's works of the 1820s seemed to explore this principle to its limits. There were critical voices even within the German musical establishment, as is shown by an anonymous article in the *AmZ* of 1826. The author worried that musical coherence and melody were being sacrificed to dramatic content:

Let us stay with our dear Weber: after all, he was the first among all the German *theatre* composers writing nowadays! Now listen to a significant portion of his *Euryanthe*; for instance the big vocal pieces from the beginning of the second act. Expression – oh yes, in abundance: but is this song? Is it melody? Indeed at several points (including the accompanied recitative) one might in some sense ask, 'Is this harmony?' and occasionally even, 'Is this music?'<sup>245</sup>

Voices critical of 'characterisation' could also be heard earlier, long before the advent of Weber's later operas. 'Derbohr', in the 1816 Munich satire, proposes an alternative, 'characteristic' setting of *Di tanti palpiti*, the most popular aria from Rossini's *Tancredi* (Figure 6).

TANCREDI: Of so much trembling / and of so much suffering, / my dear beloved, / I hope for the reward.

<sup>244</sup> 'Die Hauptforderung scheint mir in dieser Beziehung die zu sein, daß dem Melodischen, als der zusammenfassenden Einheit, immer der Sieg zugeteilt werde und nicht der Zerspaltung in einzeln auseinandergestreute charakteristische Züge.' Quoted in Dahlhaus, 'Die Kategorie des Charakteristischen', p. 19.

<sup>245</sup> 'Laßt uns noch bey unserm lieben Weber verweilen: war er doch unter allen jetzt schreibenden deutschen *Theater*-Componisten der erste! Höret nun einen sehr beträchtlichen Theil seiner *Euryanthe*; z.B. die grossen Gesangstücke des zweyten Aktes von vorn herein. Ausdruck – o ja, die Fülle: aber ist das Gesang? ist es Melodie? ja, man dürfte in gewissem Sinne bey vielen Stellen (vollends der begleiteten Recitative) sogar auch fragen: ist das Harmonie? zuweilen wohl gar: ist das Musik?' *AmZ*, 28 (1826), p.800.

Tancredi

da te mio be - ne spe - ro mer - cè.

Orch.

**Figure 6: *Tancredi* (Rossini), ‘Di tanti palpiti’**

In defiance of the idea of melody, ‘Derbohr’ breaks the aria’s text down into the tiniest possible units of meaning and proposes an alternative, ‘characteristic’ musical setting for each fragment:

*Di tanti*: a hubbub of notes piled closely on top of each other, to indicate a great quantity. 6/8 time.

*Palpiti*: twitching leaps, always across several octaves. The highest and lowest immediately following one another. *Flauto piccolo* and *Fagotto* have a *Duo*, intermingled with timpani strokes and harp pizzicati. 6/10 time.

*E tante*: as above, since the underlying words are the same.

*Pene*: the suffering must be expressed in such a slow withering away, and so inescapably and languishingly, that the listeners are caused unending suffering. Violins, flutes and horns of all calibres must support each other, and the trombone must have a 15-minute solo. One in a bar.<sup>246</sup>

Despite these doubting voices, for Poissl and most of his fellow-composers ‘characterisation’ was a defining quality of German opera, one which drew a clear line between the German and Italian aesthetics, and one which after 1816 was the main line of attack on Rossini. Louis Spohr, as has already been noted, was no great admirer of Poissl, but the two were as one in their opinion of Rossini. Spohr felt that Rossini lacked any real ‘characterisation of the *dramatis personae*’, and backed up his opinion with anecdotal evidence:

One could exchange the music of his comic operas with that of his serious ones without it being particularly noticeable; it did actually happen that he had already finished the first act of an opera when it was rejected by the Censors, so he fitted the

---

<sup>246</sup> ‘*Di tanti*: Wirwarr von Tönen, recht dicht übereinander gehäuft, um eine große Menge anzuzeigen. Sechachteltakt.

*Palpiti*: Zuckende Sprünge, immer viele Oktaven weit auseinander. Das Höchste und Tiefste unmittelbar aufeinander folgend. *Flauto piccolo* und *Fagotto* haben ein *Duo*, untermischt mit Paukenschlägen und Harfenpizzicato’s, alles grell und kräftig. Sechzehnteltakt.

*E tante*: Wie oben, denn die unterliegenden Worte sind dieselben.

*Pene*: Die Leiden müssen so lang hinwelkend, so rettungslos und verschmachtend ausgedrückt werden, daß die Zuhörer unendlich dabei leiden müssen. Violinen, Flöten und Hörner von allen Kalibern müssen sich unterstützen, und die Posaune muß ein *Solo* haben, welches 15 Minuten anhält. Ganzer Takt.’ *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 514. Emphases in original.

same music to a different opera. Without knowing the situation it is hard to hear from his music whether it speaks of merry or sad things; and it is equally hard to hear whether a king or a peasant, the master or the servant is singing.<sup>247</sup>

Perhaps the most significant work on operatic 'characterisation' published during Poissl's active career was Mosel's *Versuch einer Aesthetik des dramatischen Tonsatzes* [Essay on the Aesthetics of Dramatic Composition] (1813). Poissl and Mosel corresponded with each other after 1820, and possibly even met.<sup>248</sup> If, as von Schaden says, Poissl studied aesthetics in the years between 1808 and 1814, it seems highly likely that he knew Mosel's work. Certainly the two men's similarity of outlook would seem to confirm this.<sup>249</sup> When Poissl ventured into what might have seemed very populist, Rossini-esque operatic territory with *Die Prinzessin von Provence*, he appealed to Mosel as if he were an artistic conscience, assuring him that 'one can use all forms of melody without having to trample on truth and character'.<sup>250</sup>

For Mosel too, as for Poissl, true musical characterisation was essential:

Since it is already required of good instrumental music that it should have a definite character and evoke definite feelings in the soul of the listener, so we should require this all the more of vocal music, and above all of dramatic music.

So before all else the composer should try to penetrate to the spirit of the poem that he is to clothe with music; he should examine the type of story presented to him, its progress and its conclusion, and determine the *general character* of his musical composition accordingly. This should be grand and moving in a tragic opera, delicate and touching in a romantic *Singspiel*, charming and cheerful in a comic one.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> 'Man könnte die Musik seiner komischen Opern mit der seiner ernsten verwechseln, ohne daß es sehr auffallen würde; so wie es ihm wirklich begegnet ist, daß er den ersten Akt seiner Oper bereits fertig hatte, als diese von der Censur verworfen wurde, und er nun dieselbe Musik einer andern anpassen mußte. Denn man hört es seiner Musik, ohne die Situation zu kennen, wohl schwerlich an, ob von fröhlichen oder traurigen Dingen die Rede ist; eben so wenig, ob ein König oder ein Bauer, der Herr oder der Diener singt.' *AmZ*, 19 (1817), p. 19.

<sup>248</sup> *Briefe*, pp. 89-92, 94-100, 104-106.

<sup>249</sup> Mosel, as Weber noted (*Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 311; *Writings on Music*, p. 290), was one of the few composers apart from Poissl to write German grand opera in the second decade of the nineteenth century.

<sup>250</sup> '[...] daß man alle Formen der Melodie anwenden kann, ohne deßwegen Wahrheit und Charakter mit Füßen zu treten'. *Briefe*, p. 95 (9 February 1821).

<sup>251</sup> 'Da schon von einer guten Instrumentalmusik gefordert wird, dass sie einen bestimmten Charakter habe und in der Seele des Zuhörers klare Empfindungen bewirke; ist solches noch weit mehr von der Vocalmusik überhaupt, und am meisten von der dramatischen zu verlangen.

Der Tonsetzer suche daher vor Allem in den Geist des Gedichtes einzudringen, das er mit Musik bekleiden soll; er betrachte genau die Art, den Gang, und das Ende der vorgestellten Handlung, und setze darnach den *allgemeinen Character* seiner musikalischen Composition fest. Derselbe sey in der tragischen Oper gross und ergreifend; im romantischen Singspiele zart und rührend; im komischen lieblich und heiter.' Mosel, pp. 42-43.

Mosel emphasises that in a dramatic work every single musical element must be ‘characteristic’:

Beside this general character, every musical number requires its own particular character in accordance with the content of the text. Key, tempo, rhythm, intervals, accompaniment – nothing is unimportant here; everything makes its own essential contribution to the true expression.<sup>252</sup>

He includes in this ‘general character’ each individual person’s mode of expression:

Just as the spirit of the story must be respected by the composer, and that of the texts of the individual pieces, so also the physical, moral and social character of the *dramatis personae*. In general a man should express himself more powerfully and a woman more tenderly. In particular the hero before whom the peoples tremble should not lisp and gurgle like a tame little bird, the song of the king should be noble and majestic, and that of the peasant should be easy and naïve without being *coarse*.<sup>253</sup>

Even the overture has a characterising function:

Its task is in a way to herald the action, and to make the listener’s mind susceptible to the impressions intended by the poet and the composer in their work. So the overture must always have the same character as the prevailing one of the opera.<sup>254</sup>

This principle of integrating the overture with the opera is clearly visible in Poissl’s works. In all except two of them, thematic material from the overture reappears in the opera itself, and even in one of these two exceptions, *Aucassin und Nicolette*, the overture is still musically integrated into the story: offstage instruments heard in the overture continue to play in the opening scene (see Chapter 4). The only complete exception, where the overture is apparently autonomous, is in Poissl’s most Rossinian work, *La Rappresaglia*.

Mosel is explicitly indebted to the operatic ideals of Gluck, but he is also influenced by earlier writings on ‘characterisation’, such as those of the late eighteenth-century theoretician C. F. D. Schubart. To take this immediate example of the overture, Schubart’s

---

<sup>252</sup> ‘Ausser diesem allgemeinen Character fordert jedes Tonstück, nach dem Inhalt des Textes, auch noch seinen besonderen. Tonart, Bewegung, Rhythmus, Intervalle, Begleitung, nichts ist hier gleichgültig; jedes trägt zum wahren Ausdruck das Seinige wesentlich bey.’ Mosel, pp. 43-44.

<sup>253</sup> ‘So sehr als der Geist der Handlung, und des Textes der einzelnen Musikstücke, muss auch der physische, moralische, und conventionelle Character der handelnden Personen von dem dramatischen Tonsetzer beachtet werden. Im Allgemeinen muss der Mann sich kräftiger, das Weib zarter ausdrücken, im Individuellen soll der Held, der Völker zittern macht, nicht lispeln und gurgeln, wie ein zahmes Vögelchen; der Gesang des Königs sey edel und majestätisch, der des Landmanns leicht und naiv, ohne *gemein* zu seyn.’ Mosel, p. 44

<sup>254</sup> ‘Ihr Geschäft ist es, die Handlung auf gewisse Weise anzukünden, und das Gemüth des Zuhörers für jene Eindrücke empfänglich zu machen, welche Dichter und Componist in ihrem Werke zur Absicht haben. Die Ouvertüre muss daher immer denselben Character annehmen, welcher in der Oper selbst der herrschende ist.’ Mosel, p. 45

thoughts are very similar to Mosel's: a successful overture so embodies the character of the whole piece that 'the following scenes are [...] simply a spinning-out of the *sinfonia*'.<sup>255</sup> Schubart's posthumously-published *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* [Ideas towards an Aesthetics of Music] (1806) also offered a description of the 'characteristic' associations of certain instruments. Thus the horn is described as 'humane' and the clarinet as 'amorous'.<sup>256</sup> Most famously, Schubart compiled a schematic list of the 'characteristics of the keys', which Mosel recommended in his *Versuch* to any composers 'who do not already have their own correct feeling to guide them'.<sup>257</sup> Michael C. Tusa has noted how Weber's key-choices in *Euryanthe* are largely consistent with Schubart's 'characteristics'.<sup>258</sup> Poissl in the *Ansichten* lists the 'choice of principal key' among a composer's crucial aesthetic decisions. His own practice, especially in *Athalia*, shows a keen awareness of the affective and symbolic characteristics of keys, and he too can be seen following Schubart's 'characteristics' quite closely, for example in his use of B flat minor in association with suicide, and perhaps most strikingly in his use of E flat major in association with Christianity (Chapter 5).

In his instrumental and key 'characteristics' Schubart represents a significant departure from earlier theoreticians. He echoes the new Romantic aesthetics of Schlegel and others in that his associations are abstract and emotional, not directly imitative in the eighteenth-century manner. Other theoreticians around the turn of the century moved even further away from the descriptive principle. An article published in Munich in 1797 by F. L. Reischel states that every piece of dramatic music should be a 'character-piece' ['ein Charakterstück']. By this Reischel means that operatic music, rather than express the characters and feelings of the on-stage figures, should ally itself with the spectator and intensify his emotions:

This distinction is important because the spectator may often have quite different feelings from the person on stage. The latter may perhaps be *unhappy*, but it may be precisely the cause of this unhappiness that makes the spectator happy. For example a bandit enters, intending to murder a person whom the spectator likes very much. In this case the actor will have quite different emotions from the spectator; but the music cannot express both emotions; – which should it choose? The customary rule is that the bandit rages in a bravura aria; in my opinion the music should emphasise the emotion of the spectator.<sup>259</sup>

---

<sup>255</sup> '[...] so daß die folgenden Scenen gleichsam nur die Sinfonie ausspinnen'. Said of Holzbauer's opera *Günther von Schwarzburg*. C. D. F. Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Vienna: Degen, 1806), facs. reprint ed. by Fritz Kaiser and Margrit Kaiser (Hildesheim: Olms, 1990), p. 132.

<sup>256</sup> Schubart, pp. 311, 320.

<sup>257</sup> Mosel, p. 43. Schubart, pp. 377-382.

<sup>258</sup> Tusa, pp. 171-172.

<sup>259</sup> 'Diese Unterscheidung ist übrigens von Wichtigkeit, denn der Zuschauer kann oft ganz anders empfinden, als die Person auf der Bühne. Die letztere ist vielleicht in *Unmut*; der

This idea of the music as an independent commentator on the drama, and thus potentially as an agent of dramatic irony, anticipates instances in operas by Poissl, Spohr and Weber where the orchestra is used to communicate with the audience over the heads of the characters on stage (see discussion of *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, *Faust* and *Euryanthe* in Chapter 6). It also presages the emergence of the orchestra as a semi-independent dramatic entity in Wagner's music-drama.

Alongside 'dramatic truth' and 'characterisation', a third, related concept is also crucial to Poissl's operatic aesthetics: the 'total effect'. In the *Erklärung*, Poissl speaks of Italian opera lacking a 'purely dramatic totality'. In his example, this totality is destroyed by the Italian operas which highlight the skills of the main singer instead of creating a genuinely complete dramatic event. Secondary characters in these pieces are reduced to being dramatic cyphers, created only to give the main singer some respite between arias. The opera, in his words, becomes 'more a series of vocal pieces in a concert than a real opera'.

Poissl returned to the idea of the 'total effect' in 1820 in a sarcastic review of a piece by Peter Winter, Munich's pre-eminent opera composer. Poissl repeats the image he used in the *Erklärung* of bad opera as a kind of concert in costume:

The music of this opera is very melodious, [...] but seems to me to be calculated more for momentary effect through very successful details than for the total effect. The experienced composer was right to do this; for in an opera whose most exquisite vocal numbers have not the least connection with the action, and where it does not matter what one sings in their place, so long as the singer's choice of piece sounds pretty and suits their individual voice, the composer can do no better than to reckon with the singer's individuality and write concert music.<sup>260</sup>

Hoffmann too, in his response to Sachini, invokes totality and integration as an essential element of opera:

---

Zuschauer aber ist gerade froh, über die Ursache dieses Unmuts. Es tritt zum Beispiel ein Bandit auf, in der Absicht, eine Person, die der Zuschauer sehr lieb hat, zu ermorden. Hier wird die handelnde Person ganz anders empfinden als der Zuschauer; beide Empfindungen aber kann die Musik nicht ausdrücken; – welche soll sie wählen? Nach der gewöhnlich befolgten Regel wird der Bandit in einer Bravour-Arie rasen; nach meiner Meinung aber soll die Musik die Empfindung des Zuschauers hervorheben.' From F. L. Reischel, *Dramatischer Briefwechsel, das Münchner Theater betreffend* (Munich: 1797). Reprinted in Reipschläger, p. 88

<sup>260</sup> 'Die Musik dieser Oper ist sehr melodiös, [...] scheint mir aber mehr auf augenblickliche Wirkung durch höchst gelungene Einzelheiten, als auf den Total-Effect berechnet zu seyn. Daran hat aber der erfahrene Componist vollkommen recht gethan; denn in einer Oper, deren vorzüglichste Gesang-Stücke nicht die geringste Beziehung auf die Handlung haben, und wo es gleichgültig ist, was man an ihrer Stelle singt, wenn nur das, was der Sänger wählt, hübsch lautet, und für seine Individualität passt, kann der Componist nichts besseres thun, als auf die Individualität der Sänger rechnen, und Concert-Musik schreiben.' *AmZ(W)*, 4 (1820), p. 311.



The Italians never attained to the view that opera must manifest itself in word, action and music as a totality, and that this inseparable totality must affect the listener in a total impression.<sup>261</sup>

Of all the shared aesthetic aspirations which recur in these authors, the ‘total effect’ is perhaps the hardest to define, particularly as Poissl, Hoffmann, Mosel and Weber all applied it to different aspects of composition and artistic choice. However in his study of *Euryanthe* Michael C. Tusa has suggested three basic meanings in relation to Weber. These meanings overlap with each other and by no means exhaust all the possible interpretations, but they can usefully be applied to Poissl.<sup>262</sup>

Firstly, the principle of the ‘total effect’ means, in Tusa’s words, that ‘all of the successive segments of an opera are subordinated to the impression of the whole’. For Poissl and Hoffmann this principle was threatened, for example, by the stand-out arias created for the *prima donna* in Italian operas. Hoffmann returns to this theme again and again:

So it came about that, during the actual progress of the narrative, all the music was kept dull and insignificant, and only the *prima donna* and the *primo uomo* were allowed to stand out with significant, genuine music in their so-called ‘scenes’.<sup>263</sup>

Here the enemy of the ‘total effect’ is the individual effect (often simply referred to as *Effekt*) which, however gratifying in itself, is not integrated proportionately into the whole. This kind of *Effekt* was typically provided by vocal display in Italian operas, but also by ostentatious harmonic or instrumental effects in German ones. In the *Erklärung* Poissl warns against the unintegrated use of ‘startling modulations and very full-voiced accompaniments’. There is a running joke in *Die Opernprobe* that the German composer Campanone, alias Glockenspiel, constantly seeks *Effekt*, and given the chance would introduce cannons into the orchestra. Weber’s review of Hoffmann’s *Undine* explores the idea of the ‘total effect’ at some length. Just as Hoffmann criticised the predominance of the individual aria in Italian opera, so Weber praises Hoffmann for putting his principles into practice, always keeping the effect of individual musical numbers proportionate to the complete ‘artistic body’ which includes them:

---

<sup>261</sup> ‘Die Italiener erhoben sich nicht zu der Ansicht, daß die Oper in Wort, Handlung und Musik als ein Ganzes erscheinen, und dieses untrennbare Ganze im Totaleindruck auf den Zuhörer wirken müsse.’ *AmZ*, 16 (1814), p. 477.

<sup>262</sup> Tusa, pp. 68-70.

<sup>263</sup> ‘So kam es, dass im eigentlichen Fortschreiten der Handlung alle Musik flach und unbedeutend gehalten wurde, und nur die *Prima donna* und der *Primo uomo* in ihren sogenannten Szenen in bedeutender, oder vielmehr wahrer Musik hervortreten durften. Hier galt es aber dann wieder, ohne Rücksicht auf den Moment der Handlung, nur den Gesang, ja oft auch die Kunstfertigkeit der Sänger, im höchsten Glanze zu scheinen.’ *AmZ*, 16 (1814), pp. 477-478.

With a self-denial which can only be fully appreciated by one who knows what it means to sacrifice the glow provided by the applause of the moment, Herr Hoffmann has refused to enrich individual musical numbers at the expense of the others – something so easily achieved by developing them and spinning them out more expansively than they deserve as individual limbs of the artistic body.<sup>264</sup>

Tusa's second interpretation of the 'total effect' is that it requires a consistency of 'character' and 'characterisation' across the whole piece. This consistency applies to each individual figure in the drama, but also to the work as a whole. Weber more than once uses the image of an opera's distinctive 'colouring'. When reviewing Spohr's *Faust* he writes of a 'beautiful colouring of the whole work' ['einer schönen Farbgebung des ganzen Werkes'].<sup>265</sup> He points out that Méhul's *Joseph and Helena* are 'completely different' from each other in their 'genre and colouring' ['in ganz anderer Gattung und Kolorit'].<sup>266</sup>

This aspect of the 'total effect', with its idea of complete congruence between dramatic content and musical form, and of a consistent overall *Charakter* distinctive to each opera, recalls Hegel's description of the 'characteristic' work of art as one in which everything is essential and appropriate, and nothing is superfluous. Stephen C. Meyer has shown how the idea of a consistent overall *Charakter* even affected the dramaturgical practice of German theatres. Comic characters would be excised from 'heroic-comic' works because they undermined aesthetic consistency.<sup>267</sup> In 1811 in Munich, Weber saw Winter's *Das unterbrochene Opferfest* adapted in this way:

The fact that the opera was given as a serious opera throughout, and that the role of Pedrillo etc. was omitted, was a very pleasant phenomenon for your correspondent because although one loses a few very pretty musical numbers the whole piece gains in consistency and unity.<sup>268</sup>

The idea that the 'characterising' features of an opera could themselves be agents of integration, and thus form a part of the 'total effect', is particularly relevant when we look at Poissl's use of reminiscence motifs. Although motivic reminiscence was a technique inherited mainly from the *opéras comiques* of Grétry, Dalayrac, Méhul and others, one can

---

<sup>264</sup> 'Mit einer seltenen Entsagung, deren Größe nur derjenige ganz zu würdigen versteht, der weiß, was es heißt, die Glorie des momentanen Beifalls zu opfern, hat Herr Hoffmann es verschmäht, einzelne Tonstücke auf Unkosten der übrigen zu bereichern, welches so leicht ist, wenn man die Aufmerksamkeit auf sie lenkt und durch breitere Ausführung und Ausspinnen, als es ihnen eigentlich als Glied des Kunstkörpers zukommt.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 132. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 203.

<sup>265</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 274. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 193.

<sup>266</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 286. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 286.

<sup>267</sup> Meyer, pp. 46-49.

<sup>268</sup> 'Daß die Oper ganz als ernsthafte Oper gegeben wurde und die Rolle des Pedrillo usw. wegblieb, war Ref. eine angenehme Erscheinung, denn obwohl man einige sehr niedliche Musikstücke verliert, gewinnt doch das Ganze dadurch sehr an Haltung und Einheit'. Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 119. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 95.

see a sudden development and intensification of the technique in certain German operas of the mid-1810s, for example in Spohr's *Faust* and Poissl's *Athalia*, both composed in 1813, and then again in Poissl's *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* (1815). Weber, in his discussion of *Faust*, again finds a telling metaphorical image – that of the recurring motif as a musical thread woven through the opera, bringing its own colour to the fabric but simultaneously binding the texture together:

Certain melodies, successfully and appropriately deployed, run like unobtrusive threads through the entirety of the piece and hold it together in spirit.<sup>269</sup>

Tusa writes of Weber's own *Euryanthe* that the recurrence of certain themes 'obviously contributes to the sense of overall unity':

Through such recall the listener is compelled at some level of consciousness to relate the immediate experience of present action to some earlier moment in the opera.<sup>270</sup>

Arguably the recurring motif became such an interesting device for these composers because it combined two of the core aesthetic principles discussed here: characterisation and integration. Like any musical element a motif can be 'characteristic' in its own right, using traditional musical signifiers (elements of melody, rhythm and tonality with widely-understood extra-musical associations) to express dramatic content. However as Tusa points out, the recurring motif also becomes part of the 'characterising' process simply by virtue of its recurrence:

The character of a musical phenomenon may accrue from reference to a symbol that is arbitrarily defined within the context of the work. That is, once an element or set of elements is established and accepted, for whatever reason, as a symbol for a particular kind of expression, it may be used at will as a symbol in other contexts. Because they recur in different pieces, such symbols contribute to the unity of the entire work, either by giving a character a specific type of music or by pointing up similarities of situation and mood at different points in the opera. Leitmotifs are obvious manifestations of such arbitrary symbols, and key character can be specified in this way as well.<sup>271</sup>

This 'characterising' aspect of the motivic recurrence itself was recognised by Weber in his introduction to *Athalia*:

---

<sup>269</sup> 'Glücklich und richtig berechnet gehen einige Melodien wie leise Fäden durch das Ganze und halten es geistig zusammen.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 275. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 193.

<sup>270</sup> Tusa, p. 71.

<sup>271</sup> Tusa, pp. 200-201.

The main impulses of narrative and emotion are held together and designated by certain memorable melodies which recur splendidly. What at first is merely a hint is sure to return later in complete and joyous certainty.<sup>272</sup>

In other words, only on repetition does the motif become fully 'characteristic'.

The third, most fundamental meaning of the 'total effect', as explored by Tusa, is the completely integrated use of all the artistic elements. This is the quality invoked by Hoffmann when he demands that 'opera must manifest itself in word, action and music as a totality'. Mosel expresses himself similarly, defining dramatic music (as opposed to autonomous 'music as music') as 'music intimately merged with poetry to form a whole' ['einer mit der Poesie zu *einem Ganzen* innig verschmolzene Musik'].<sup>273</sup> Perhaps the fullest exploration of this idea comes in Weber's *Undine* review. A truly integrated work of art, Weber says, is greater than the sum of its parts. Indeed, this very integration presents a problem for the admiring reviewer who has to describe it in words. He cannot simply praise individually felicitous aspects:

The greatest effects and beauties only emerge from the way in which they are positioned and combined; they generally lose their particular quality when examined individually, and indeed seem to testify against themselves because when observed alone they become almost meaningless. Even the liveliest description can very rarely convey the feeling of the true, organically-connected life they share with the rest of the work.<sup>274</sup>

If the work is truly integrated then it can only be appreciated with a particular kind of open-mindedness, a willingness to join the artist on his journey through its totality:

If one is correctly to judge a work of art which plays out in time, then one needs a state of mind which is receptive to every impression but guards against pre-determined opinions or emotional tendencies, other than a certain opening-up of the soul for the subject-matter.<sup>275</sup>

---

<sup>272</sup> 'Sinnig sind die Hauptmomente der Handlung und des Gefühles durch gewisse eindringende und herrlich wiederkehrende Melodien zusammengehalten und bezeichnet. Was früher Ahnung war, kehrt bestimmt später in voller erfreulicher Gewißheit wieder.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 270. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 185.

<sup>273</sup> Mosel, p. 10.

<sup>274</sup> 'Die größten Wirkungen und Schönheiten gehen nur aus der Art ihrer Auf- und Zusammenstellung hervor, verlieren meist immer, einzeln herausgehoben, ihre ganze Eigentümlichkeit, ja zeugen oft scheinbar wider sich selbst, indem sie, so allein betrachtet, fast bedeutungslos werden. Ihr wahres organisches Zusammenleben mit dem übrigen vermag doch auch die lebendigste Beschreibung nur höchst selten ganz fühlbar zu machen.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p.128. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 200.

<sup>275</sup> 'Um ein sich in der Zeit bewegendes Kunstwerk richtig zu beurteilen, wird jene ruhige, unbefangene Stimmung erfordert, die, jeder Art des Eindrucks empfänglich, sorgfältig vor bestimmter Meinung oder Richtung des Gefühls bewahrt sein soll, ein gewisses Aufschließen der Seele für den behandelten Stoff ausgenommen.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, pp. 128-129. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 201.

In a sentence much quoted by later writers, Weber emphasises the role of all the operatic arts in this total effect:

It goes without saying that I am speaking of *that* opera which the German desires: a work of art complete in itself, wherein all the aspects and contributions of the related arts which have been applied blend into each other, disappear and in a sense perish, in order to create a new world.<sup>276</sup>

For some writers one obstacle to this kind of 'total effect' was the presence of speech alongside song. According to Mosel, this kind of aesthetic unity demands that opera in its most perfect form should be continuously sung:

The dialogue must be set as recitative, that foundation of musical tragedy, since here where the most important thing is a poetical whole and an uninterrupted overall impression, the alternation of speech and song is completely inadmissible. One of the greatest aestheticians argues that it is only Habit, that powerful sorceress who often achieves the incomprehensible, who can make us endure this glaring alternation within a single drama. It insults the ear and destroys all the unity, all the total effect of the performance.<sup>277</sup>

Hoffmann too argues against dialogue opera, and in similar terms:

The opera torn apart by dialogue is a nonsense which we only tolerate out of habit. We should be dwelling in the higher poetic realm where the language is music, but every moment we are hurled down to Earth.<sup>278</sup>

This kind of statement has naturally appealed to those later writers who saw Poissl's generation of composers, and indeed Poissl himself, as part of a group working their way inevitably towards the through-composed Wagnerian *Musikdrama*. But while the figures considered here all embraced the idea of the 'total effect', within this shared aesthetic their attitudes towards 'through-composition' were more individual, pragmatic and differentiated

---

<sup>276</sup> 'Es versteht sich von selbst, daß ich von *der* Oper spreche, die der Deutsche will: ein in sich abgeschlossenes Kunstwerk, wo alle Teile und Beiträge der verwandten und benutzten Künste ineinanderschmelzend verschwinden und auf gewisse Weise untergehend – eine neue Welt bilden.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 129. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 201.

<sup>277</sup> 'Der Dialog ist für das Recitativ, diese Grundlage des musikalischen Trauerspiels, bestimmt, denn hier, wo es auf ein poetisches Ganzes, auf ununterbrochene Gesamtwirkung ankommt, ist der Wechsel der Rede und des Gesanges ganz und gar unzulässig. Einer der grössten Ästhetiker behauptet, dass nur allein die Gewohnheit, diese mächtige Fee, die oft Unbegreifliches wirkt, uns diesen grellen, das Gehör beleidigenden, alle Einheit, allen Totaleindruck der Vorstellung zerstörenden Wechsel in einem und demselben Schauspiel erträglich machen könne.' I. F. von Mosel, 'Vaudeville, Liederspiel, Singspiel, Oper', in *AmZ(W)*, 4 (1820), pp. 689-690.

<sup>278</sup> 'Die durch Gespräch zerrissene Oper ist überhaupt wohl ein Unding, das wir nur aus Gewohnheit dulden. Wir sollen uns in dem höheren poetischen Reich befinden, in dem die Sprache Musik ist, und jeden Augenblick hinabgeschleudert berühren wir die Erde.' Review of Méhul's *Ariodant* in E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Schriften zur Musik*, ed. by Friedrich Schnapp (Munich: Winkler, 1963), p. 311. Review originally published in *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt*, 25 (1816) pp. 195-199

than post-Wagnerian musicology has tended to admit. Weber's most famous reference to the subject was written in 1820 in an introduction to the recitative version of Poissl's *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*. Weber's words, although they pre-date the completion of his dialogue opera *Der Freischütz* (1821), do seem to mark the point at which his own thoughts turned towards the possibility of a work without spoken dialogue. This vague plan was eventually to lead to the 'grand Romantic opera' *Euryanthe* (1823). Nonetheless, for all his interest in the possibilities of continuously-sung opera, Weber is noticeably less dogmatic on the subject than Mosel or Hoffmann. If we read his piece in context, as an article whose primary purpose was to explain and promote an unknown opera to the Dresden audience, it feels more like a clarification of current terminology than a flaming manifesto on behalf of 'through-composition':

There has been much argument about the intrinsic nature of so-called grand opera, and it has still not been established what its essential founding principles are. So I will content myself with stating what is now, in tacit agreement, generally understood under the adjective 'grand'. Namely, an opera in which the musical numbers are connected by continuously orchestrated recitatives, and therefore where Music hold court like a monarch, surrounded by her ceaselessly active servants.<sup>279</sup>

Spohr, in his *Aufruf an junge Komponisten* [Appeal to Young Composers] of 1823, asks 'whether we Germans should not also finally raise our work of art to greater unity by turning our dialogues into recitatives' ['ob wir Deutsche nicht auch endlich die Oper als Kunstwerk zu grösserer Einheit dadurch erheben sollten, dass wir die Dialoge in Recitative verwandeln'].<sup>280</sup> He too is writing partly in order to promote a through-composed opera, his own *Jessonda*, and he rehearses the arguments against spoken dialogue in similar terms to Mosel and Hoffmann:

When the aestheticians reject opera as a work of art and declare it to be a monstrosity, it is the alternation of speech and song which gives them their main justification for this. And indeed it is really only the force of habit which makes it bearable.<sup>281</sup>

---

<sup>279</sup> 'Es ist viel über eigentliche Wesenheit der sogenannten großen Oper gestritten und bis jetzt noch nicht festgestellt worden, von welchen Grundprinzipien sie eigentlich bedingt wird. Ich begnüge mich also nur anzuführen, was man gegenwärtig in stillschweigend angenommener Übereinkunft unter dem Beiworte 'groß' zu verstehen pflegt. Nämlich eine Oper, in der die Musikstücke durch fortlaufend instrumentierte Rezitative verbunden sind, und wo demnach die Musik als Herrscherin, von allen ihren ununterbrochen in Tätigkeit gesetzten Krondienern umgeben, Hof hält.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 310. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, pp. 289-290.

<sup>280</sup> Louis Spohr, 'Aufruf an deutsche Komponisten', in *AmZ*, 25 (1823), p. 463.

<sup>281</sup> 'Wenn die Aesthetiker die Oper als Kunstwerk verwerfen und monströs nennen, so ist es hauptsächlich der Wechsel von Rede und Gesang, der sie dazu berechtigt. Auch ist es wirklich nur die Macht der Gewohnheit, die ihn ertragen lässt.' *AmZ*, 25 (1823), p. 463.

However Spohr is also far from dogmatic on the subject, going on to say that recitative-based opera only works with certain kinds of dramatic content. If these conditions are not met by the libretto, he says, then ‘it is better to keep the dialogue’.<sup>282</sup> There are also pragmatic considerations for the composer:

Nothing looks easier at first glance, and yet nothing is so difficult as to write a good recitative. This is where we lag furthest behind the masters of previous ages, admittedly for the simple reason that there are almost no more recitatives to compose.<sup>283</sup>

Poissl himself appears never to have commented on the conflicting claims of dialogue and recitative, beyond a short factual report in a letter to Meyerbeer that he had added recitatives to *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*.<sup>284</sup> However the debate about the integration of speech and song within the ‘total effect’ is of great relevance to him. This is not because he was the alleged pioneer of ‘through-composition’ whom we encounter in the literature, but rather because he found other ways of achieving the same aesthetic end within dialogue-based forms. His compositional practice in dialogue-based works such as *Aucassin und Nicolette* and *Athalia* shows an intense engagement with the ‘total effect’ despite the alternation of speech and song. We even see him utilising features of dialogue-based opera (such as melodrama and the creation of harmonic tension across a passage of speech) to create forms of dramatic integration which were not available in continuously-sung opera. In other words, instead of baulking at the supposed ‘monstrosity’ of the speech-song alternation and seeking a way out in ‘through-composition’, the internal evidence of Poissl’s works is that he was committed to making this alternation of textures work in a way that was still thoroughly compatible with the integrated ‘total effect’.

As we will see when we examine his musical dramaturgy in the context of *Aucassin und Nicolette* and *Athalia*, Poissl found technical solutions to these issues in French models – the *opéras comiques* of Méhul and Cherubini. But as with ‘dramatic truth’ and ‘characterisation’ the underlying aesthetic principle, here the pursuit of the ‘total effect’, was something larger, something transcending the individual genre and the individual technical means employed. Technical details inevitably form much of the subject-matter of the next two chapters, but with Poissl we must always understand them as a means to an

---

<sup>282</sup> ‘Entspricht ein Opernbuch diesen Anforderungen nicht, so behalte man lieber den Dialog bey’. *AmZ*, 25 (1823), p. 464.

<sup>283</sup> ‘Nichts scheint im ersten Augenblicke leichter und nichts ist doch so schwer, als ein gutes Recitativ zu schreiben. Auch sind wir hierin gegen die Meister früherer Zeit am weitesten zurückgeblieben, aus dem freylich einfachen Grunde, weil es fast keine Recitative mehr zu schreiben giebt.’ *AmZ*, 25 (1823), p. 464.

<sup>284</sup> *Briefe*, p. 38 (10 October 1815).

aesthetic end. Thanks to his own writings and those of his close contemporaries we can have a fairly clear idea of what those aesthetic ends were.



## CHAPTER 4

### POISSL'S MUSICAL DRAMATURGY

The relationship between musical expression and dramatic content was at the heart of Poissl's aesthetics and yet, as shown in Chapter 1, the existing literature has engaged very little with his actual musical dramaturgy. It is hoped that the detailed case-study of *Athalia* in Chapter 5 might serve as a model for approaches to the rest of his oeuvre. However to understand *Athalia* itself we need to see it in the musical context of Poissl's whole career, and in particular of his previous development as a composer. This chapter will give an overview, necessarily highly selective, of Poissl's musical dramaturgy in the four operas which preceded *Athalia*, focussing particularly on aesthetic aspects which, as Chapter 3 has shown, were prominent in Poissl's own writings and those of his German contemporaries.

#### **Establishing a language: *Die Opernprobe* and *Ottaviano in Sicilia***

Poissl's first opera *Die Opernprobe* was an apprentice work, written by the 22-year-old composer after what seems to have been a very short period of musical study with Danzi. Given Poissl's inexperience it is hardly surprising that its musical language lacks sophistication. There are some attractive melodies, and Poissl seizes the opportunities afforded by the libretto to compose music in the style of *opera seria* within a German comic opera. However the harmonic language often feels very static (Figure 7).

The image shows a musical score for an Adagio section. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. Above the first staff, there is a bracketed instruction '[Flute solo]'. The flute part begins with a melodic line starting on a whole note G4, followed by a series of eighth notes. Below the flute, the orchestration (Orch.) is shown in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part starts with a dynamic marking 'p' and features a rhythmic accompaniment of chords and eighth notes. The second system continues the flute melody and the orchestral accompaniment. The score is written in a clear, standard musical notation style.

**Figure 7: *Die Opernprobe*, Duet No. 2**

Nonetheless there is one particularly interesting pointer to Poissl's future development, and that is in his handling of the overture. In a spirit of 'characterisation' it comically anticipates the juxtaposition of *opera seria* and *opera buffa* in the opera itself. A slow introduction in C minor feels authentically tragic. However, just as the audience in the theatre might be thinking it has come to the wrong opera, the music changes to a much lighter *Allegro molto* in C major (Figures 8 and 9).

**Figure 8: *Die Opernprobe*, Overture (opening)**

**Figure 9: *Die Opernprobe*, Overture (opening of *Allegro molto*)**

The opening C minor theme of the overture (Figure 8) is not directly quoted later, but its *faux*-tragic manner is reflected in the music Poissl composes for his fictitious Italian opera *Ettore in Trabisonda* (Figure 10).

Allegro moderato  
FEDERIGO (BLUMENAU)  
CORILLA

Ch. Mor-te vo - le - sti, e fie-ra mor-te av - ra - i. Che is -  
CHORUS  
Che is -

Orch. *f*

8  
FEDERIGO (BLUMENAU)  
Ch. tan-te! O Ciel! Che af - fan-no! O - la! po-po-li, a mor - te io la con-dan - no.  
tan-te! O Ciel! Che af - fan-no!

Orch.

Figure 10: *Die Opernprobe*, Aria No. 12

Reflecting the *buffo* aspect of the overture, Figure 9 is explicitly quoted in the Finale of each of the two acts, with an increase of tempo on each occasion. At the end of Act I the theme's original *Allegro molto* becomes a *Presto* (Figure 11).

Presto

Voices *f*  
im - mer zan - ken im - mer streit - ten

Orchestra *f*

Figure 11: *Die Opernprobe*, Finale Act I

In the closing bars of the whole work we hear the same theme flashing past in rhythmic diminution (Figure 12 bar 3).

[Allegro molto]

Voices  
kö-n-nen des Bei - falls wir uns er - freu'n, so wer-den er - füllt uns-re Wün-sche seyn, es

Orch.  
f

Figure 12: *Die Opernprobe*, Finale Act II

This, in comic vein, is exactly the kind of integration between overture and opera which was advocated by Mosel and Schubart. The opera becomes, in Schubart's words, a 'spinning-out' of the overture. Or, put another way, the overture is perceived retrospectively as programmatic, an encapsulation of the 'character' of the opera itself.

By the time Poissl came to write *Ottaviano in Sicilia* in 1811 he commanded a much wider range of expressive and structural techniques. *Ottaviano* was his first great public success (Weber described its reception in Munich as one of 'unprecedented enthusiasm'),<sup>285</sup> and the essential elements of its harmonic and vocal language were to remain with Poissl throughout his career. This language also allowed him to explore ideas of characterisation and integration on a much more sophisticated level than in *Die Opernprobe*. His advances in expressive technique are exemplified by the duet for two sopranos *Ingrata, all'amor mio* from Act I (Supplementary Volume, pp. 3-9). Scribonia has found her former lover Cinna living in hiding, a fugitive from Octavian's power. In the recitative preceding the duet she confesses that, believing Cinna dead, she has bowed to pressure from her father and married their common enemy Octavian. Cinna is horrified and feels doubly betrayed, both personally and politically.

In the duet we can see Poissl striving to create genuinely 'characteristic' music within the established formal framework of Italian *opera seria*. So for example, in contrast to the limited harmonic palette of *Die Opernprobe*, he is now able to underpin and propel long melodic periods with harmonies that avoid immediate resolution and support the dramatic and emotional arc of the text. After the opening bar of the duet, the tonic does not reappear

---

<sup>285</sup> [...] die mit einem in München wirklich beispiellosem Enthusiasmus aufgenommene italienische Oper in zwei Akten: "Ottaviano in Sicilia". Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 269. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 184.

in root position until bar 9, matching the length of Cinna's first sentence. This gives an underlying tension and propulsion to Cinna's words, reinforced by the jagged imitative figures at the top and bottom of the orchestra and the string *tremoli* in the middle register. The vocal writing itself is expressive too, reflecting that concern for 'correct declamation' so often invoked by German composers. The mixture of stepwise movement and wider intervals in Cinna's opening phrases, suggesting a mixture of legato and marcato delivery by the singer, reflects a character torn between sorrow and anger. The singer has an opportunity to show both vocal and dramatic range.

At Scribonia's entry (bar 11) the natural cadence to D major is interrupted and the music takes a plunge into B flat major as she angrily defends herself. In *Die Opernprobe* Poissl had already used this kind of sudden modulation to the flattened submediant. However in the earlier work he rarely had a real dramatic justification for what the *Erklärung* calls 'startling modulations'. In Figure 13 for example the sentiment of the text (and indeed its ABAB rhyme scheme) continues blithely across the sudden change of key in bar 10.

BLUMENAU: It is my supreme happiness to live only for you, [modulation] and only your loving glance can give joy to this heart.

[Allegro non troppo]

FEDERIGO (BLUMENAU)

Fed. 1 Nur für dich al - lein zu le - ben, nur für

Orch. 1 (oboe) (bassoon)

Fed. 6 dich al - lein zu le - ben ist für mich das höch - ste Glück,

Orch. 6

Fed. 11 und Freu - den die sem Her - zen ge - ben

Orch. 11

**Figure 13: *Die Opernprobe*, Aria No. 6**

This is the kind of harmonic effect that Poissl himself was to criticise in the *Erklärung*, being ‘motivated neither by the characterisation of the dramatis personae, nor by the course of the action, nor by the fluctuation of passions’. By the time he wrote *Ottaviano in Sicilia* however he could use this effect in a manner more consistent with ‘dramatic truth’. The key-change in the *Ottaviano* duet is harmonically very similar to the one in *Die Opernprobe*, but has a genuinely characterising purpose, expressing the emotional chasm between Scribonia and Cinna.

The continuation of Scribonia’s entry also shows a sure grasp of musical rhetoric. With the words ‘Misera e sfortunata / Io sono al par di te’ (bars 18-22) she appeals to Cinna’s compassion. The music returns (bars 16-22) to the home key, and Scribonia’s previously angular vocal lines change to pleading, ingratiating legato. Cinna however (bar 22) is not to be appeased. Under the words ‘Tu – infida! / Nò, mi traffiggi il seno’, not only the downbeat accents (bars 22-26) but also the move away from D major show that he rejects conciliation. The low finish of ‘mi traffiggi il seno’ [‘you pierce my breast’] takes the singer into her chest register, a vocal illustration of the verbal image. The quick, disjointed rhythms of Scribonia’s ‘ma ascolta prima’ (bars 27-29) show a sense of ‘true’ declamatory style, as does Cinna’s firmly repeated ‘nò’.

The final section, with the two sopranos singing in parallel, might seem to deny the idea of individual characterisation, but in fact Cinna and Scribonia now share the same text and to a certain extent the same unhappiness. Cinna’s exclamation ‘oh, Dei!’ (bars 29-30), presumably with an individually-shaped decoration by the singer, provides the transition from antagonism to shared despair.<sup>286</sup> Harmonically the sixty-seven bars of the *Allegro assai* are firmly rooted in an almost unmodulating D major, a balancing contrast to the harmonic excursions of the first section. Here Poissl shows an ability to combine vocal

---

<sup>286</sup> The original singer of Cinna was Helene Harlas, later to be the first interpreter of the title role in *Athalia* and of Aristeia in *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*. Harlas had the reputation of being a fine actress as well as an outstanding singer. She and her partner the clarinetist Heinrich Baermann were close friends of Poissl and Weber. *Sängerlexikon*, II, p. 1504.

display with musical interest. There is a diversity of textures – parallel movement, imitation, and short declamatory gestures (bars 62-65, 72-75) which contrast with the extended coloraturas (65-71, 75-81) and allow the singers to take the necessary breaths.

In the duet we see Poissl using declamation, harmony and rhythmic textures as elements of ‘characterisation’. Elsewhere in *Ottaviano in Sicilia* we see him starting to explore the dramatic possibilities of orchestral colour as a ‘characterising’ vehicle. Poissl seems to have had a particular fondness for middle-range instruments such as violas, bassoons and horns, and for dark orchestral combinations. Octavian’s aria *Con il crin di lauri adorno* has an extended introduction evoking night-time in his battle-camp (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, Introduction, Act II Scene 6**

The absence of upper-range instruments here recalls Méhul’s banishment of high instruments from *Uthal* (1806) in evocation of a misty, mythical Scotland. Later in this introduction quiet, imitative horn-calls seem to suggest night watchmen moving round the camp. This is the kind of effect John Warrack means when he calls Poissl’s orchestration ‘truly Romantic in that the invention is contained at least as much in the tone colour as in the thematic material’.<sup>287</sup> A scene in the Temple of Vesta, in which the anti-Octavian conspirators swear an oath, uses similarly dark instrumental combinations to evoke mystery and secrecy (Figure 15). The orchestral colours here characterise a moral as well as a physical twilight. Cinna has just been spared by Octavian and is reconciled with him, so now when pressed to re-join the anti-Octavian conspirators he finds their plotting alien and questionable.

---

<sup>287</sup> Warrack, *German opera*, p. 294.

Poco Adagio

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Bassoons:** Part 1, starting with a fortissimo (fz) dynamic, followed by a piano (p) dynamic.
- Horns in E:** Part 1, playing fortissimo (fz).
- Trumpets in E:** Part 1, playing fortissimo piano (fp) at the end of the phrase.
- Trombones:** Part 1, playing fortissimo (fz).
- Timpani:** Part 1, featuring trills (tr) and a piano (p) dynamic.
- Chorus of Conspirators:** The vocal line with lyrics: "Del ti-ran no che l'op-pri-me li-be-rar Ro-ma pian-gen-te pro-met".
- Viola:** Part 1, playing fortissimo (fz) and piano (p).
- Cello and Bass:** Part 1, playing piano (p) and ending with a pizzicato (pizz.) marking.

**Figure 15: Ottaviano in Sicilia, Conspirators' Chorus, Act II No. 5**

These colouristic instrumental effects can be seen within an Italian opera as a 'German' shift of emphasis away from the voice and towards using the orchestra as a significant characterising force. The critic of the *AmZ* noted 'German' features in the overture, and did not approve:

Of all the musical pieces only the Overture seemed the least successful; it is clearly too German for this genuinely Italian opera, or rather too *pondered*, full of fussy, too easily smudged figurations which are much too loosely strung together.<sup>288</sup>

By 'pondered' [gegrübelt] the reviewer probably meant the overture's symphonic construction. Von Schaden mentions Joseph Haydn among the composers that Poissl studied, and Haydn's influence may be visible here. The opening *Largo* is 47 bars long, no mere introduction. Its first bars are melodically simple to the point of blandness – Poissl

---

<sup>288</sup> 'Die Ouverture allein schien uns von allen Musikstücken am wenigsten gelungen, denn sie ist offenbar für diese ächt ital. Oper zu deutsch, oder vielmehr zu *gegrübelt*, voller kleinlicher, zu schnell verwischter Figuren, die gar zu locker aneinander gereiht sind.' *AmZ*, 14 (1812), p. 660.



seems mostly interested in the play of antiphony and dynamics between the different orchestral sections. However this music is the germ of significant things to come (Figure 16).

The musical score for the opening of *Ottaviano in Sicilia, Overture* (Largo) is presented in a standard orchestral format. It features eight staves: 2 Flutes, 2 Clarinets in B flat, 2 Bassoons, 2 Horns (E flat), Timpani, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello & Bass. The tempo is marked 'Largo' and the key signature is B-flat major. The score shows the first four measures of the piece, with dynamics ranging from piano (p) to forte (f). The woodwinds and strings play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes, while the flutes and clarinets play a melodic line. The bassoons and timpani provide a steady accompaniment. The violins and violas play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes, and the cellos and basses play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.

**Figure 16: *Ottaviano in Sicilia, Overture* (opening)**

The *Allegro assai* (Figure 17) begins with what is ostensibly a new theme, but the accompaniment of this theme is closely related to the opening of the *Largo*, even in its alternation of strings and wind (Figure 17 bars 2-5, cf. Figure 16 bars 1-4). As in the last movement of Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony, the enigmatic opening bars out to have been the accompaniment of the main subject.

The musical score is for the opening of the *Allegro assai* section of the *Ottaviano in Sicilia* Overture. It is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) begins with a *[Largo]* section and transitions to *Allegro assai*. The instrumentation includes 2 Flutes, 2 Clarinets in B flat, 2 Bassoons, 2 Horns (E flat), Timpani, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello & Bass. Dynamics range from *[pp]* to *p*. The second system (measures 7-12) continues the *Allegro assai* section, featuring antiphonal passages between strings and winds. Dynamics include *cresc.* and *f*.

**Figure 17: Ottaviano in Sicilia, Overture (opening of *Allegro assai*)**

The opening figure of the *Largo* remains important in the *Allegro assai*, which is in sonata form. Its rhythm is passed antiphonally between strings and wind in the bridge section (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, Overture (*Allegro assai*, bridge section)**

As part of the second subject the same rhythm is insistently repeated by bassoons, horns and trombones (Figure 19).

**Figure 19: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, Overture (second subject)**

Having used this figure so prominently in the overture, Poissl reprises it in the opera itself. He did the same in *Die Opernprobe*, as has been shown. But in *Ottaviano in Sicilia* motivic recall is not merely a structural device to create formal symmetry. The re-appearances of overture material in the opera establish a dramatic association with the characters of Cinna and Scribonia, and so become part of the piece's musical dramaturgy – in other words part of the process of 'characterisation'. One of these re-statements is in the Duet *Ingrata*,

*all'amor mio* examined above. The second section there, *Allegro assai*, is introduced with a figure closely resembling the opening two bars of the overture (Figure 20 bars 1-2 and 6-7, cf. Figure 16 bars 1-6).

**Figure 20: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, Duet, Act I No. 3**

A more explicit quotation comes in Scribonia's aria *Voglio che avvampi ognora* in Act II (Figure 21). The close similarity with the second subject of the Overture (Figure 19) is reinforced by the shared tonality (B flat major within a movement in E flat major) and the instrumentation of trombones, horns and bassoons.

**Figure 21: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, Aria, Act II No. 4**

As seen above, in the overture this thematic material has a close connection with the first subject of the *Allegro assai* (Figure 17). This first subject itself appears towards the end of the opera in association with Cinna and Scribonia. In the introductory recitative of Cinna's

aria *Qual volto, ohimè! si pallido* we hear orchestral fragments of it in the minor mode. Cinna, captured by Ottaviano and expecting to die himself, hopes that Scribonia will be spared (Figure 22).

CINNA: Oh, my unhappy love! Unhappy fatherland! There is nothing more to hope for. If only I knew what Scribonia's destiny was!

Allegro smanioso

Orch.

Cin.

CINNA

Oh, in-fe - li-ce a-mor mi-o! Patria in-fe-li-ce! Non v'è più che spe-rar.

14

Cin.

sa-pes-si al - me-no pria di mo - rir, qual si - a di Scri - bo-nia il des-tin.

Orch.

**Figure 22: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, recitative before Act II No. 10**

This re-using of material from the overture in association with particular characters anticipates Poissl's more extensive use of 'characteristic' recurring motifs in later works. When we hear these motifs within the opera we are reminded, consciously or unconsciously, of their first appearance. Moreover when that first appearance occurred in the overture, the overture is perceived retrospectively not merely as being in the general 'character' of the opera as described by Schubart and Mosel, but actually programmatic, an integrated part of the narrative.

### **Italian opera, German-style: *Merope***

The critic of the *AmZ* may have considered the *Ottaviano in Sicilia* overture 'too German', but it seems to have been precisely Poissl's ability to negotiate the borderline between German and Italian operatic styles which brought him his next commission, a re-writing of

Nasolini's opera *Merope*. Although this work does not appear in lists of Poissl's operas, it bears his artistic stamp almost as much as those pieces which were entirely his. The genesis and reception of *Merope* constitute an illuminating case study not only for Poissl's compositional practice but also for Italian and German approaches to opera in general.

The occasion for Poissl's commission was the visit to Munich in 1812 of the soprano Charlotte Häser. German-born, Häser had made a hugely successful career in Italy. It was customary for visiting star singers to choose the operatic vehicle in which they wished to appear, and Häser chose the Nasolini. However on opening the score, the theatre management seems to have decided that the piece had typically 'Italian' shortcomings. In particular they found it lacked orchestral interest. It also highlighted the principal singer while neglecting the secondary roles. This was one of the Italian practices which Poissl himself later identified in the *Erklärung* as inimical to a 'purely dramatic totality'. As the *AmZ* reported, individual personalities played a part too, notably Munich's resident Italian tenor Antonio Brizzi:

Her [Häser's] choice had been approved, but when the composition was *read* it was considered very dull and, especially in the orchestra part, thoroughly thin and pitifully slight. In particular Herr Brizzi, who admittedly does not like to perform except when he can be assured of a definite advantage over the others, declared his part to be too insignificant, its music poor and now too high for his voice etc.; therefore it should be expanded, rewritten etc. Demoiselle Häser, who for all the adulation she has received over many years in Italy's premier theatres has remained a modest and gentle German, had no objections, and only ruled out alterations to her own role. However, when she later made closer acquaintance with our excellent singer Madame Harlass, whose role (Timante) really was insignificant, she herself requested that instead of her Aria in Act One she should sing a duet with Madame Harlass, and proposed adding an aria in Act Two for this rightly loved singer. Freiherr von Poissl took on the composition of the new numbers.<sup>289</sup>

Nasolini and Poissl are named on the playbill, but the version of *Merope* which was performed in Munich on 1 September 1812 also includes contributions from two other

---

<sup>289</sup> 'Man hatte ihre Wahl gebilliget, dann aber (beym *Lesen*) die Composition sehr flach, und, besonders in der Orchesterpartie, überaus dünn, ärmlich vernachlässigt, befunden. Besonders erklärte Hr. Brizzi, der freylich nicht gern anders auftritt als wenn er glaubt sich entschiedene Ueberlegenheit über die Andern zugestehen zu dürfen, seine Rolle für sehr unbedeutend, die Musik dazu für schlecht, für seine Stimme jetzt zu hoch etc.; sie müsse mithin vergrößert, sie müsse neu geschrieben werden etc. Dem. Häser, die obschon seit mehrern Jahren auf den ersten Theatern Italiens gehuldigt, doch noch immer die bescheidene, sanftmüthige Deutsche geblieben ist, wendete nichts dagegen ein, und verbat nur Veränderungen ihrer Rolle. Doch als sie hernach unsre wackere Sängerin, Mad. Harlass, deren Rolle (Timante) wirklich sehr unbedeutend war, näher kennen lernte, erbot sie sich selbst, statt ihrer Aria im ersten Act mit Mad. Harlass ein Duett zu singen, und schlug vor, für diese mit Recht beliebte Sängerin eine neue Arie im zweyten Act einzulegen. Die Composition der neu zu schreibenden Stücke übernahm der Freyh. v. Poißl.' *AmZ*, 14 (1812), p. 238.

composers. The Duet with Helene Harlas which Häser inserted into Act I is by Simon Mayr,<sup>290</sup> and Meyerbeer, who spent most of 1812 in Munich and had befriended Poissl, contributed to at least three other numbers.<sup>291</sup> However the dominant musical voice in *Merope* was Poissl's, both in quantity and in matters of overall form and style. His new additions considerably outnumbered the original material by Nasolini (Table 2).

<b>MEROPE (Munich version, 1812)</b>		
Poissl, Meyerbeer	Overture	
<b>ACT I</b>		
Poissl	(1)	Introduction (Polifonte, Adrasto, Ismene, Chorus): <i>Ombra che qui t'aggiri</i>
Poissl		Recitative with strings (Polifonte, Adrasto): <i>Seconderà pietoso</i>
Poissl	(2)	Duet (Polifonte, Adrasto): <i>La sorte mia felice</i>
Nasolini	(3)	Recitative and Cavatina (Timante): <i>Gran nume, che leggi</i>
Nasolini	(4)	Cavatina (Merope with Ismene, Chorus): <i>Deh consola/Quante volte</i>
?Poissl		Recitative with strings (Merope, Timante): <i>Ma quai strani pensier</i>
Mayr	5	Duet (Merope, Timante): <i>Taci, va</i>
Poissl		Recitative with strings (Merope, Polifonte): <i>Parti, e lasciami in preda</i>
Poissl	(6)	Aria (Polifonte): <i>Se intrepido fra l'armi</i>
Nasolini		Recitative with strings (Merope, Ismene, Adrasto, later Polifonte): <i>Mia Regina, che vuoi?</i>
Nasolini		Recitative with strings (Merope) <i>Barbaro mostro, ancora</i>
Nasolini	(7)	Terzetto with Chorus (Merope, Timante, Polifonte): <i>Barbaro, a tanto eccesso</i>
<b>ACT II</b>		
Nasolini	(1)	Introduction (Adrasto, Chorus): <i>Si vada, Messeni</i>
Nasolini	(2)	Duet with Chorus (Merope, Polifonte, Chorus): <i>Che ascolto? chi viene?</i>
Poissl	(3)	Terzetto with Chorus (Polifonte, Adrasto, Nearco, Chorus): <i>No, quest'alma non tema gl'insulti</i>
Poissl	(4)	Recitative and Aria (Timante): <i>Qual terra è mai questa? / Smania, timore e speme</i>
Poissl	5	March (strings only)
Poissl	(6)	Chorus: <i>Sorgi dal freddo cenere</i>
Poissl		Recitative with strings (Polifonte, Adrasto, Polidoro, Chorus): <i>Il perfido, o Messeni</i>
Poissl	(7)	Scene and Aria (Polifonte with Adrasto, Chorus): <i>Giuro che il Rè difesi</i>
Nasolini	(8)	Scene and Aria with Chorus (Merope with Timante, Chorus): <i>I nostri gemiti / Figlio, senti</i>
Poissl	(9)	March
Poissl	(10)	Scene (Timante, Polifonte, Merope): <i>Ah! che tradimento! Chorus Esulta pur Messene</i>

**Table 2: *Merope*, table of numbers (excluding *secco* recitative)**

<sup>290</sup> It has not been possible to identify the specific source of this duet (Act I, No. 5).

<sup>291</sup> See Meyerbeer's diary entries for 18, 21 and 22 August 1812 in Meyerbeer, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, I, pp. 201-202.

Musically, Poissl's numbers stand out from Nasolini's by virtue of their extended harmonic colouring. In *Merope* we see Poissl experimenting with a chromaticism that goes beyond anything he attempted in his other operas, even in the later, avowedly "Romantic" works *Die Prinzessin von Provence* and *Der Untersberg*. The *AmZ* reviewer found the latter part of the Overture 'bizarre', and he was probably thinking of the harmonic complexity of passages such as the final approach to the home key of D major (Figure 23).



The image shows a musical score for the Overture of *Merope*. It consists of two systems of orchestral parts. The top system is marked [Allegro molto] and [f]. The bottom system starts at measure 5. Both systems feature complex chromaticism and dense harmonic textures.

**Figure 23: *Merope*, Overture**

This chromaticism colours the whole opera and reflects its dramatic character. In the most striking scene of Act II, one newly composed by Poissl, the usurper Polifonte swears beside the grave of the dead king Cresfonte that he was always loyal. The oath itself has confident, wide-ranging vocal phrases and diatonic harmonies (Figure 24).

POLIFONTE: I swear that I defended the King, that in his lifetime I always loved him.



The image shows a musical score for the Aria of Polifonte in Act II No. 7 of *Merope*. It includes the vocal line for Polifonte and the orchestral accompaniment. The tempo is marked Maestoso and the dynamic is mf.

**Figure 24: *Merope*, Aria, Act II No. 7**

However Polifonte is lying. The ghost of Cresfonte appears and denounces him as a traitor, to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning (Figure 25). To match this *coup de théâtre* the simple diatonicism of his aria is supplanted by a tonally alien timpani roll on B natural, chromatic harmonies and choral interjections in the remote key of E minor (bars 5-12).



POLIFONTE: I swear. I swear.  
CHORUS: What a sound! What a noise!  
POLIFONTE: What do I see?  
CHORUS: Cresfonte!

Polifonte

Chorus

Orchestra

Pol.

Ch.

Orch.

1

8

Giu - ro. Giu - ro.

mezza voce

Qual suo - no!

[Libretto: distant thunder and a flash of lightning]

p

cresc. poco a poco

[Timpani]

(qui compare l'ombra)

Che ve - do?

Qual ru - mo - re!

Cres - fon - te!

f

**Figure 25: Merope, Aria, Act II No. 7 (continuation)**

Another piece of extreme onstage action is the killing of Polifonte by Merope's son Timante. The music Poissl composed for this so shocked the *AmZ* reviewer that he took the unusual step of including a music example on the page (Figure 26).



Figure 26: *Merope*, music from Act II No. 10 as shown in *AmZ*, 14 (1812), p. 641

The writer, who obviously had access to a score, embeds this example in a general criticism of Poissl's chromaticism and over-orchestration:

Or is it really praiseworthy (and in such a simple, amiable overall context!), after an Andante in A major, to start up with a first inversion of B flat and then stay in E flat major for a while; or after lingering for a long time in D flat major to move by way of a first inversion of A back to the theme in D major; or in a vocal piece in B flat major to hurl the listener in the course of a few bars from F major through C major, G minor, D minor, E flat major, D flat major, D major etc. back into B flat major? [...] Herr von P. also loves trumpets, timpani and *trombones*. But if these instruments come blasting, rolling and storming in as often as they do here, then obviously the ear will grow accustomed to them; they will not have a special effect any more, and so in order to achieve this effect one will ultimately need to let off cannons.<sup>292</sup>

The joke about composers resorting to cannons in the orchestra to create *Effekt* was a well-worn one – Danzi and Poissl had already used it in the libretto of *Die Opernprobe*. But as shown in Chapter 3, the *AmZ* critic represents a serious strand in the operatic debate, one which saw musical over-complication as a typical fault of German composers. Poissl is portrayed as an over-emphatic German trampling on the defenceless Nasolini:

---

<sup>292</sup> 'Oder lässt es sich etwa (und in einem so einfachen freundlichen Ganzen!) rühmen, wenn man z.B. nach einem Andante aus A dur ein Allegro mit dem Sextenaccord von B beginnt, dann eine Weile in Es dur bleibt; oder nach langem Verweilen in Des dur durch den Sextenaccord von A wieder zurück zum Thema in D gehet; oder in einem Gesangstück aus B dur in wenigen Takten aus F dur durch C dur, G moll, D moll, Es dur, Des dur, D dur etc. den Zuhörer wieder nach B wirft? [...] Hr. v. P. liebt auch Trompeten, Pauken und *Posaunen* sehr. Wenn aber diese Instrumente so gar oft, wie eben hier, drein schmettern, wirbeln und stürmen, so ists ja offenbar, dass sich das Ohr daran gewöhnt, sie eben darum keinen besonderen Effect mehr hervorbringen, und man am Ende, um diesen herbezuführen, Kanonen lösen möchte.' *AmZ* 14 (1812), pp. 640-641. The musical numbers cited are respectively: Timante's aria *Smania, timore e speme* (Act II No. 4), the Overture, and the Terzetto *No, quest'alma non tema gl'insulti* (Act II No. 3), though here the sequence of keys given is not entirely accurate.

[Poissl] approached the bright, amiable, lucid Italian with a profligate overabundance of old and new modulations, audacious harmonic progressions etc., and with the combined force of all the instruments. In both respects he was excessive, and if not in the absolute sense, then at least in relation to the overall context.<sup>293</sup>

Arrogance has blinded Poissl to the simple virtues of the Italian original:

It seems to have been taken for granted that Nasolini was thoroughly superficial and ineffective, though in fact many people came to a different conclusion later.<sup>294</sup>

In fact, as we see in the *Erklärung*, Poissl did not approach these issues thoughtlessly. He believed that the composer who allows a striking harmonic effect to dominate, as in the chromatic sections of *Merope*, must have a dramatic justification. Arguably such a justification is given at the moment quoted by the *AmZ* review, the killing of Polifonte. This becomes clear if we examine the quoted bars in their fuller musical and dramatic context (see Supplementary Volume pp. 10-13). In this final scene Polifonte and Merope are in the Temple of Hercules, about to be married by the High Priest. They are unsettled by noise from outside. Polifonte's 'All'armi! o fidi miei', (bars 1-2) though verbally a command, is in its vocal contour more of a question, reflecting Polifonte's confusion. Timante rushes in with a sword in his hand, singing a line ('Perfido! Mori!', bar 3) which is both resolute in its vocal contour and harmonically an answer to Polifonte's question.

Up to this point the recitative has been accompanied only by continuo, but as Timante stabs Polifonte the orchestra enters (bar 4). A sequence of tonally ambiguous diminished-seventh chords and a semi-resolution (bars 4-8) express Polifonte's shock and disorientation. These are the bars reproduced in the *AmZ* review. Polifonte then dies in the unusually dark key of E flat minor, and his death throes (bars 12-15) are depicted in sepulchral orchestral colours not unlike the oath scene of *Ottaviano in Sicilia* (Figure 15). After Polifonte's death the instrumentation becomes lighter and brighter, and so does the tonality, moving directly into the very bright key of B major (bars 15-17).

Far from seeking a gratuitous musical *Effekt*, Poissl is characterising a particularly shocking piece of onstage action, and is following Mosel's principle that all musical elements can and should be agents of that characterisation. Within this relatively short section the musical elements put to the service of the drama include vocal declamation, harmony, key

---

<sup>293</sup> 'Er trat dem heitern, gefälligen, klaren Italiener mit einem überreichen, verschwenderischen Aufwand von alten und neuen Modulationen, kühnen Fortschreitungen und dergl. und mit der gesammten Macht aller Instrumente entgegen. In beyden hat er nun hier – wenn nicht schon an und für sich selbst, doch wenigstens im Verhältnis zum Ganzen, gewiss zu viel gethan.' *AmZ*, 14 (1812), p.640.

<sup>294</sup> 'Man scheint vorausgesetzt zu haben, Nasolini sey durchaus oberflächlich und effectlos; nachher fanden Viele es freylich anders.' *AmZ*, 14 (1812), p.639.

characteristics and instrumental colour. The musical form is in fact following the dramatic content very closely.

Though he was to be criticised for over-complicated harmonies, there are signs in the MS score of *Merope* that Poissl showed restraint and actually stepped back from possible chromaticisms, even where these would have been genuinely motivated by the drama. In his original version of Timante's aria *Smania, timore e speme*, a cadential phrase (Figure 27 bars 1-4) is extended on repetition and elaborated with a sequence of chromatic modulations (bars 5-12).

**Figure 27: *Merope*, Aria, Act II No. 4 (original version)**

At some point in the compositional process this passage was simplified. The original is still visible in the Munich score, but a pencilled revision has removed the most chromatic bars, re-harmonised those that remain, and inserted a clarinet solo to vary the phrase-repeat

(Figure 28).

The image displays a musical score for the aria 'Merope, Act II No. 4 (final version)'. It features four staves: Timante (vocal line), Orch. (orchestral accompaniment), Tim. (timpani), and (Clarinet solo). The lyrics are: 'e ques-to co - re op - pres - so più non si cal - me - rà.' The score is in G major and 2/4 time. The vocal line is marked with a '1' at the beginning. The orchestral part includes a '1' in the bass clef. The timpani part has a '5' above it. The clarinet solo part has a '5' above it. The lyrics are written below the vocal line and above the clarinet solo line.

**Figure 28: *Merope*, Aria, Act II No. 4 (final version)**

The chromatics of the first version had a genuine psychological and dramatic purpose. They are an illustration of the text 'e questo core oppresso più non si calmerà' ['and this troubled heart will never again be calm']. The revision may have sprung from Poissl's own second thoughts, or may have been requested by the performer (Helene Harlas). In either case the original cannot be said to have been motivated by gratuitous *Effekt*.

Another way in which Poissl gives this version of *Merope* his own distinctive stamp is by connecting the overture with the opera through motifs, and by motivic cross-references between numbers. These go further than the motivic reminiscences in *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, and can also be seen, in their aspiration to musico-dramatic integration and a consistency of overall 'character', as expressions of a 'German' aesthetic.<sup>295</sup>

The motivic connection between overture and opera is achieved through a short, repetitious theme in the overture containing a triplet figure. Much of the overture's musical development is subsequently based on this figure (Figure 29, cf. Figure 23).

---

<sup>295</sup> Meyerbeer's diary entry for 22 August 1812 (Meyerbeer, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, I, p. 202) suggests that the themes of the overture were composed by Poissl even if their working-out was partly by Meyerbeer.

**Figure 29: Merope, Overture**

In the same way that certain themes from the Overture of *Ottaviano in Sicilia* became associated with the characters of Cinna and Scribonia, so this theme is used in *Merope* in connection with Polifonte, and in particular with the antagonism between him and the followers of Merope. Thus we hear it in the Terzetto with Chorus when Adrasto, Merope's confidant, challenges Polifonte's authority (Figure 30). It recurs later after Polifonte's perjury is exposed and he is chased away by Merope's loyal subjects (Figure 31).

**Figure 30: Merope, Terzetto with Chorus, Act II No. 3**

[Allegro smanioso]

Chorus

Te - co por - ta, te - co, ti - ran - no, il fie - ro tuo do - lor.

Orch.

[f]

**Figure 31: *Merope*, Aria, Act II No. 7 (last section)**

The motivic connections extend further within the opera. A melodic shape related to the opening bars of Figure 29 links three other musical numbers associated with Polifonte and his desire to marry Merope. The similarity of outline to Figure 29 bars 1-3 is clearest in the Chorus ‘Sorgi dal freddo cenere’ [‘Rise from the cold ashes’], sung at Cresfonte’s tomb just before Polifonte arrives to swear his oath (Figure 32 bars 1-2, 9-10).

Maestoso

Orch.

*p*

Chorus, Ismene, Adrasto

Sor - gi dal fred - do ce - ne - re, omb - ra e la ma - no ad -

Orch.

**Figure 32: *Merope*, Chorus, Act II No. 6**

In the same open-octave texture as in Figure 32 bar 1, and with one note fewer, this motif appears in the accompaniment of the duet *La sorte mia felice*, in which Adrasto opposes Polifonte’s marriage plan (Figure 33, bass-line of bars 1-2, 7-8).

1 Allegro molto POLIFONTE  
Polifonte, ADRASTO  
Au - da - ce! tre - ma del  
Orchestra  
1 f p

6 ADRASTO  
Pol. ADRASTO  
mio ri - go-re! Su - per - bo!  
Orch. ADRASTO  
6 f p

Figure 33: *Merope*, Duet, Act I No. 2

Later, when Polifonte attempts to woo Merope face to face, the string accompaniment is based on the same melodic motif (Figure 34 bars 1-4).

1 Allegro assai MEROPE  
Merope MEROPE  
Par-ti, e las-cia-mi in pre-da al mio do-lor.  
Orchestra (strings)  
1 f p

Figure 34: *Merope*, Recitative before Act I No. 6

On several levels Poissl's adaptation of *Merope* can be seen as a 'Germanisation' of the Italian original, and this was indeed the explicit wish of the Munich theatre management. They wanted more musical interest in the orchestra part and an upgrading of the secondary roles. Poissl delivered on both these counts. The orchestra parts of his added numbers are much richer than Nasolini's, and significant new music was created for the roles of Timante (Helene Harlas) and Polifonte (Antonio Brizzi). In fact, as the *AmZ* reviewer pointed out, the balance of numbers was tipped heavily in Brizzi's favour: he ended up with seven musical numbers to the *prima donna* Häser's five.

However in less obvious ways too, with his use of 'characterising' elements in declamation, tonality and instrumentation, and of motivic links between musical numbers including the



overture, Poissl was realising German aesthetic aspirations. The use of thematic recall to give overall unity to the work is particularly remarkable within an opera that is not even entirely written by him. It suggests that ideas of the integrated ‘total effect’ and of a consistent overall ‘character’ were central to his developing operatic language. The ‘German’ nature of the resulting work is further confirmed by its reception history. In Poissl’s adaptation *Merope* was translated into German by Hiemer, with spoken dialogues replacing some of the recitatives. In this form it was taken up with success by theatres in Frankfurt and Stuttgart.<sup>296</sup> Managements and audiences seem to have felt that, despite its Italian origins and the presence of Nasolini’s name on the playbill, *Merope* had become in some sense a German opera.

### ***Opéra comique in German: Aucassin und Nicolette***

Schilling’s encyclopedia entry on Poissl, written in the mid-1830s, identifies *Aucassin und Nicolette*, first performed in 1813, as a significant milestone in his development. For Schilling *Athalia* (1814) was the composer’s crowning achievement, but *Aucassin und Nicolette* represented an important step away from the Italian *opera seria* which had brought Poissl his initial successes:

His bright eye had identified a higher goal, and to achieve it was more important than anything, even than the applause of the multitude, which gratified only the young cavalier in him, not the composer and artist. And indeed with surprising speed he ascended to the only sphere in which his profound artistic aspiration could be satisfied. The operetta ‘Aucassin und Nicolette’, which he staged in 1813, already indicated this new direction.<sup>297</sup>

If we examine the score of *Aucassin und Nicolette* we see a continuation of the stylistic developments achieved in *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and *Merope*. This is particularly true of its orchestral and vocal characterisation. Beyond this we also see an attempt by a German composer to absorb the French *opéra comique* genre which, in works by Grétry, Cherubini, Méhul and others, dominated German theatre repertoires. Poissl’s intention to emulate these

---

<sup>296</sup> See performance data in Appendix.

<sup>297</sup> ‘Ein höheres Ziel hatte sich seinem lichten Seelenaug ausgesteckt, und das zu erreichen galt ihm über Alles, am nächsten über jenen Beifall der Menge, in welchem sich nur der junge Cavalier, nicht der Componist und Künstler gefiel. Und in der That mit einer überraschend schnellen Kraft schwang er sich auf zu der Sphäre, wo eben allein nur sein tief künstlerisches Verlangen Befriedigung erwartete. Schon die Operette “Aucassin und Nicolette”, die er 1813 auf die Bühne brachte, deutete diese veränderte Richtung an.’ Schilling, p. 491.

models is already clear in his choice of libretto: a German-language adaptation of an *opéra comique* libretto by Sedaine, one which had already been set by Grétry.<sup>298</sup>

Contemporaries of Poissl such as Weber and Hoffmann wrote admiringly of *opéra comique*, and musicology has since acknowledged the influence of this genre on early Romantic opera, but Poissl is perhaps unique among his generation of composers in actually setting out to compose an *opéra comique* in German. There may have been an external impetus for returning to German-language opera. For financial reasons performances of new Italian operas were suspended at the Munich Court Theatre in 1813.<sup>299</sup> But whatever the cause, in *opéra comique* Poissl seems to have found a particularly congenial vehicle for forms of characterisation which were already developing in his preceding works. He also found in Méhul and Cherubini models of integration and the ‘total effect’ which could be applied to dialogue-based forms.

As noted above, in *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and *Merope* Poissl was already using orchestral colour as an autonomous means of characterisation. A similar approach is demonstrated by the Entr’acte preceding Act II of *Aucassin und Nicolette*. Neither the score nor the libretto tells us that the scene which is to follow takes place at night, but the ‘dark’ key, muted strings and viola-led texture are unambiguous (Figure 35).

The image shows a musical score for the Entr'acte to Act II of *Aucassin und Nicolette*. The score is for five instruments: Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The tempo is marked [Adagio?] and the dynamics are *p* (piano). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The score consists of six measures. The Violin parts are mostly rests with some notes in the second and fourth measures. The Viola part has a melodic line in the first and fifth measures. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts have sparse notes, with the Double Bass having a [p] marking.

**Figure 35: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Entr’acte to Act II**

In the Entr’acte to Act III Poissl goes even further. The musical material here is so minimal as to consist almost exclusively of instrumental colour, with hardly any melodic or

---

<sup>298</sup> *Aucassin et Nicolette* (Versailles, 1779).

<sup>299</sup> Zenger, pp. 130-133.

harmonic action. The curtain is about to rise on Nicolette sitting alone in the forest, and Poissl is evoking her emotional and physical isolation (Figure 36).

The image shows a musical score for an orchestral unison. The tempo is marked 'Andante molto' and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes parts for Flutes, Clarinets in A, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The unison is marked with a first ending bracket and a piano (p) dynamic. The score ends with a G.P. (Grande Pause) instruction.

**Figure 36: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Entr'acte to Act III**

Although, as we have seen, these colouristic effects have antecedents in Poissl's previous operas, they can also be interpreted as responses to the orchestral techniques of *opéra comique*. For instance the kind of colour-shaded unison which we see in Figure 36 is also used by Cherubini in *Les deux journées*. This hugely popular work was a staple of the Munich repertoire in Poissl's time, performed in German as *Der Wasserträger*. Poissl will almost certainly have known it. Weber attended and reviewed a Munich performance of it in July 1811, at a time when he and Poissl were spending much of their leisure time together.<sup>300</sup> In the Entr'acte which introduces Act II, graded orchestral unisons evoke both the dramatic tensions established in Act I and the visual atmosphere of the scene to come, set in the morning twilight (Figure 37).

---

<sup>300</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, pp. 106-109; *Writings on Music*, pp. 76-79.

The image shows a page of a musical score for an orchestra. At the top, the word "Sostenuto" is written. The score is arranged in staves for the following instruments: Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets (in C), Bassoons, Horns in D, Trombones, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music is in 2/4 time and the key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The score features several dynamic markings: *ff* (fortissimo) at the beginning of many staves, *diminuendo* (diminishing) in the woodwinds and strings, and *pp* (pianissimo) in the strings towards the end of the passage. The notation includes various note values, rests, and slurs.

**Figure 37: *Les deux journées* (Cherubini), Entr'acte to Act II**

Another *opéra comique* with an obvious influence on Poissl is Méhul's *Joseph*. This too was a popular work in Munich, and like *Der Wasserträger* was seen there by Weber in the summer of 1811.<sup>301</sup> Zenger records that there were 27 'consistently applauded' performances of *Joseph und seine Brüder* during the directorship of Karl August Delamotte (1810-1824), making it that period's most often performed opera.<sup>302</sup> Based on an Old Testament story, *Joseph* was later to have a particularly strong influence on Poissl's own biblical opera *Athalia*, but in *Aucassin und Nicolette* there are already signs that Poissl knew Méhul's work. There is for instance a striking similarity between the opening of Poissl's Act I Finale and that of Siméon's aria *Non, l'Éternel que j'offense* (Figures 38 and 39).

<sup>301</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, pp. 110-113; *Writings on Music*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>302</sup> '[...] wurde mit gleichbleibendem Beifall 27 mal gegeben'. Zenger, p. 180.

AUCASSIN: Swear to me that, as often as you like, you will wreck the peace and happiness of our land, and ravage our fields and meadows with fire and the sword!

Allegro

[Violins, Violas]

[Woodwind]

Orchestra

[Cellos, Basses, Timpani]

*p* *p* *fz* *fz* *cresc.*

AUCASSIN

Auc. Schwört mirs, so oft es euch ge-fällt, des Lan-des Ruh' und Glück zu

Orch. *f* *p* *pfz* *fz* *fz*

Auc. stö-ren, und un-sre Flu-ren, un-ser Feld durch Schwert und

Orch. *fz* *fz* *fz*

Auc. Feu-er zu ver-hee-ren! Ge-rech-ter

GARINS

Orch. *fz* *fz* *f* *p*

Figure 38: Aucassin und Nicolette, Finale Act I (opening)

SIMÉON: No, no, the Eternal one whom I have offended overwhelms me with the weight of my wrongdoings.

Allegro

SIMÉON

Siméon

Non, non,

Orchestra

[Strings]

[+ Flutes]

[+ Clarinets, Bassoons]

*p* *f* *f* *p*

5  
Sim. l'É - ter - nel que j'of - fen - se m'ac - ca - ble, m'ac -  
Orch. f p f p

9  
Sim. ca - ble du poids de mes maux et sur mon  
Orch. f p pp

13  
Sim. front dans sa ven - gean - ce son doigt di -  
Orch. pp cresc. pp

**Figure 39: *Joseph* (Méhul), Aria No. 3 (opening)**

The two numbers share the same tempo and the same key, and both have rhythmically intense, motoric accompaniments. Poissl's orchestral introduction is similar to Méhul's, even in its instrumentation. Both openings, low, quiet and only fleetingly stating the tonic harmonies, are designed to emerge seamlessly from the preceding dialogue, creating that bridge between speech and song to which German musicians aspired as part of the 'total effect'. There are also similarities in the vocal lines, for instance if we compare Aucassin's opening octave F to F (Figure 38 bar 5) with Siméon's repetitions of the same interval (Figure 39 bars 12-15).

What is particularly interesting in the light of Poissl's attitude to musical characterisation is not so much the fact that these two pieces of music are similar, as that they spring from similar emotional states in the characters, and indeed from similar dramatic situations. Both characters are defying their families. Aucassin is performing a shockingly provocative act against his father Garins, releasing the country's enemy Bongars to attack Garins' lands again. In *Joseph* Siméon, plagued by guilt, is refusing the comfort of his brothers, insisting that their collective crime (selling their father's favourite son Joseph into slavery) has

brought a curse on the house of Jacob. Both dramatic situations centre on an act of filial disloyalty, Aucassin's in the present and Siméon's in the past. It is tempting to dismiss Poissl's rather obvious borrowing of Méhul's musical template as unoriginality, but that would be to misunderstand his primary intention, which is the 'characterisation' of a dramatic situation by allusion to its musical expression in another, familiar work. Whether the allusion was consciously received by the audience, and indeed whether they were worried by its unoriginality, was less important than that they should experience the scene as dramatically true and 'characteristic'.

Elsewhere in *Aucassin und Nicolette* one can see musical elements borrowed from other extremely well-known pieces and used to characterise equivalent dramatic situations. For example, Poissl and his German librettist Hiemer introduce a song ('Mein Freund und Tröster Du') for Aucassin in his prison cell. This song is not in Sedaine's original, but was surely intended by Poissl and Hiemer to evoke memories of Blondel's song *Une fièvre brûlante*, sung to the imprisoned King in Grétry's *Richard Cœur-de-Lion*, a work performed in Munich as *Richard Löwenherz*. At other points it is Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* that appears to have provided the model. Aucassin and Nicolette, meeting after their enforced separation, sing phrases reminiscent of Pamino and Tamino at a similar moment of reunion (Figures 40 and 41).

[Andante]

Nicolette  
Drum lass für dich das Le - ben mich als

Aucassin  
Le - ben. Drum lass für dich das Le - ben

Orch.  
p

**Figure 40: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Quartet and Chorus No. 8**

Andante

PAMINA  
Ta - mi - no mein! o welch ein Glück!

TAMINO  
Pa - mi - na mein! o welch ein Glück!

Orchestra  
p

**Figure 41: *Die Zauberflöte* (Mozart), Finale No. 21**

As in *Die Zauberflöte*, the reunion of Aucassin and Nicolette eventually leads to a Quartet involving the two lovers and two sentries. In Poissl's work these sentries are the comical soldiers Bredau and Marcou. In Mozart's opera they are the two Men in Armour, also a tenor and a bass (Figures 42 and 43). Poissl's quartet, partly unaccompanied, may be less musically and vocally ambitious than Mozart's, but it adopts the same key, the same time signature, the same combination of voice-types and some similar melodic gestures (cf. Figure 42 bars 4, 6 and 8; Figure 43 bars 2 and 11). Poissl seems to be appealing directly to the collective operatic memory of his audience.

poco più lento

Nicolette  
Bald wer-den wir uns wie - der se - hen! Nur für dein Glück,

Aucassin  
Bald wer-den wir uns wie - der se - hen! Nur für dein Glück,

Bredau  
Auch wir zum Him - mel herz - lich fle - hen für eu - er Glück, für eu - er

Marcou  
Auch wir zum Him - mel herz - lich fle - hen für eu - er Glück,

Nic.  
nur für dein Wohl will ich hin - auf zum Him - mel fle - hen

Auc.  
nur für dein Wohl will ich hin - auf zum Him - mel fle - hen

Bre.  
Wohl. Die Hoff - nung wie - der, wie - der euch zu se - hen

Mar.  
für eu - er Wohl. Die Hoff - nung wie der euch zu se - hen

Figure 42: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Quartet and Chorus No. 8



[Andante]

Pamina  
Bah. Wir wan - deln durch des To - nes Macht froh

Tamino  
Wir wan - deln durch des Ton - es Macht froh

1. Geharnischter  
Ihr wan - delt durch des To - nes Macht

2. Geharnischter  
Ihr wan - delt durch des To - nes Macht

Orchestra  
[p]

Pam.  
durch des Tod - es dü - stre Nacht. Wir wan - deln

Tam.  
durch des To - des dü - stre Nacht. Wir wan - deln durch des

1. Geh.  
froh durch des To - des dü - stre Nacht. Ihr wan - delt

2. Geh.  
froh durch des To - des dü - stre Nacht. Ihr wan - delt

Orch.

**Figure 43: Die Zauberflöte, Finale No. 21**

As noted above, Poissl shapes the instrumental introduction to the Act I Finale (Figure 38) in such a way as to minimise the register-shift between speech and song. For the first time in *Aucassin und Nicolette* he also makes use of melodrama, a texture which was to become crucially important in the musical dramaturgy of *Athalie*. Again there were many models for this in Cherubini and Méhul, and particularly in *Les deux journées*, which makes extensive and varied use of melodrama. Most relevant to Poissl's use is a scene in Cherubini's Act II, where Constance, the wife of the hero, is trying to escape from Paris with the help of the young Parisian Antonio. He is travelling to the country to marry and Constance travels with him, pretending to be his sister Marcellina. However at the city gate they are stopped by a soldier who notices the discrepancy between Constance's appearance and the description in

her documents. The confrontation between the three characters begins as spoken dialogue, but as the dramatic tension rises the orchestra enters, heightening the emotion of the spoken lines (Figure 44).

COMMANDANT: Look at me... Look at me!  
 CONSTANCE: Your look is so frightening.  
 COMMANDANT: You cannot look me in the eye. This confusion, this trembling – it all suggests...  
 ANTONIO: But you are terrifying her!  
 COMMANDANT: Come on then, to the guard-house with you!  
 CONSTANCE [sung]: Oh my brother I beg you! Antonio...

**Allegro**

1  
 2d COMMANDANT: Regarde-moi...  
 CONSTANCE: Vos regards sont si terribles.  
 Regarde-moi donc.

7  
 2d COMMANDANT: Les yeux ne peuvent s'arrêter sur les miens. Cet embarras, ce tremblement tout annonce...  
 ANTONIO: Dam! Vous l'intimidez aussi!  
 2d COMMANDANT: Allons, allons, au corps-de-garde!

13  
 CONSTANCE  
 O mon frè - re je t'en sup - pli - e! An - to - ni - o,

**Figure 44: *Les deux journées* (Cherubini), Ensemble and Chorus No. 7 (opening)**

The texture changes from melodrama to singing (bar 15), and eventually to an elaborate ensemble with chorus.

Poissl's one use of melodrama in *Aucassin und Nicolette* fulfils a similar dramatic function. Its purpose, as Hoffmann wrote of melodramas in Méhul and Cherubini, is 'to create a climax rising continuously from speech to song at moments of emotion'.<sup>303</sup> In Act I Garins quarrels with Nicolette over her relationship with his son, calling her a 'shameless hussy'

<sup>303</sup> '[...] um zu leidenschaftlichen Momenten von dem Sprechen bis zum Gesange, einen fortsteigenden Klimax zu bilden'. Hoffmann, *Schriften zur Musik*, p. 312.

[ 'schamlose Dirne' ].<sup>304</sup> When the well-meaning Governor pleads with Garins to be more gentle it only increases his irritation. The orchestra enters as Garins vents his anger on the Governor too. With rising emotion he forbids Nicolette to give any further encouragement to his son, and moves from speech into song (Figure 45).

GARINS [spoken]: No! Let me speak. She must listen. [sung:] If you should ever see my son [you are not to seek to please him].

The musical score for Figure 45 is presented in two systems. The first system, starting at measure 1, is marked 'Allegro' and 'GARINS (spoken)'. It features a bass line for Garins and a piano accompaniment for the Orchestra. The lyrics for the spoken part are 'Nichts! Mich lasst reden!' and 'Hören soll sie mich!'. The second system, starting at measure 7, shows Garins singing. The lyrics are 'Er-blickst du je - mal mei - nen Sohn, sollst du ihn'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'mf'. The score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

**Figure 45: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Trio No. 3 (opening)**

Far from letting the 'monstrous' alternation of speech disrupt the 'total effect', Poissl uses melodrama here as a positive vehicle of characterisation, a texture available to the composer of dialogue opera which not only bridges the gap between speech and song but also illustrates a dynamic, fluid psychological process.

In a similar quest for integration of all the musical and dramatic elements, Poissl incorporates the 'character' of the overture into that of the rest of the opera, as he did in his previous operas. However in *Aucassin und Nicolette* he uses a form of integration which reflects the particular traditions of *opéra comique*. In a departure from his previous practice, the overture of *Aucassin* has no direct motivic connection with the opera, but is nonetheless programmatic, and indeed closely incorporated into the narrative. It is a piece of battle music, representing the fight raging round Garins' castle and incorporating brass fanfares played behind the still-lowered stage curtain (Figure 46).

---

<sup>304</sup> *Aucassin und Nicolette, ein Singspiel in drei Aufzügen* (Munich: Zängl, 1813), p. 10. Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00053218/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

The image displays a musical score for the Overture of *Aucassin und Nicolette*. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Trumpets, Horns, and Orchestra. The Trumpets and Horns parts are marked with a dynamic of *mf* and include the instruction "(On stage)". The Orchestra part begins with a dynamic of *[p]* and later transitions to *mf*. The second system includes parts for Trumpets (Tpts.), Horns (Hns.), and Orchestra (Orch.). The Trumpets and Horns parts are marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The Orchestra part continues with a dynamic of *mf*. The score is written in G major and 2/4 time, with a tempo marking of [Allegro assai].

**Figure 46: Aucassin und Nicolette, Overture**

It is not clear whether Poissl knew Grétry's original setting of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. There too the overture represents the battle, but the sound from behind the curtain is Garins' voice. When the curtain rises Garins himself is revealed on stage. Even if Poissl did not know this particular effect, he must have been aware of similar ones in other *opéras comiques*. For example in the Entr'acte preceding Act II of *Les deux journées* a striking clock and a military drum are heard from behind the closed curtain, acoustically setting the scene which is shortly to be revealed. Méhul uses a similar technique in *Uthal* (Paris, 1806). Its overture depicts a storm, and we hear the voice of the heroine Malvina behind the curtain, calling for her father.

In *Aucassin und Nicolette* it is the stage trumpets that provide this narrative continuity between the overture and the opera itself. They play on behind the scenery after the curtain has risen, establishing the battle's location outside the room in which Aucassin and Garins are quarrelling (Figure 47).

AUCASSIN: Nicolette! Nicolette! I shall never forget you!  
GARINS: Listen! The trumpets! Save me, dear son!

[Allegro con fuoco] AUCASSIN  
Auc. Ni-co - let - te! Ni-co - let - te! Nie - mals, nie ver - gess' ich dich!  
Orch. [mf]  
Auc. dich!  
Gar. GARINS  
Tpts. (off-stage trumpets) Horch! Trom-pe - ten! Ret - te, ret - te,  
Orch. fz

**Figure 47: Aucassin und Nicolette, Introduction No. 1**

Within the opera itself there is some use of reminiscence motifs, but generally Poissl seems more interested in other methods of integration across the span of the drama. We see him using (for the first time outside his Finales) extended, multi-sectioned musical numbers which are tonally complete – they end in the same key in which they began – but which respond section by section to the developing narrative. The opening number is an example of this, an extended musical structure incorporating elements of duet, recitative, chorus and aria as well as a wide range of tempi, time signatures and keys (Table 3).

Poissl's interest in key relationships and their characterising force can be seen even in this tabular representation. The dramatic content of the scene is that Aucassin initially refuses to take part in the defence of his father's castle, which is under attack by Bongars. Aucassin is eventually persuaded to help by Garins' promise that his son can have one more meeting with Nicolette. Aucassin demands this in the first B-flat major section 'Nicolette! Nicolette!' (Figure 47) and the quarrel is eventually resolved by Garins' concession at the end of the penultimate section in F major 'Glückt es mir, euch zu erretten', in other words at the point of final resolution to the home key. As the quarrel moves through its various stages

between these points, the psychological and musical tension is increased by contributions, in three different non-tonic keys, from the Chorus, who also appeal for Aucassin's help. After Aucassin has set out his demand in the opening key of B flat major ('Nicolette! Nicolette!'), the irruption of the Chorus in the very distant key of E minor ('Weh! Der Feind naht sich') is a particularly strong harmonic illustration of his intransigence and their desperation.

<b>No. 1 Introduction</b>			
<b>Characters</b>	<b>Text</b>	<b>Key</b>	<b>Time signature</b>
Aucassin, Garins	<i>Nicolette! Nicolette!</i>	B flat major	4/4 Allegro con fuoco
Chorus	<i>Weh! Der Feind naht sich</i>	E minor	3/8 Presto
Aucassin, Garins	<i>Hörst du's mein Sohn</i>	Transitional (Recitative)	4/4 Allegro moderato - Allegro assai - Andante
Chorus	<i>Rettung! Weh!</i>	G minor	3/8 Allegro molto
Aucassin, Garins	<i>Wohl denn, ich will mit euch sterben</i>	Transitional (Recitative)	4/4 Allegro
Chorus	<i>Drohend naht Bongars sich</i>	F minor	3/8 Presto
Aucassin, Garins	<i>Vater!</i>	Transitional (Recitative)	4/4 incorporating Maestoso
Aucassin, Garins	<i>Glückt es mir, euch zu erretten</i>	F major	3/4 Larghetto
Aucassin, Chorus	<i>Meine Waffen her!</i>	B flat major	4/4 Allegro con spirito

**Table 3: Aucassin und Nicolette, structure of Introduction No. 1**

This concern for tonal organisation is also visible in the large-scale structure of the whole piece. Consecutive musical numbers are generally in keys that are close to each other in the cycle of fifths, or are related by intervals of a third (Table 4).

<i>Aucassin und Nicolette</i>		
<b>Overture</b>		D major
<b>Act I</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	B flat major
<b>2</b>	<b>Duet</b>	E flat major
<b>3</b>	<b>Trio</b>	G minor – G major
<b>4</b>	<b>Aria</b>	C Major
<b>5</b>	<b>Finale</b>	F minor – F major
<b>Act II</b>		
<b>6</b>	<b>Entr'acte and Song</b>	C minor
<b>7</b>	<b>Trio</b>	F major
<b>8</b>	<b>Quartet and Chorus</b>	E flat major
<b>9</b>	<b>Aria</b>	D major
<b>10</b>	<b>Finale</b>	C major
<b>Act III</b>		
<b>11</b>	<b>Entr'acte and Romance</b>	A minor – A major
<b>12</b>	<b>Duet</b>	E major
<b>13</b>	<b>Finale</b>	D major

**Table 4: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, keys of the musical numbers**

The exception to this general rule of not-too-distant keys would seem to be between Nos. 8 (E flat major) and 9 (D major). However here a feeling of disjuncture is dramatically appropriate, because Aucassin reneges in No. 9 on an agreement he made in No. 8. Poissl gives the listener a feeling of modulation rather than a sudden lurch down a semitone by introducing the new number with a recitative based for several bars on the dominant seventh of the new key (Figure 48).

AUCASSIN: Should I avoid her, forget her?

Allegro assai

AUCASSIN

Sie soll ich meiden? Ver-gessen? O

Auc.

Orch.

*p*

**Figure 48: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Recitative before No. 9**

Even between keys that are not particularly distant from each other Poissl seems concerned to create as smooth a transition as possible across the intervening dialogue. No. 4 ends in C major, and No. 5 (ultimately in F minor/F major) begins on a dominant pedal C (Figure 38). The gap between the keys of No. 9 (D major) and No. 10 (C major), is bridged by starting No. 10 on a chord of G major and maintaining the bass-note G as a dominant pedal for the

first five bars. Poissl is aware that key relations between consecutive numbers are important in a dialogue opera, possibly even more important than in a continuously-sung one. In a dialogue opera there is no linking, modulating recitative between numbers, so arguably the previous tonality is remembered more clearly by the listener.

Here again Poissl seems to have been influenced by French composers of *opéra comique* and their awareness of harmonic connections across passages of dialogue. On more than one occasion in *Les deux journées* Cherubini ends a number with an unresolved harmony such as a dominant seventh. This harmony remains at least subliminally in the listener's ear during the ensuing dialogue, and the arrival of the next number offers harmonic resolution.<sup>305</sup> Poissl does something similar between Nos. 3 and 4 of *Aucassin und Nicolette*. The home key of G major is sounded so briefly at the end of No. 3, a long number dominated by other keys, that there is no full sense of harmonic closure (Figure 49). Nicolette, throwing herself on Garins' mercy, breaks down in sobs. It is as if the tonality also collapses, leaving her plea unanswered in the air.

NICOLETTE: Let him forget my suffering, create the bond of love anew, pledge himself to a worthier one, and be happy with her.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system is for Nicolette and Orchestra. The tempo is marked [quasi Andante]. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor). The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics for Nicolette are: "Dass er, ver - ges - send ih - rer Pein, den schö - nen Bund der Lieb' er -". The second system is for Nicolette and Orchestra. It begins with a 7-measure rest for Nicolette. The tempo is marked (mit unterdrückter Wehmuth). The lyrics for Nicolette are: "neu'n, und ei - ner Wür - di - gern sich weih'n und mit". The system ends with a (schluchzend) tempo marking.

<sup>305</sup> Nos. 7 and 8 of *Les deux journées* both end on unresolved dominant seventh chords, No. 12 on an unresolved first inversion of G major.



13  
Nic. ihr mö - ge - glück - lich seyn.  
Orch. fz p pp

**Figure 49: Aucassin und Nicolette, Trio No. 3 (conclusion)**

Like Cherubini's unresolved dominant sevenths, this leaves a residue of musical tension across the following dialogue which is only resolved by the start of the following number. During the dialogue Garins is briefly touched by Nicolette's tears, but the news of Aucassin's victory arrives, reminding Garins that she is not a worthy bride for his son. His aria 'Der Siegeston erschallt' ['The victory signal rings out'] then begins emphatically in C major (Figure 50), a firm harmonic resolution (though not the one that Nicolette would have wished) for the questioning pseudo-G major with which No. 3 ended.

Recitativo  
1 Allegro  
Garins  
ORCH.  
Der Sie - ges-ton er - schallt. Er

**Figure 50: Aucassin und Nicolette, Aria No. 4 (opening)**

Poissl almost certainly knew the harmonic devices used by Cherubini to bridge dialogue in *Les deux journées*. He may also have been aware of Méhul's *Ariodant* (1799), in which numbers end with short modulatory passages preparing the key of the next one.<sup>306</sup> He was definitely acquainted with his friend Meyerbeer's first opera *Jephtas Gelübde*, which was premiered in Munich in December 1812, just five months before *Aucassin und Nicolette*.<sup>307</sup> Meyerbeer, himself possibly taking his cue from Méhul, includes modulating passages

---

<sup>306</sup> Hoffmann's review of *Ariodant* (*Schriften zur Musik*, pp.308-315) prints an example of this. Despite Hoffmann's reservations about dialogue opera, he gives an illuminating analysis in this review of the many ways in which Méhul and Cherubini sought to 'bind dialogue and song together as much as possible' ['die Prosa so viel als möglich mit dem Gesange zu verbinden'].

<sup>307</sup> Meyerbeer, *Jephtas Gelübde*, MS score, British Library Manuscript Add. 29906.

between numbers separated by dialogue, or by a scene change. Unlike Méhul however, Meyerbeer places the modulation on the start of the following number rather than the end of the preceding one. A relatively simple example of this happens between No. 2, which is in A major, and No. 3 which is in D major. The passage of dialogue between the two is brief, and the keys of A and D are so closely related that Meyerbeer could easily have started No. 3 directly on the new tonic harmony without any feeling of disjuncture. Nonetheless he composes opening bars which lead the ear into the new key (Figure 51).

**Figure 51: *Jephthas Gelübde* (Meyerbeer), Aria No. 3 (opening)**

Elsewhere in *Jephthas Gelübde* longer and more complicated modulations are used where the key relationships between numbers require it.<sup>308</sup> In *Aucassin und Nicolette* Poissl does something similar between Nos. 7 and 8. No. 7 ends in F major and is followed by a substantial amount of spoken dialogue. The next number is ultimately in E flat major, but the introductory recitative after the dialogue begins with a chord of F major, the key last heard, used as a dominant of B flat major (Figure 52).

**Figure 52: *Aucassin und Nicolette*, Quartet and Chorus No. 8 (opening)**

---

<sup>308</sup> This happens for example between No. 3, an aria for the hero Asmaweth which ends in D major, and No. 4, an aria for the villain Abdon which begins with music in the contrasted but third-related F-sharp minor, then passes through C major and A minor before arriving at its final key of E major. After this number there is a scene change, but the next piece (No. 5) begins in E minor before working its way to F major.

B flat major is then the key in which this recitative makes its cadence after thirteen bars, forming a natural preparation for the E flat major of the number itself. A natural, integrated harmonic flow from F to B flat to E flat is created between the two numbers despite the presence of dialogue.

All these techniques of integration – the devising of introductions which lead the ear seamlessly between speech and song, the dramatically targeted use of melodrama, the creation of dramatically meaningful key relationships within larger musical numbers and the tonal planning visible across the piece as a whole – can be seen as part of Poissl's aspiration to the 'total effect' within a genre based on spoken dialogue.

Perhaps because of the bias towards 'through-composition' in later accounts of Poissl, *Aucassin und Nicolette* has received little attention in the literature. It was also the least successful of all Poissl's works at its premiere, though Schilling ascribes this failure partly to the strange atmosphere in Munich in the spring of 1813, after the disastrous Bavarian losses in Napoleon's Russian campaign. However if we turn to Poissl's contemporaries they seem to have had a clearer view of Poissl's intentions and achievements in this work. Not only Schilling but also Weber appears to have been interested in *Aucassin und Nicolette*. Although he never conducted it himself, he recommended it to his successor when he left Prague in 1816, complete with a suggested cast list from the ensemble of the Estates Theatre.<sup>309</sup> In *Aucassin und Nicolette* Poissl assembled the skills in vocal and instrumental characterisation which he had developed in the composition of *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and *Merope*, and combined them with the formal specifics of *opéra comique*. As we shall see in the following chapter, this gave him the dramaturgical and musical basis for *Athalia*, the opera which was generally recognised among his contemporaries as his most significant achievement.

---

<sup>309</sup> Jaroslav Bužga, 'Carl Maria von Webers Prager "Notizen-Buch" (1813-1816)', in *Oper heute*, 8 (1985), pp. 7-44.

## CHAPTER 5

### *ATHALIA: A CASE STUDY*

In his first five operas, including his adaptation of *Merope*, we see Poissl engaging with the aesthetic aspirations of German opera, developing techniques not only of individual characterisation but also of integration and the ‘total effect’. Armed with these techniques, he finds in French *opéra comique* a genre with the musical flexibility to express the ‘dramatic truth’ that was central to his artistic vision. All this compositional experience was then combined in what was to be his most widely-respected opera, *Athalia*.

*Athalia* is the work of a composer now confident enough to take the *opéra comique* genre and to adapt it into what the *Erklärung* calls a ‘national’ work, one which, in the words of an early German reviewer of the piece, was ‘neither *Italian* nor *French*, but [...] purely German, and belongs to us’.<sup>310</sup> The work is German not only in the aesthetic sense but also in its underlying ideology. It was written at a watershed moment in German history, against the background of Napoleon’s defeat and the dissolution of Bavaria’s eight-year alliance with France. This was a moment when Bavaria re-defined itself as a nation, and *Athalia*, written like all Poissl’s previous operas for Max Joseph’s *Nationaltheater*, touches on highly topical issues of tyranny and freedom, national cohesion and disunity, and the place of religion in national identity. Poissl, as we have seen, was throughout his career a composer who was alive to the ideological and political currents around him. *Athalia* is a particularly remarkable piece, not only because it marks his arrival at artistic maturity but because this maturity coincided with perhaps the most significant historical moment of his lifetime.

#### **Composition and historical context**

Poissl composed *Athalia* in the summer and autumn of 1813 at his estate in Loifling in north-eastern Bavaria. Since his librettist, the actor Johann Gottfried Wohlbrück,<sup>311</sup> remained in Munich we can track some of the compositional process through Poissl’s letters. The earliest letter we have is from 27 July 1813, and it suggests that Wohlbrück had

---

<sup>310</sup> ‘[...] weder *Italienisch* noch *Französisch* ist, sondern [...] rein Deutsch, und uns angehörig’. *JLM*, 29, (1814) pp. 546ff.

<sup>311</sup> Wohlbrück (1770-1822) was also the librettist of Meyerbeer’s *Alimélek* (1813). His son August Wilhelm Wohlbrück (1794-1848) wrote the libretti for Marschner’s *Der Vampyr*, *Der Templer und die Jüdin* and *Der Bäu*.

still only sent Poissl the first of the opera's three Acts. The composer is already quite far advanced with his setting:

The Finale is now completely finished and already mostly *orchestrated*; I consider it the best piece of dramatic music I have written in my life. Now I have nothing more to write in the first Act except the *Introduction*, and so it would be good if I could soon have some of the second Act.<sup>312</sup>

Three months later, in early November, Poissl is composing Act III in Loifling while in Munich Wohlbrück is already working with Helene Harlas, the singer of the title role. Poissl seems to have made it a priority to finish Harlas's music first, composing her death scene in the Finale before completing some preceding numbers which did not affect her. Poissl's letter of 3 November indicates that Wohlbrück is also planning to rehearse with Georg Mittermayer, the singer of Joad, and with his own daughter Luise Wohlbrück, who is to play the child role of Joas (also known as Eliakin):<sup>313</sup>

It pleases me without end that you are happy with Mme. Harlas's efforts, and I hope the same for Mittermayer. From Eliakin I expect only good things anyway, since her Father will ensure that everything is for the best, and her own talent will lead her on the right path.

I enclose the Duet; I can only send the section of the ensemble piece in a few days' time.<sup>314</sup> The role of Athalia is now finished. The great Scene in the second Act seems to me to be unique of its kind, and I think the beginning of the last Finale up to her death is highly successful.<sup>315</sup>

At this point a first performance is planned in early January 1814. However in the course of November it is decided in Munich to give the opera later, on 28 January, the nameday of Max Joseph's opera-loving consort Queen Karoline. Poissl is pleased to hear this. In a letter

---

<sup>312</sup> 'Das Finale ist nun vollkommen fertig und auch schon grossentheils *instrumentirt*; ich halte es für das beste dramatische Musikstück, daß ich in meinem Leben gemacht habe. Nun habe ich im ganzen ersten Akt nichts mehr als die *Introduction* zu machen, und es wird daher sehr gut seyn, wenn ich bald etwas vom 2ten Akte bekomme.' *Briefe*, p. 21 (27 July 1813).

<sup>313</sup> Some sources (e.g. Waidelich, p. 324, fn. 22; von Pechstaedt in *Briefe*, p. 25, fn. 5) suggest erroneously that the performer was Wohlbrück's other daughter Marianne, later the wife of Heinrich Marschner. Luise Wohlbrück's later singing career was short-lived and consisted mostly of engagements alongside her better-known sister. *Sängerlexikon*, IV, p. 3753.

<sup>314</sup> Poissl is referring to two musical numbers involving Luise Wohlbrück in Act III: the Duetto No. 11, and the arioso *Bei Gottes Wort* (within the Ensemble Piece No. 12) which was later cut.

<sup>315</sup> 'Daß Sie mit den Bemühungen der *M*: Harlaß zufrieden sind, freut mich unendlich, und ich hoffe und wünsche ein gleiches von Mittermayer. Vom Eliakin kann ich ohnehin nur Gutes erwarten, da der Vater alles in dieser Hinsicht zum Besten leiten wird, und eignes Talent ohnehin den guten Weg führt.'

'Das Duett erhalten Sie hier; den Antheil am *Ensemble* Stück kann ich erst in einigen Tagen senden. Der Charakter Athaliens ist nun fertig. Die grosse Szene des 2ten Aktes scheint mir einzig in ihrer Art, so wie ich auch den Anfang des letzten Finals bis zu ihrem Tode für höchst gelungen halte.' *Briefe*, pp. 23-24 (3 November 1813).

of 26 November 1813 he suggests that a successful gala premiere in the presence of the King and Queen might further his own long-term ambitions for a position as *Intendant*. In the same letter he approves new casting proposals from Wohlbrück, though he wishes for a younger singer in the role of Josabeth.<sup>316</sup> Meanwhile the opera is as good as finished except for the overture:

I am now finished with the instrumentation too, and apart from the *Ouverture*, about which I am undecided and which I would very much like to write in Munich, in your presence and with your advice, I can put down my pen.  
I am very pleased that you are satisfied with the music for *Joas*, and I myself feel that if performed in a very simple child-like way this character will stand up very positively beside the others.<sup>317</sup>

Poissl's approach to composing the overture chimes with his view that it should be an integral part of an opera's 'character'. He writes it last, so that it can incorporate musical material from the opera itself, and in this case even seeks the collaboration of his librettist.

After this the letters cease. Poissl returns to Munich and presumably the two men are able to confer in person. In the event the premiere was postponed once more, partly for financial reasons.<sup>318</sup> Poissl was deprived of his hoped-for performance on the Queen's nameday, but the final premiere date was appropriate for an opera which takes place on the feast of Pentecost: 3 June 1814, the Friday after Whitsunday.

This chronology of composition and performance is significant because it unfolds alongside tumultuous events on the international stage which were reflected in the work. Although by the time of *Athalia's* premiere in June 1814 Napoleon had been ousted and exiled, the opera, which is about the downfall of a rampaging Napoleon-like tyrant and the liberation of an oppressed nation, was first conceived when this downfall was by no means certain. Bavaria had not yet extracted itself from the Franco-Bavarian alliance set up in 1805. However, Wohlbrück and Poissl may have been emboldened to choose their subject-matter by the collapse in public support for Napoleon in the early months of 1813. After the Emperor's disastrous Russian campaign in the winter of 1812-13, only 3,000 of the 33,000 Bavarian

---

<sup>316</sup> We do not have Wohlbrück's letters, so it is unclear which singer was being discussed. However it seems unlikely that this was Antonia von Fischer (*née* Peierl), the soprano who eventually sang the role at the premiere. In November 1813 she was only 24. *Sängerlexikon*, IV, p. 2691.

<sup>317</sup> 'Mit der *Instrumentation* bin ich nun auch fertig, und ausser der *Ouverture*, über die ich noch nicht einig bin, und die ich gar zu gerne in München in Ihrer Gegenwart und mit Ihrem Rathe machen möchte, habe ich keine Feder mehr anzusetzen. Daß Sie mit der Musik für *Joas* zufrieden sind, freut mich recht sehr, und ich glaube selbst, daß bey recht kindlichem einfachem Vortrage, worann ich ohnehin nicht zweifle, dieser Charakter lieblich den andern gegenüber stehen muß.' *Briefe*, p. 28 (26 November 1813).

<sup>318</sup> Waidelich, p.326.

troops conscripted into Napoleon's *Grande Armée* returned alive.<sup>319</sup> This effectively destroyed what little support Napoleon still had in Bavaria. Crown Prince Ludwig, already the centre of the anti-French party in Munich, became increasingly open in his opposition to the alliance. In April 1813 he wrote to his father, begging him to 'save Bavaria' and urging neutrality as 'the only means of regaining national goodwill'.<sup>320</sup> He also proposed secret negotiations for a new alliance with Austria, itself still technically in alliance with Napoleon.

Despite this pressure Max Joseph and his first minister Count Montgelas took the view that neutrality would 'satisfy neither St. Petersburg nor Berlin', Russia and Prussia now being the leading powers opposed to France.<sup>321</sup> For the moment France was the only guarantor of Bavaria's security, and despite Napoleon's current difficulties it was by no means certain that he would be defeated in the long term. It fell to Montgelas to interpret Max Joseph's policy to the disappointed Ludwig:

Although he sympathises with the sufferings of his subjects and is often dissatisfied with the French Government, he fears the genius of the Emperor, his enormous resources and the use such a great man can make of them. What an overwhelming disaster it would be if victorious France no longer supported Bavaria! Moreover, your father is also distrustful of the Court of Vienna.<sup>322</sup>

Max Joseph's caution was not unreasonable. Napoleon went on to prove his resilience with victories at Lützen (2 May) and Bautzen (21 May). In the interests of family harmony, the King ordered the Crown Prince to stop agitating for a change of policy:

Last evening, my dear Ludwig, I received your letter No. 26. Its whole tone proved to me that your hatred of the Emperor and of the French dominates all your thoughts and actions. As my opinion differs from yours in this respect, and as my paternal love makes it absolutely necessary that we should remain good friends, I beg of you never to speak to me again about politics. [...] After my death you will be able to do what you think right. For your own happiness I hope that you will be able to come through as well as I have done so far.<sup>323</sup>

It must have been around this time, probably after the premiere of *Aucassin und Nicolette* on 28 May 1813, that Wohlbrück and Poissl began work on *Athalia*. As Poissl composed his opera across the summer of 1813, Montgelas and other government figures played a difficult diplomatic hand with great skill, not least internally in persuading Max Joseph, a man of honour and a Francophile, to break his word to Napoleon. On 12 August Austria

---

<sup>319</sup> According to Schilling, the failure of Poissl's *Aucassin und Nicolette* on its premiere in May 1813 was connected to the catastrophic public mood in Munich.

<sup>320</sup> Corti, p. 113 (7<sup>th</sup> April 1813).

<sup>321</sup> Corti, p. 113 (Montgelas, 16 April 1813).

<sup>322</sup> Corti, p. 114 (2 May 1813).

<sup>323</sup> Corti, pp. 114-115 (25 May 1813).

switched sides and declared war on France. Bavaria, still a French ally, could expect an Austrian invasion at any moment. This reinforced Max Joseph's sense of reliance on France as a protective power, as did Napoleon's victory at Dresden later that month. Nonetheless, by the beginning of September the military trend was clearly moving against France, and Max Joseph reluctantly decided to enter secret negotiations with the Austrians. When the treaty of Ried sealed a new alliance with Austria on 7 October he still had private doubts:

In the whole affair we shall merely secure independence from France to come again under the Austrian yoke. As we have now made France our enemy she will make short work of us.<sup>324</sup>

Ludwig however congratulated his father in the warmest terms, seeing the treaty as a vindication not only of his own anti-French stance but also of the popular will:

As soon as this can be made public the whole population, nobility, bourgeoisie and peasantry, will worship you and flock to the colours to march against France.<sup>325</sup>

Max Joseph would not allow an eager Ludwig to take part himself in fighting the French, but within days of the treaty being signed Bavarian troops joined a coalition of Austrian, Prussian, Russian and Swedish forces. Together they inflicted a heavy defeat on Napoleon at the so-called Battle of the Nations near Leipzig on 16-19 October.

A letter from Poissl to Wohlbrück written two weeks later suggests that news of the treaty and the battle had arrived in Loifling. In the letter Poissl moves from a discussion of possible premiere dates for *Athalia* to an extended commentary on the political situation:

The King has fulfilled the wishes of his people, and now by joining the enemies of France he has finally reinforced the gains for his Kingdom which were purchased with Bavarian blood during the alliance with France. This deserves the thanks of his heir and of his people, who will no doubt grant it with warm hearts. The consequences of this step are still incalculable, since France, which was already barely able to resist because of Austria's terrifying accession to the great alliance, must now raise new armies against Bavaria and the others who take the same step; these armies must be all the more numerous because the existing allies now have new powers at their disposal as a result of these steps. If the allies stick to their fine principles and truly fight for human happiness, and if they prove by their actions that France is not to be dismembered, but rather Napoleon's ambition opposed, and the object of his usurpation torn away from him; if furthermore they can remain united among themselves; and if they do not lose sight of grander interests, and of the cause of humanity, by devouring each other over trivial problems (which was what brought about Germany's long misery before), then the good cause is almost certain to triumph! Then – I hope soon – we too will enjoy happy times, and divine Art, honoured and rewarded once more, will make her home as happily under Germany's temperate skies as she has in the warmer climes of Italy and France. How passionately I long for that beautiful age!

---

<sup>324</sup> Corti, p. 118 (7 October 1813).

<sup>325</sup> Corti, p. 118.



Now my dear friend farewell, unite your prayer from a full and ardent heart with mine, for victory and peace, and remain as I gladly am,  
your faithful friend  
Poissl<sup>326</sup>

This rare glimpse of Poissl's political views is informative on several levels. An ideal of German cultural unity is held up, in which political disunity and divisions over 'trivial problems' are set aside to enable German culture to flourish. The letter confirms the impression, suggested by many of the operas themselves, that Poissl was a man intensely interested in the politics of the Bavarian state. His basic stance as shown here is very close to that of Crown Prince Ludwig, who is specifically mentioned. Poissl criticises the high cost in 'Bavarian blood' of the alliance with Napoleon and, like the Crown Prince, sees Max Joseph's change of policy as one that will be greeted 'with warm hearts' by the nation at large. It is perhaps no coincidence that in *Athalia* a royal heir is central to the story, one who, like Ludwig in Bavaria's nationalist circles, was the embodiment of a hopeful future for the nation. However, despite what appears to be Poissl's sympathy for the anti-Napoleon tendency embodied by Ludwig, the letter is also alive to political nuances and to the complex detail of the strategic situation. He acknowledges that Bavaria has made gains as well as losses in its alliance with Napoleon.<sup>327</sup> He also echoes Max Joseph's fear that France might fight back, despite the new numerical strength of the allies.

Perhaps most interestingly for our understanding of *Athalia*, this political section of the letter touches on the opera's key themes of nationhood and usurpation. Poissl makes a clear

---

<sup>326</sup> 'Der König hat die Wünsche seines Volkes erfüllt, und das was Baiern's Blut in der Allianz mit Frankreich für sein Reich erworben, jetzt erst durch seinen Beytritt zu den Feinden Frankreichs, befestigt, und dieß verdient den Dank seine Nachfolgers und seines Volkes, dem ihm alles auch gewiß aus warmem Herzen zollt. Die Folgen dieses Schrittes sind jetzt noch gar nicht zu berechnen, denn Frankreich, durch Oesterreichs furchtbaren Beytritt zur grossen Allianz ohnehin kaum zu widerstehen im Stande, muß nun neue Heere gegen Baiern und seine Nachfolger in diesem Schritte aufbringen, und diese müssen um so zahlreicher seyn, da den früher Allirten durch diese Schritte wieder neue Kräfte zur Disposition gekommen sind. Wenn die Allirten in ihren schönen Grundsätzen, wahrhaft für Menschenglück zu kämpfen, beharren; in ihren Unternehmungen beweisen daß nicht Frankreich zerstückelt, sondern nur *Napoleons* Ehrgeiz bekämpft, und ihm was er *usurpirte* entrissen werden soll; wenn sie ferner unter sich einig bleiben, und nie grosse *Interessen* und die Sache der Menschheit über kleinlichsten Bemühungen einander selbst auffressen |: was leider Deutschlands langes Elend früher herbeyführte:| aus den Augen verlieren, so muß der vollste Triumph der guten Sache schon so gut als entschieden seyn! Auch wir können dann noch, und hoffentlich bald, frohe Zeiten erleben, und die göttliche Kunst, wieder geehrt und belohnt, wird sich unter Deutschlands gemässigtem Himmel so gerne heimisch ansiedeln, als im wärmern Klima Italiens und Frankreichs. Wie sehnlich harre ich dieser schönen Zeit entgegen! / Nun, theurer Freund, leben Sie wohl, vereinigen Sie Ihr Gebet aus voller heisser Brust mit dem meinen, um Sieg und Frieden, und bleiben Sie mir, was ich Ihnen so gerne bin / unveränderlicher Freund / Poißl'. *Briefe*, pp. 24-25 (3 November 1813).

<sup>327</sup> [Territorial gains. Bavaria's advantageous position at the Congress of Vienna]

distinction between the nation of France, which is to be treated with respect, and Napoleon, whose power is illegitimate and based on usurpation. For Poissl, a monarchist and an aristocrat, Napoleon's political origins in revolutionary France would have made him a particularly abhorrent figure. Indeed France itself, the 'object of his usurpation', deserves to be liberated from Napoleon as much as the German states do. The emphasis on the high moral purpose of the allies echoes the opera's equation of the struggle against Athalia with 'God's work'. At the end of the letter Wohlbrück is invited to join Poissl in praying for 'victory and peace'. This would seem to suggest that Wohlbrück was also firmly in the anti-Napoleon camp. Certainly the opera they were creating caught the now widespread anti-French mood in Bavaria, and later in other parts of Germany.

### **The libretto**

The opera is based on Racine's last tragedy *Athalie* (1691), which in turn derives its plot from a story in the Old Testament.<sup>328</sup> Wohlbrück compresses Racine's five acts into three, and three of the original *dramatis personae* are eliminated. These are Joad's son Zacharie and the minor figures Nabal and Agar, who serve as the messengers and confidants of Mathan and Athalia respectively. The nurse Salomith is reduced from a speaking role to a silent one. Events and conversations are re-ordered and some events are acted out rather than narrated. However, much of the remaining text is still based closely on Racine's, with his rhyming alexandrines turned into iambic pentameters.<sup>329</sup> The only major departures from the story as told in the play are two pieces of dramatic stage action: the striking of Baal's banner with a thunderbolt at the end of Act II and Athalia's on-stage suicide at the end of the opera.

Athalia, daughter of Jezebel, has usurped the throne of Judah and introduced the cult of Baal. Determined to destroy the legitimate house of David, she has massacred even her own grandchildren. However one of these children, the rightful heir Joas, has escaped. Now ten years old, he is living secretly in the Temple at Jerusalem with his aunt Josabeth and her husband Joad, the High Priest. He is unaware of his true identity and answers to the name Eliakin.

#### Act I

The Temple children, members of the priestly tribe of Levi, bind wreaths for the feast of Pentecost [No. 1 Introduction: *Sehet und fühlet*]. Josabeth contrasts their unworried existence with her own fear, and their tranquility with the tyrannical, idolatrous regime of Athalia beyond the Temple walls. Joad brings the surprising news that Athalia intends to

---

<sup>328</sup> Versions of the story are found in the Second Book of Kings, Chapter 11 and the Second Book of Chronicles, Chapters 22-23.

<sup>329</sup> According to Waidelich (p. 328, fn. 32) Wohlbrück borrowed some formulations from the translation by Carl Friedrich Cramer (c. 1785).

come to the Temple and make a sacrifice. Today is also the day on which Joad intends to reveal Joas's true identity to the Levites. After this he will proclaim the boy King to the people at large. Josabeth is frightened that this will put the child in danger. She recalls Athalia's massacre of her grandchildren and her own rescue of the infant Joas from among the corpses of his siblings. Joad urges her to trust in God [No. 2 Recitative and Duet: *Und ich soll jetzt nicht zittern*].

Athalia arrives in the Temple with the Judean commander Abner. He is shocked that she intends to flout the ancient laws which ban all but the priesthood, and in particular women and heathens, from entering the Temple sanctuary. When Mathan the High Priest of Baal appears, he asks Athalia why she is in the Temple of a religion she hates. She explains that she has been driven here by a recurring dream in which her murdered mother Jezebel prophesies her downfall. In the same dream a boy dressed in the robes of a Judean priest plunges a dagger into her breast. Deeply troubled by these premonitions, she has found no solace in the temple of Baal, and so will now try to appease the Hebrew God with offerings. Mathan, an unscrupulous apostate from the true faith, hopes that Athalia's sacrilegious action will provoke a war which will finally destroy the Temple and its inhabitants [No. 3 Trio: *Ach dass der Wurm im Busen schlief*].

Inside the Temple Joas, the Temple youths and the Priests worship Jehovah [No. 4 Finale: *Gott Israels*]. Joad reminds them that they are celebrating the day when God handed down the Law from Mount Sinai. Their rituals are interrupted by Athalia who insists on proceeding to the altar despite Joad's objections. In the sanctuary she sees Joas and recognises him as the boy from her dream. Deeply shaken, she runs away. Joad and his people celebrate this as proof of God's judgement on sinners.

## Act II

Athalia returns to her palace, where her attendants witness her agitation [No. 5 Chorus: *Unheil und Verderben*]. Desperate to know more about the mysterious boy, she sends Abner to Joad to arrange a meeting with the child. Once Abner has left, Mathan warns the Queen not to trust him. Abner, he says, remains loyal to the royal house of David and may conspire with Joad to put up a pretender, legitimate or not, to the throne of Judah. Athalia gives orders for her soldiers secretly to surround the Temple. She is wracked by guilt at her own misdeeds but concludes that she has to destroy the Temple and the mysterious child [No. 6 Scene and Aria: *Nein, die Verwirrung muss sich wenden*].

Meeting Abner in the garden of the Temple, Joad agrees to Athalia's request for a meeting with the child. However Abner warns Joad to be on his guard. Mathan has been whispering to Athalia about a fabled treasure of David hidden in the Temple. The covetous Queen may try to storm the Temple and take the treasure by force. Joad tells Abner that there is indeed a treasure, but he is encouraged by the story of Athalia's dream, in which he sees further evidence of Jehovah's work. When the boy appears Abner is moved for reasons he cannot understand [No. 7 Recitative and Quartet: *Der Gott, der in des Kindes sanften Zügen*].

Athalia arrives and demands to see the child. Joas, still unaware of his own identity, replies simply and piously to her questions [No. 8 Melodrama: *Mein Vater!*]. Even Athalia is moved by this, but when she asks him more he invokes God's punishment on her own sins of blasphemy, murder and idolatry, and she is disconcerted. With an undertone of threat she offers to adopt Joas as her own son. He expresses his horror at the prospect of exchanging his loving foster-parents for 'such a mother'. Athalia turns furiously on Joad, accusing him of putting words into the child's mouth. She plants the banner of Baal in the ground of the Temple and promises its imminent destruction, challenging Joad to produce a rightful King from the line of David [No. 9 Finale: *Hier pflanz ich Baals Panier*]. When Athalia storms out, Joad appeals to Jehovah for support. A divine thunderbolt destroys Baal's banner.

## Act III

A battle rages outside the Temple [No. 10 Entr'acte and Chorus: *Vor den Thoren droht und höhnt*]. Within its walls, Joad and Josabeth reveal Joas's true identity to him [No. 11 Duetto: *O Herr, was thust du?*]. They invest him with the regalia of David. He receives the homage of his parents, of the Levites (who are now armed) and of his fellow Temple

children [No. 13 Chorus: *Wachse, blühender Zweig!*]. Joad then orders the priests to conceal the boy. He has a prophetic vision of the world's future redemption through a son of the house of David [No. 14 Scene and Aria: *O Herr der Herrlichkeit!*]. Athalia breaks into the Temple with military force and demands to be shown David's secret treasure. Joad reveals it. The treasure is Joas himself, now seated on David's throne with the book of the Law and the sword of David at his side [Melodrama: *Das ist das Kind*]. Athalia orders her men to strike the boy down, but they are overpowered by the Levites. She appeals to Abner but he proclaims his loyalty to the new King. Hearing fanfares, she believes that Mathan and his soldiers outside the Temple will rescue her, but news arrives that the Levites have slaughtered them [No. 15 Finale: *Gott, du verlässt die Deinen nicht!*]. Athalia at last admits defeat and wishes, prophetically, that one day Joas himself will abandon the faith of Jehovah. As a final act of defiance she stabs herself. Joad and the people rejoice at their liberation, and as the opera ends they praise God's justice.

Where Wohlbrück's text expands on Racine's original or departs from it, it is mostly in order to generate specifically operatic musical forms such as ensembles, duets, choruses and finales. Where he re-orders scenes it is also usually in pursuit of a satisfying overall operatic structure. Thus the first Chorus is brought forward to open the opera in the place of Racine's explanatory but very un-operatic opening scene between Joad and Abner. Another Chorus is introduced to set the scene at the beginning of Act II.

In pursuit of visual interest Wohlbrück also abandons Racine's 'Aristotelian' unity of place, distributing the action across five different locations.<sup>330</sup> Other changes reflect that taste for action rather than narration which, as we have seen in the discussion of Poissl's *Andromache* (Chapter 2), was a feature of German theatrical aesthetics. Thus in Racine's play, Athalia's first sighting of Joas is narrated in the third person by Zacharie. In the opera it is shown on stage as the crucial event of the Act I Finale. This has implications elsewhere. In order to prepare this striking scene dramatically and psychologically, the idea of Athalia's dream is introduced by her in her very first conversation, not as an explanation after the event. Athalia's on-stage suicide in Act III, like Hermione's in *Andromache*, also reflects this taste for showing rather than telling – in Racine Athalia is taken away and killed off-stage. The suicide also needs to be psychologically prepared, so the idea is raised by Athalia in an expansive *scena* (No. 6) in the previous Act. The text of this is almost entirely Wohlbrück's invention.<sup>331</sup> The destruction of Baal's banner by lightning at the end of Act

---

<sup>330</sup> I. 1-6: Courtyard in front of the High Priest's dwelling in the Temple [Vorhof der Wohnung des Hohenpriesters im Tempel]. I. 8: The interior of the Temple with the incense altar, the golden menorah and the table of showbread [Das Innere des Tempels mit dem Rauchaltar, dem goldenen Leuchter und dem Schaubrotstisch]. II. 1-4: In the Queen's palace – large hall with gallery in the background [Im Palast der Königin – Großer Saal, im Fond Gallerie]. II. 5-8: The High Priest's garden by the Temple [Garten des Hohenpriesters am Tempel]. III: Hall of columns in the Temple [Säulenhalle im Tempel]. As given in Munich *Soufflierbuch* (1814), Mbs: St. th. 6-4.

<sup>331</sup> See complete transcription of this scene in Supplementary Volume, pp. 14-29, and discussion below.

II, Wohlbrück's other major addition to the story, points to the influence of *opéra comique*, where such spectacular scenic effects were common. Cherubini's *Lodoiska*, for example, featured a burning castle and Grétry's *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* a collapsing one.

The original play, written for a girls' school, has extended choral sections, and Wohlbrück follows Racine's example, if not always his words themselves, in incorporating into his libretto much that is ceremonial and oratorio-like rather than dramatic. This particularly applies to Act III. The deployment of Jehovah's thunderbolt at the end of Act II deprives the rest of the opera of much of its narrative tension – it is clear that whatever Athalia does she will be trumped by God's power – so the last Act takes on the character of a pageant of kingship, with different sections of the nation paying homage to Joas. This may slow down the narrative, but it underlines one of the ideological subtexts of the piece, its vision of a reborn nation with religion at its centre.

This theme of religious regeneration alongside national liberation was incidentally not limited to Poissl and Wohlbrück, or indeed to Bavaria and the Catholic South. It was widespread in many areas of German art as Napoleon's secularist Empire stumbled and nationalist hopes rose. Gertrud Fiege, for example, detects a similar thread in the work of the Protestant, North German artist Caspar David Friedrich:

The binding together of religion and politics in Friedrich's paintings corresponds to a view of man as both a religious and a socio-political being; simultaneously it reflects an inherent attitude of the time, that hand in hand with the national renewal there also had to be a religious one.<sup>332</sup>

An emphasis on this message can be detected in Wohlbrück's adaptation of the character of Joad. In Racine Joad is not a particularly attractive figure, despite his steadfastness in matters of faith. He is a devious, even ruthless politician, cold in his dealings with his own wife and happy to shed blood in Jehovah's cause. In the opera, where he sings much of Poissl's slowest and most oratorio-like music, he has become a blander, more sententious but also more benevolent figure. He is genuinely forgiving and tender towards his wife and is bound to the boy Joas by affection as much as by political pragmatism. His main dramatic function is as a mouthpiece for the true faith and as the presiding figure of the work's ceremonial scenes. He also makes explicit the connection between faith and nation in language which, as Björn Kühnicke has pointed out, reflects the religious rhetoric of the anti-Napoleon intelligentsia. Joad's declaration to the armed Levites that they are 'watching

---

<sup>332</sup> 'Die Verbindung von Religion und Politik in Friedrichs Bildern entspricht der Sicht des Menschen als eines sowohl religiösen wie gesellschaftlich-politisch orientierten Wesens; sie spiegelt aber zugleich die in der Zeit liegenden Auffassung, daß mit der nationalen Erneuerung eine religiöse Hand in Hand zu gehen habe.' Gertrud Fiege, *Caspar David Friedrich* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977), p. 57.

and fighting not for a human purpose, but for Jehovah's cause'<sup>333</sup> could be an echo of a passage by Ernst Moritz Arndt:

The war, which is not being conducted for booty and conquest but for the fatherland and for freedom, is a holy war, and so men must raise their hearts and thoughts to God and to heaven.<sup>334</sup>

When the opera was performed the two-dimensionality of the Joad who emerges from Wohlbrück's adaptation did not go unnoticed by critics:

The role of Joad, so brilliantly written in Racine, seemed much less significant in the opera, as is almost natural, with the opera illustrating so little of his cast of mind.<sup>335</sup>

However for Wohlbrück and Poissl this seems have been a price worth paying in order to make an ideological point. They present Joad, the visionary embodiment of true religion and the *de facto* leader of the true nation, as a symbolic archetype and a character without blemish, even though this entails a loss of dramatic subtlety and interest.

Athalia, representing the opposite principle, survives Wohlbrück's adaptation with more complexity. There is no doubting her villainy, nor the opera's underlying message against usurpation (and so by implication against Napoleon). Again the language of Wohlbrück's adaptation echoes the religious colour of much anti-Napoleonic rhetoric. Characterised in Racine merely as an 'impious foreigner',<sup>336</sup> in Wohlbrück's version Athalia is described in much more robust language as a 'servant of idols' [Götzendienerin], a 'false princess' [Afterfürstin] and a 'foreign criminal' [Frevlerin des Auslands]. Josabeth describes Athalia's reign and the resulting national humiliation in demonic imagery, dismayed that 'shame and disgrace weigh us down' and that 'idolatry insolently raises its serpent's head'.<sup>337</sup> Björn Kühnicke has compared this invective with another anti-Napoleon passage by Arndt, a poem of 1811 equating the French Emperor with the Devil himself:

---

<sup>333</sup> 'Seyd eingedenk, nicht für ein Menschenwerk, / Ihr wacht und streitet für Jehovas Sache.' *Athalia, eine große Oper in drei Aufzügen* (Munich: 1828), p. 50. Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00053153/images/>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

<sup>334</sup> 'Der Krieg, der nicht für Raub und Eroberung geführt wird, sondern für das Vaterland und für die Freiheit, ist ein heiliger Krieg, und die Menschen müssen also ihre Herzen und Gedanken zu Gott und zum Himmel erheben'. From *Was bedeutet Landsturm und Landwehr* (1813). Quoted by Kühnicke, p. 122.

<sup>335</sup> 'Die bey Racine so glänzend durchgeführte Rolle des Joad zeigte, wie fast natürlich, in der Oper sich unendlich unbedeutender, da diese die Gesinnungen so wenig veranschaulichte.' *Morgenblatt*, 8 (1814), p. 628.

<sup>336</sup> '[...] impie Etrangère'. *Athalie*, I. 1. 71. Cited as in Jean Racine, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

<sup>337</sup> '[...] da Schmach / und Schande auf uns lasten, frechen Muths / Abgötterey das Schlangenhaupt erhebt'. *Athalia libretto* (1828), pp. 4-5.

For Satan has come. He has assumed flesh and bone, and wants to be master of the world.<sup>338</sup>

Crown Prince Ludwig himself made the same comparison, in a letter to his father:

If Satan were to wander the Earth in human form, then I believe it would be Napoleon.<sup>339</sup>

Despite the Satanic imagery, in Wohlbrück's adaptation as in the original Racine there is also a recognition of Athalia's humanity and complexity. She appears sometimes to be damaged by her own experience, and driven by weakness as much as by malice. She also recognises goodness in others, for instance in her Act II encounter with the innocent Joas, and in her dealings with the honourable soldier Abner, who has conflicting loyalties:

I know your honest heart. Give to your God what belongs to him, but also to your ruler what duty requires.<sup>340</sup>

Abner himself represents a type that must have been familiar in the German states allied with Napoleon: the honourable patriot in temporary, pragmatic alliance with the foreign usurper, trying to mitigate the worst excesses against his own people. He is treated with sympathy and psychological subtlety. In fact the only out-and-out villain in the piece is the apostate priest Mathan, who has abandoned the faith of Jehovah for personal gain, bears a personal grudge against Joas and encourages Athalia in her most destructive acts.

Perhaps the most significant shift of emphasis in the adaptation is the additional prominence given to the role of Joas as the embodiment of messianic promise. Just as Athalia is associated with demonic imagery, so Joas's Jesus-like qualities are emphasised by Wohlbrück's language. His descent from the house of David is repeatedly mentioned, and Josabeth compares him to a 'sacrificial lamb'.<sup>341</sup> As we shall see, Poissl's music reinforces this proto-Christian imagery with 'characteristic' keys and motifs. Joas is also simply more visible in the opera than in the play. He is first seen in the Finale of the first Act and sings the prayer "Wenn die Weihrauchsäule", which has no equivalent in the play. He appears silently in his first encounter with Athalia shortly thereafter, a scene which is also not shown in the play, though it is narrated by a third person. The scene of Joas's questioning by the

---

<sup>338</sup> 'Denn der Satan ist gekommen, / Er hat sich Fleisch und Bein genommen, / Und will Herr der Erde sein.' From *Lied der Rache* (1811). Quoted by Kühnicke, p. 119.

<sup>339</sup> 'Wenn der Satan in menschlicher Gestalt wandelte, glaube ich, es wäre Napoleon.' Quoted in Karl Borromäus Murr, *Ludwig I.: Königtum der Widersprüche* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2012), p. 29.

<sup>340</sup> 'Kenn' ich doch / Dein redlich Herz. Du gibst was deinem Gott / Gehört, dem Gott; doch deinem Herrscher auch / Was Pflicht gebet.' (I. 4). MS performing material (F): Mus. Hs. Opern 457.

<sup>341</sup> 'Du willst mit ihm ans Licht zu treten wagen, / Der wehrlos ist, gleich einem Opferlamm?' *Athalia* libretto (1828), p. 8.

Queen (No. 8) is taken from Racine almost unaltered. Before this he takes part in a Quartet with Josabeth, Joad and Abner, another of Wohlbrück's oratorio-like additions. A further addition, interpolated into the interrogation scene itself, is his Romanze *Nach meines Gottes Ebenbild*. In fact all Joas's significant scenes from the play are incorporated and indeed augmented with musical numbers, with the result that his role takes on a greater length relative to the piece. There are signs that Wohlbrück and Poissl intended even more prominence for him. Act III of the Munich score shows an additional aria in which Joas, raised to the throne, swears to abide by God's law. However this number was cut before the first performance and not re-instated in subsequent versions, perhaps out of dramaturgical considerations or for fear of over-taxing the child performer.<sup>342</sup>

It cannot be said that the expansion of his role gives Joas a greater depth of character. If anything, he acquires a layer of sentimentality which the original play avoids. Racine in his preface claims that he has put no words into Joas's mouth that could not be spoken by an exceptional ten-year-old, and one can just about agree – his Joas is almost unnaturally virtuous and pious, but still believably a child. Wohlbrück's Joas on the other hand can seem very self-regarding – a child adopting an adult's view of his own childishness:

If my mouth strives to babble what lives in my bosom, it is not an empty game. For it is my highest aim to proclaim God's glory loudly and devoutly in the sanctuary.<sup>343</sup>

The prominence (and indeed the sentimental treatment) of Joas were in part a response to popular taste. Zelter may have disparagingly described Wohlbrück's Joas to Goethe as 'little Joas, stuffed like a sausage with wisdom, piety and plentiful *bons mots*',<sup>344</sup> but child characters, and in particular virtuous orphans, were a much-loved element of Viennese *Singspiele* such as Weigl's *Das Waisenhaus* and Gyrowetz's *Der Augenarzt*, both pieces in the Munich repertoire. Wohlbrück may also of course have been ambitious for his daughter who was to perform the role. But the net effect of his adaptation is again to underline the ideological subtext of the piece. The royal heir, embodiment of the nation's messianic hopes, is endowed with the greatest possible number of appealing qualities (or what counted as such to Wohlbrück) and moved closer to centre stage.

---

<sup>342</sup> The aria forms part of the unperformed Ensemble Piece No. 12, of which other sections (but not Joas's aria) were restored in the Berlin version. See discussion of versions below.

<sup>343</sup> 'Wenn jetzt mein Mund zu lallen strebt, / Was tief in meinem Busen lebt, / Es ist kein leeres Spiel. / Denn andachtsvoll im Heiligthum / Laut zu verkünden Gottes Ruhm / Ist meiner Wünsche höchstes Ziel.' *Athalia* libretto (1828), pp. 35-36.

<sup>344</sup> '[...] das kleine Joaschen wie eine Wurst gestopft sei mit Weisheit, Frommigkeit und viel Redensarten'. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1799 bis 1832*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Richter and others (Munich: Hanser, 1991), XX/I, p. 500 (Zelter to Goethe, 28 February 1817).



### **Biblical precedents: *Athalie*, *Jephtas Gelübde* and *Joseph***

Poissl and Wohlbrück could look to many precedents for their use of biblical subject matter as an allegory of current affairs. As Kühnicke has noted, there was a surprisingly high level of German interest in Racine's *Athalie* itself during the Napoleonic wars and immediately afterwards. This suggests that others in Germany were sensitive to the play's contemporary resonances and recognised, despite its French origins, that it could be instrumentalised as a nationalist text. For example Carl Dielitz translated Racine's play into German in 1813. He did not publish it until 1829, but on publication emphasised in a preface that it had been written in the year of the Battle of the Nations (the year in which *Athalie* was also written).<sup>345</sup> Like Wohlbrück's adaptation, Dielitz's version is coloured by the nationalist feeling of the moment. Like Wohlbrück he translates Racine's relatively neutral 'pays' with the more ideologically-charged 'Vaterland', and elaborates on the original in a way which reflects the concerns of 1813. For example, in Racine Joad has a vision of the new Jerusalem:

Jerusalem is reborn, more radiant and more beautiful. Whence do these children come to her from all sides, who were never carried in her bosom? Raise, Jerusalem, raise your proud head;<sup>346</sup>

The evocation here is of a future faith (i.e. Christianity) which will embrace Gentiles as well as Jews. In Dielitz's version this passage is expanded and turned into something much more explicitly concerned with nationhood:

[Jerusalem] shines even more beautiful, brighter in its new radiance. Thousands of children stream towards it, from a thousand sides. Hurry, peoples, hurry! It is the earth of your Fatherland, which you have never known! Jerusalem, raise your head in delight!<sup>347</sup>

Poissl will have known examples closer to home of biblical stage-works reflecting contemporary politics. During the writing of *Athalie* Peter Lindpaintner composed the biblical melodrama *Abraham, oder die Ergebung in den Willen Gottes* [Abraham, or Acquiescence in God's Will] for the Isartor-Theater, Munich's second, more populist state theatre. As Reiner Nägele has pointed out, the work had a political agenda, being designed

---

<sup>345</sup> Kühnicke, p. 113. Kühnicke also mentions new translations by Nicolai and von Maltitz, both from 1816.

<sup>346</sup> 'Jérusalem renaît plus brillante et plus belle. / D'où lui viennent de tous côtés / Ces enfants qu'en son sein elle n'a point portés? / Lève, Jérusalem, lève ta tête altière.' *Athalie*, III. 7. 1166. The equivalent scene in the opera is the Scene and Aria No. 14, in which Joad has a similar vision of the Christian future. Cf. *Athalie* libretto (1828), pp. 52-53.

<sup>347</sup> 'Nur schöner noch / Und heller strahlt's in seiner neuen Klarheit! – / Ihm strömen tausend fremde Kinder zu / Von tausend Seiten! Eilet, Völker, eilet! / Es ist der Boden Eures Vaterland's, / Den Ihr noch nie erkannt! Jerusalem, / Erhebe mit Entzücken Du Dein Haupt!' Quoted in Kühnicke, pp. 123-124.

to calm public unrest after the collapse of a river bridge in Munich on 13 September 1813.<sup>348</sup>

There were also biblical works on the stage of the Court Theatre which Poissl will have known, and which also carried contemporary political messages. One of these was Meyerbeer's opera *Jephtas Gelübde*, which was premiered there on 23 December 1812. The piece only achieved two performances, neither of which Poissl was able to attend, but Meyerbeer had been in Munich since April of that year finishing this, his first opera, and lobbying Queen Karoline to have it produced at the Court Theatre.<sup>349</sup> The two men became close friends and collaborators, so Poissl will have known the opera very well. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Meyerbeer's use of harmonic links across passages of dialogue possibly influenced Poissl's compositional practice in *Aucassin und Nicolette*. In *Athalia* it is arguably Poissl's choice of an Old Testament story with contemporary resonances which most clearly shows the influence of *Jephtas Gelübde*.

*Jephtas Gelübde* is based on the story of the Israelite commander Jephta and centres round his vow, if victorious in battle, to kill the first living thing that he meets on his return home. In the event this is his own daughter, whom he is thus obliged to sacrifice. There are similarities to other mythical and operatic topoi, including the Iphigenia myth treated by Goethe in *Iphigenie in Aulis* and Gluck in *Iphigénie en Aulide*, but in Meyerbeer's opera, whose libretto was written by the Berlin Professor Alois Schreiber, there is a particular emphasis on Jephta's status as a social outcast. Illegitimate by birth, he is rejected by his own tribe until, under attack from the Ammonites, they need his skills as a commander:

JEPHTA: They now hope for my help, who once drove me from my father's house and land, who hated me and mockingly reminded me of the shame of my birth?<sup>350</sup>

There is an echo here of calls for national unity in the face of Napoleon, and as in *Athalia* (and indeed in the biblical sources for both operas) the national cause is depicted as having

---

<sup>348</sup> Nägele, pp. 69-70.

<sup>349</sup> Meyerbeer arrived in Munich on 25 April 1812. He made Poissl's acquaintance two days later and seems to have met him regularly thereafter. He attended rehearsals of *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and its first performance on 1 July. During August he helped Poissl with his re-composition of *Merope*. Poissl was away from Munich for the premiere of his own clarinet concerto on 25 December, so he wrote to Meyerbeer that last-minute revisions made by him were 'approved sight unseen' ['von mir ungesehen aprobirt']. See *Briefe*, p. 20 (21 December 1812). Meyerbeer left Munich on 3 January 1813. There are many references to Poissl in Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, I, notably pp. 167, 187 (also endnote, which reprints Meyerbeer's enthusiastic review of *Ottaviano in Sicilia*) and 201-202.

<sup>350</sup> 'Die sollten Zuversicht zu meinen Beystand hegen, die mich aus Vaterhaus und Land verstießen, mich gehaßt, mich höhrend an meiner Abkunft Schmach gemahnt?' Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Jephtas Gelübde*, MS score, British Library Manuscript Add. 29906.

God's protection.<sup>351</sup> However the unity invoked in *Jephtas Gelübde* is problematic, and this may reflect the composer's particular situation. The attitude of Meyerbeer and other Berlin Jews towards Napoleon was ambivalent. They felt themselves to be patriotic Prussians, and yet it was Napoleon who had abolished Prussia's anti-Jewish laws on his conquest of the kingdom in 1806. Meyerbeer's brother Wilhelm was to serve with distinction in the Prussian army during the War of Liberation, but Jewish soldiers were not allowed to join the élite Guards regiment, and after the war were not eligible for promotion beyond non-commissioned rank.<sup>352</sup> We know from his letters and diaries that Meyerbeer was highly sensitive to anti-Semitic prejudice, and suffered badly from what Heinz Becker has called the 'trauma of the outcast' ['das Trauma des Ausgestoßenseins'].<sup>353</sup> The Jewish Gileadites in the opera can be read as an image of the Germans, rejecting a loyal and capable man because of an accident of birth.

Nonetheless, despite Meyerbeer's particular perspective on the idea of national unity, there is no doubt in the opera that the Gileadites must come together to avert the external threat from the Ammonites. In this Meyerbeer was himself following literary and operatic precedents. His use of the ancient Jews as an image of contemporary Germany was by no means the first example of this metaphor in the increasingly nationalistic culture of the early nineteenth century. Just as the ancient Greeks, with their fragmented geography and multiplicity of states, became a literary surrogate for the Germans (Chapter 2), so the ancient Hebrew tribes also became a historical and literary point of comparison, particularly among proponents of a monarchistic, religion-based form of state. The political theorist Adam Müller (1779-1829) made the similarity explicit in his lectures *Die Elemente der Staatskunst* (1809), with an implied recognition of German vulnerability in the face of Napoleon's 'Romans':

The Jews were in a situation and a state of mind easily understood by the Germans of recent times. They had an upright belief in their great destiny and many ideas, but also many obsolete conceptions. Among these last was a belief in a direct, instantaneous revenge for the wrongs done to them, through some saviour who would emerge; also a belief in their supremacy over the Gentiles. So they inevitably became the prey of the Romans [...].<sup>354</sup>

---

<sup>351</sup> The story of Jephtha is given in Judges, 11.

<sup>352</sup> See Heinz Becker in Meyerbeer, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, I, pp. 26-29.

<sup>353</sup> Meyerbeer, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, p. 29.

<sup>354</sup> 'Die Juden waren in der Lage und Stimmung, wie die Deutschen der neueren Zeit sie leicht begreifen: gerechter Glaube an eine große Bestimmung, viele Ideen, aber auch viele erstorbene Begriffe; unter diesen denn auch der Glaube an directe, mit Einem Schlage, durch irgend einen aufstehenden Retter, erfolgreiche Rache für das widerfahrene Unrecht; und Oberherrschaft über die Völker. Darum wurden sie eine unvermeidliche Beute der

The ancient Jewish equation of nationhood with national religion would also have appealed to Poissl, who as we have seen saw the Catholic religion as a central part of Bavarian identity.

Méhul's *Joseph* represented another operatic manifestation of this metaphor on the operatic stage, even if the connection between Jews and Germans was a facet of the work's reception in Germany rather than something intrinsic to the work as originally conceived. As noted above, *Joseph* was the single most frequently performed opera on the Munich stage between 1810 and 1824. It is based on Genesis, 42-45. Sold into slavery by his brothers, Joseph has found freedom and high status in Egypt. When after many years his brothers are driven to seek corn in Egypt because of famine in their homeland, Joseph receives them but does not reveal his true identity. He sees how his brother Siméon is tormented by guilt for his past actions. When Siméon confesses his crime to their father Jacob, Joseph intervenes to avert Jacob's anger and reveals himself to his family. Re-united, Jacob and his sons thank God for his mercy.

First performed in Munich in 1809, *Joseph*'s durability in the repertoire was helped, from the management's point of view, by its ease of performance. It required no complicated stage effects and its non-virtuosic vocal style meant that it could usually be cast from the resident ensemble without employing guest singers. Among the playbills of the Court Theatre one often finds *Joseph* as the piece which is put on when another opera has to be cancelled at short notice.<sup>355</sup> However on top of its practical advantages for the theatre, *Joseph* seems to have been genuinely loved by audiences. This is particularly remarkable in view of the fact that it lacks many of the operatic attributes traditionally regarded as audience-friendly. It has an all-male cast of characters (though the role of Benjamin is written to be sung by a woman) and there is no romantic love-story. There is little in the way of stage spectacle, and indeed little outward action at all. The drama is primarily an inward one, and the most dramatic events of Joseph's life – his sale into slavery and subsequent rise to power in Egypt – happen fifteen years before the opera begins. The vocal style, as noted above, is relatively austere, so it would not draw in that part of the opera audience which was primarily interested in virtuosic singing.

However *Joseph* does seem to have held a great attraction for German audiences in the Napoleonic period and afterwards. Stephen C. Meyer has located this attraction in what he

---

Römer [...].’ Adam H. Müller, *Die Elemente der Staatskunst*, ed. by Joseph Baxa (Jena: 1922), II, pp. 209ff. Quoted in Kühnicke, p. 125.

<sup>355</sup> For example the playbill of the Court and National Theatre for 22 August 1819 shows *Joseph* being performed ‘because of the sudden indisposition of Mlle. Metzger’ [‘wegen der plötzlichen Unpäßlichkeit der Mlle. Metzger’]. Playbill collection of the Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich.

calls the opera's 'ideological substratum'. *Joseph*, he argues, is a work about community and nationhood. Its two most complex characters, Joseph and Siméon, are in their different ways alienated from the communities of family, faith and nation. By the end of the opera they have been re-integrated. For Joseph this entails a process of forgiveness, and for Siméon one of remorse:

The grand tableau at the end of the opera, in which Joseph embraces his brothers surrounded by the community of faith, enacts an ideal of nationhood essentially the same as Arndt's vision of the purified and united Germany he hoped would arise from the ashes of the Napoleonic wars.<sup>356</sup>

For Poissl the practical example of *Joseph* must have been an encouragement to take on the subject-matter of *Athalia*. Méhul's piece showed that a biblical opera could address current themes as well as achieving genuine popularity, and all without recourse to traditionally crowd-pleasing forms of *Effekt*. *Athalia* admittedly has more stage spectacle than *Joseph*, but it also lacks conventionally popular operatic elements such as a romantic love-relationship. Its vocal style is also for the most part austere and without virtuosity.<sup>357</sup>

Poissl seems happy to signal the debt to *Joseph* in his score. As in his use of musical gestures from Méhul's work and from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in *Aucassin und Nicolette* (Chapter 4), his borrowings in *Athalia* come close to being actual quotations. The *AmZ* reviewer of the first Berlin performances in 1817 noted a general resemblance to *Joseph* (and to Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*) but claimed not to have met any 'old acquaintances':

On the contrary, even having heard the piece four times (in two rehearsals and two performances) I was not aware of a single reminiscence.<sup>358</sup>

This is surprising in that Poissl at the very least adopts the conventions of 'Hebrew' music invented by Méhul. The very first music in *Athalia* after the Overture, a Chorus of Maidens and Youths, is introduced by a swelling major chord (Figure 53).

---

<sup>356</sup> Meyer, p. 60

<sup>357</sup> The few exceptions to this, in the title role, are connected to a particular 'characterising' effect (see analysis of *Athalia*'s Scene and Aria below).

<sup>358</sup> 'Im Gegentheile ist der Ref. sich bey viermaliger Anhörung (in zwey Proben und zwey Vorstellungen) keiner einzigen Reminiscenz bewusst worden.' *AmZ*, 19 (1817), pp. 259-260.

Figure 53: *Athalia*, Introduction No. 1 (opening)

This would surely have reminded Poissl's audiences of the swelling ceremonial chord with which Méhul introduces each verse of his 'Hebrew' hymn in *Joseph*, both in the Overture and in the opera itself (Figure 54).

Figure 54: *Joseph* (Méhul), No. 5 (opening)

Later in *Athalia* Poissl even sets the same text as Méhul ('God of Israel') to music that is very similar in melody and identical in key. Perhaps the obvious influence of the Priests' music in *Die Zauberflöte*, a similarity reinforced by the presence of basset horns and trombones, made the *AmZ* critic deaf to the echoes of *Joseph* (Figure 55).

The image shows a musical score for the finale of Act I of the opera *Athalia*. The score is for a Chorus and an Orchestra. The tempo is marked 'Tempo di Marcia grave'. The Chorus part is written for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are: 'Gott Is - ra - els! o seg - ne un - ser Fle - hen, dass es hin'. The Orchestra part is written for Violin (V) and Cello/Double Bass (C/B). The score is in common time (C) and begins with a first ending bracket. The Chorus part features a melody with some rests, while the Orchestra provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and some melodic lines.

Figure 55: *Athalia*, Finale Act I

With these direct and surely immediately identifiable textual and musical references to Méhul's work, Poissl was not merely borrowing Méhul's 'characterisation' of ancient hymnody. He was also signifying to his audience the artistic tradition in which he wished his piece to be received: that of the biblical opera as a metaphor of the contemporary world.

### Reconstructing the original version

In his 1911 dissertation Reipschläger saw *Athalia* as part of a strategy by Poissl to regain favour with the King and the public after the failure of *Aucassin und Nicolette*:

With this purpose in view, it was quite natural for Poissl to return to through-composed German grand opera. As his subject he chose Racine's *Athalie*, which was adapted for him by the actor and writer Gottfried Wohlbrück.<sup>359</sup>

This perception of *Athalia* as a 'through-composed German grand opera' proved very durable. In 1930 Ludwig Schiedermaier wrote that Poissl's operas as 'through-composed German stage dramas [...] went beyond the sphere of the *Singspiel*'. This sentence was quoted with approval ten years later by Ludwig Schrott,<sup>360</sup> who even described *Athalia* directly as 'one of the prime early examples of a through-composed German opera'.<sup>361</sup>

The fact is that the first version of *Athalia* was not 'through-composed'. It included extensive spoken dialogues and melodramas, and in this and in other respects was closer in genre to a serious *Singspiel* or to an *opéra comique* than to a 'through-composed grand opera'. Poissl revised the piece in the summer of 1815 and replaced the dialogues with

---

<sup>359</sup> 'Es lag ganz in Poissls Natur, wenn er zu diesem Zweck sich wieder der grossen, deutschen durchkomponierten Oper zuwandte.' Reipschläger, p. 130.

<sup>360</sup> Schrott, 'Aus dem Ringen um die deutsche Oper', p. 300.

<sup>361</sup> *ibid.*, p. 301.

recitatives, but the version given at the first performance in Munich in 1814, in Stuttgart and Frankfurt in 1815 and in Prague in 1816 (conducted by Weber) was with spoken dialogues.

To a large extent it is the prejudices of post-Wagnerian musicology that led to Poissl's most prominent work being placed, misleadingly, in a 'grand, through-composed' tradition. There are actually plenty of clues, even to the most casual student of the material, that the work originated in a dialogue-based form. Even in *Athalia's* later, revised version with added recitatives there is still speech, albeit with orchestral accompaniment. The melodramatically-accompanied lines of Joas remain spoken, even though his interlocutors now sing. The remaining presence of a strophic *Romanze*, a song form alien to 'grand opera', also suggests that the piece had its origins in another genre. Weber's introduction to his Prague performances, much quoted in the Poissl literature, refers unambiguously to 'versified dialogue' [versifizierten Dialog].<sup>362</sup> The libretto published for the premiere in 1814, containing only the sung parts of the opera, is a thin document of 31 pages, obviously not comprising the whole of the opera because the unprinted sections were spoken. So the fact that *Athalia* was originally a dialogue opera is relatively plain to see in the surviving material. There may have been a certain amount of wilful blindness among scholars keen to emphasise Poissl's pre-Wagnerian credentials as a composer of 'through-composed' operas. However, reconstructing exactly what the 1814 Munich version contained is still a complicated task. The Munich revival of 1828, the last known performances there, used the recitative version.<sup>363</sup> As a result the Munich performing score,<sup>364</sup> though also used in 1814, has been overlaid with additions and adaptations. The Frankfurt<sup>365</sup> and Stuttgart<sup>366</sup> scores are in the dialogue version and are the best surviving sources for the original spoken text, but reflect the versions produced in those theatres. These did not necessarily make the same choices as the Munich premiere regarding the inclusion or exclusion of scenes and musical numbers.

Nonetheless if we collate all these sources it is possible to reconstruct with a fair degree of accuracy the version which was performed on 3 June 1814. Much of the 1814 material is still visible in the Munich score, and so a side-by-side comparison of this with the 1814 libretto reveals a basic structure of sung and spoken elements. This process is helped by the fact that the 1814 score was prepared by a copyist (A) who appears not to have been employed on the 1828 revival. As a result the music that was composed for 1814, even if in

---

<sup>362</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 271. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 185.

<sup>363</sup> It seems likely that the 1816 performance still used the dialogue version.

<sup>364</sup> Mbs: St. th. 6-1.

<sup>365</sup> F: Mus. Hs. Opern 457.

<sup>366</sup> SI: HB XVII 521 a-b.



some cases it was cut before the performance, is clearly distinguishable in the score (Figure 56).

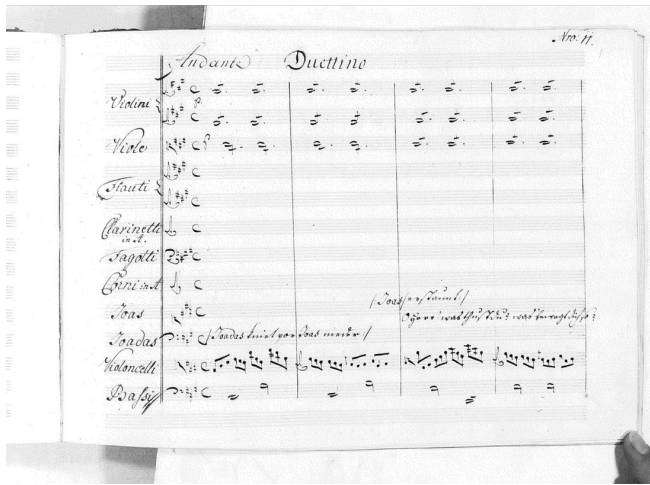


Figure 56: *Athalia*, Duettino No. 11 (Munich score, hand A)

The only major exception to this is Joad's Scene and Aria *O Herr der Herrlichkeit* (Act III). We know from its presence in the published libretto that it was sung at the first performance,<sup>367</sup> but it is not written in hand A in the score (Figure 57). It seems likely that it was a late addition to the piece, added after the rest of the score had already been prepared, and thus was written out by a different copyist, B. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that both this and the following number, the Act III Finale, are numbered as 'No. 14'.<sup>368</sup>

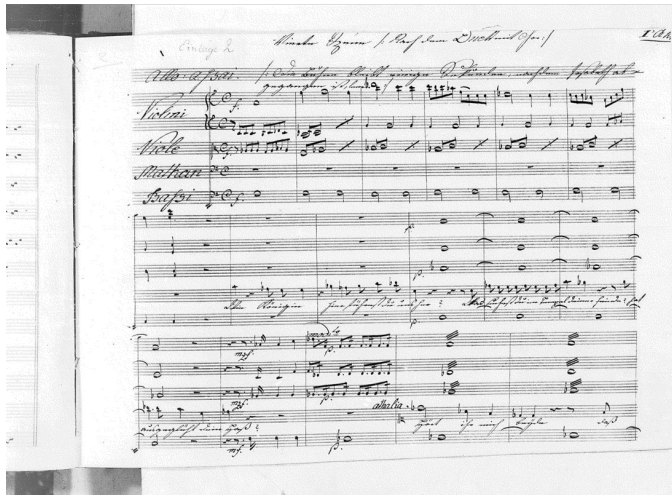


Figure 57: *Athalia*, Scene and Aria No. 14 (Munich score, hand B)

<sup>367</sup> *Athalia, eine große Oper in drei Akten* (Munich: Storno, 1814), pp. 27-28.

<sup>368</sup> To avoid confusion, the numbering from the Frankfurt score is used here, i.e. Scene and Aria (No. 14) and Finale (No. 15). See also Table 5 below.

Other hands are briefly visible in the score at moments where small re-adaptations or transpositions have taken place,<sup>369</sup> but the vast majority of the post-composed recitatives are in a third hand, C (Figure 58).



**Figure 58: Athalia, recitative added to Act I (Munich score, hand C)**

As an additional indicator of the different layers of revision, the sections inserted into the score for the 1828 revival, in whatever hand, are almost all marked *Einlage* [insert] for the benefit of the binder, and through-numbered from *Einlage 1* to *Einlage 12* (cf. ‘*Einlage 2*’ marking in Figure 58).<sup>370</sup>

As a result, around four-fifths of the original musical version can be established using just the Munich material. Two existing melodrama numbers from 1814, in Acts II and III, were written out anew for the 1828 score because they had been extensively adapted, and the original 1814 versions were removed. However in these instances we can assume that the versions preserved in Stuttgart and Frankfurt (both scores first used in 1815, and identical with each other) represent these melodramas as they were also performed in Munich.

Reconstructing the spoken text is slightly more difficult, as it was abridged by Wohlbrück when Poissl created the recitative version,<sup>371</sup> and is not easily visible beneath the deletions and changes in the Munich performing material. Thus, while the Munich *Soufflierbuch* (prompter’s book) does contain the complete spoken dialogue from 1814, passages removed

---

<sup>369</sup> For instance, Josabeth’s short Arioso *O Herr vergieb mein Zagen* in No. 1 was obviously transposed down for a particular singer. This entailed some re-composition of the recitatives preceding and following the Arioso. Both versions remain visible in the score.

<sup>370</sup> There is a slight confusion here in that the Joad scene is marked *Einlage 11½*, as if it too was inserted after 1815 (cf. Figure 7.5). However this number was definitely included at the premiere (see above) and is present in identical form in the Stuttgart and Frankfurt scores, both of which were made before 1815.

<sup>371</sup> See also Waidelich, ‘Weder *Italienisch* noch *Französisch*’, p. 328 and footnote.

for the 1828 version have been scored through and are hard to read.<sup>372</sup> Once again however the Stuttgart and Frankfurt materials compensate for lacunae and deletions in the Munich ones. There are slight variants, but the dialogues performed in Stuttgart and Frankfurt seem to have been substantially as at the premiere in Munich. The Stuttgart score has an abridged copy of each dialogue scene bound into the conductor's score on small sheets, and the Frankfurt material, even more usefully, includes a book with the complete spoken text.<sup>373</sup> So by collating all these sources it is possible to reconstruct the original 1814 version of *Athalia* with some certainty (Table 5).

<b>ATHALIA (1814 Munich version)</b>	
<b>Act I</b>	
Scene 1	<b>No. 1 Introduction:</b> <i>Sehet und fühlet</i>
Scene 2	<i>Ihr frommen Kinder</i>
Scene 3	<b>Dialogue</b> (64 lines): <i>Der Zeiten Fülle, Josabeth, ist da.</i>
	<b>No. 2 Recitative and Duet:</b> <i>Und ich soll jetzt nicht zittern</i>
Scene 4	<b>Dialogue</b> (23.5 lines): <i>Wie? Mathan noch nicht hier</i>
Scene 5	<b>Dialogue</b> (18.5 lines): <i>Wie, Königin, du hier?</i>
	<b>Dialogue</b> (39 lines): <i>Doch aus den Tiefen meiner eignen Seele</i>
	<b>No. 3 Terzetto:</b> <i>Ach, daß der Wurm im Busen schliefe</i>
Scene 6	<b>Dialogue</b> (25 lines): <i>Ist Abner <u>dir</u> dies große Werk gelungen?</i>
(Scene change)	
Scene 7	<b>No. 4 Finale:</b> <i>Gott Israels!</i>
<b>Act II</b>	
Scene 1	<b>No. 5 Entr'acte and Chorus:</b> <i>Unheil und Verderben</i>
Scene 2	<b>Dialogue</b> (27 lines): <i>Doch dieses Unschuldskind?</i>
Scene 3	<b>Dialogue</b> (22 lines): <i>Jetzt, Fürstin</i>
Scene 4	<b>No. 6 (Scene and Aria):</b> <i>Nein, die Verwirrung muss sich wenden</i>
(Scene change)	
Scene 5	<b>Dialogue</b> (21 lines): <i>Ich will mich denn zu ihrem Wunsche fügen</i>
Scene 6	<b>Dialogue</b> (34 lines): <i>Zwar bürg' ich für des Knaben Sicherheit</i>
Scene 7	<b>No. 7 Recitative and Quartet:</b> <i>Der Gott, der in des Kindes sanften Zügen</i>
Scene 8	<b>Dialogue</b> (13 lines): <i>Es naht die Fürstin!</i>
	<b>No. 8 Melodrama:</b> <i>Mein Vater!</i>
	<b>Dialogue</b> (12 lines): <i>Das ist zu viel. Ha! Allzufrecher Priester!</i>
	<b>No. 9 Finale:</b> <i>Hier pflanz ich Baals Panier</i>
<b>Act III</b>	
Scene 1	<b>No. 10 Entr'acte and Chorus:</b> <i>Vor den Thoren droht und höhnt</i>
Scene 2	<b>Dialogue</b> (17 lines): <i>Dieß ist der Ort</i>
Scene 3	<b>Dialogue</b> (29 lines): <i>Mein Vater!</i>
	<b>No. 11 Duettino:</b> <i>O Herr, was thust du?</i>
	<b>Dialogue</b> (4 lines): <i>Ich Joas?</i>
Scene 4	<b>Dialogue</b> (76 lines): <i>Hier siehst du uns</i>
Scene 5	<b>Dialogue</b> (27 lines): <i>Geliebtes Kind! Mein Sohn!</i>

<sup>372</sup> Mbs: St. th. 6-4.

<sup>373</sup> Included with the other performing materials under the shelfmark Mus. Hs. Opern 457.

	<b>No. 13 Chorus:</b> <i>Wachse, blühender Zweig</i>
Scene 6	<b>No. 14 Scene and Aria:</b> <i>O Herr der Herrlichkeit!</i>
	<b>Dialogue</b> (2 lines): <i>Athalia naht sich der heil'gen Schwelle</i>
Scene 7	<b>Dialogue</b> (18 lines): <i>Wie nun? Verführer du!</i>
	<b>Melodrama:</b> <i>Da ist das Kind</i>
Scene 8	<b>Dialogue</b> (11 lines): <i>Herr, der Tempel ist befreit!</i>
	<b>No. 15 Finale:</b> <i>Gott, du verläßt die Deinen nicht!</i>

**Table 5: *Athalia*, original version (1814)**

The missing Number 12 in Act III is the Ensemble Piece *So huldigt nun, ihr heiligen Leviten*, an extended piece of ceremonial music in which homage is paid to Joas and he swears to follow the Law. The scene is included in the Munich score in copyist A's hand but was obviously not performed at the premiere – pencil markings in the score indicate a cut, and none of the text appears in the printed 1814 libretto. As suggested above, this abridgement could have been made in order to spare the child performer. There were also good dramaturgical reasons for not slowing the opera down at this late point in proceedings. Some of this music was restored in the version Poissl prepared for Berlin in 1815, but in a shortened form.<sup>374</sup>

### Speech, song and melodrama

Within the structure outlined in Table 5 there is a strikingly high proportion of speech to song. Even discounting the passages of melodramatic speech within musical numbers, there are 438 lines of spoken dialogue.<sup>375</sup> Some of Poissl's decisions regarding the addition of music, far from indicating that he would rather have written a through-composed work, suggest that he actually favoured spoken dialogue over recitative. Two of the most dramatic passages in Act I, Josabeth's account of the rescue of Joas and Athalia's narration of her dream, both scenes which would seem to cry out for the added expressivity of music, are left in spoken form. We glimpse the rationale behind this in one of Poissl's letters to Wohlbrück:

I am still very undecided whether I should set Athalia's dream before the Terzetto in recitative, as it would be terribly long, and if Mme Geiger spoke it even halfway to your satisfaction then we could leave it in its original form.<sup>376</sup>

---

<sup>374</sup> The Berlin version was still without the Arioso for Joas.

<sup>375</sup> Most of these lines are iambic pentameters. The half-lines counted in Table 5 reflect lines that are split between the end of one scene and the start of the next.

<sup>376</sup> 'Ich bin noch sehr unentschieden, ob ich vor dem Terzett Athalias Traum in Rezitativ setze, denn es wird entsetzlich lang, und wenn die Geiger es nur halbwegs zu Ihrer Zufriedenheit spräche, so liessen wir's bey der ersten Anlage!' *Briefe*, p. 22 (27 July 1813). Geiger was the married name of Helene Harlas.

Speech is seen not just as a second-best alternative to recitative, but actually as potentially more effective.<sup>377</sup> The main reason given by Poissl is the greater concision of speech. Another reason may have been the perception that German singers could not deliver recitative clearly enough to convey complicated dramatic content. This is a concern voiced in other writings from the period. For example this could be one reason why, as we have seen, Spohr recommended retaining spoken dialogue if an opera had a complicated plot (Chapter 3). It was a problem reflected in a review of *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia*, performed in Stuttgart in 1816 with added recitatives:

*Der Wettkampf zu Olympia* has a plot that is much too convoluted to be easily understood – it is really a drama with singing – and when the words are completely incomprehensible, as is the case with most singers, then the listener is watching the progress of a plot that he does not understand, and remains dissatisfied.<sup>378</sup>

Harlas was considered a fine singing actress. However the details of Athalia's dream narration are so crucial to the audience's understanding that Poissl may have felt that this content was safer, more reliably comprehensible if delivered in spoken form.

If we look at this structure in more detail, it is clear that as in *Aucassin und Nicolette* Poissl has given careful thought to the transitions between speech and song. For example after the first long dialogue scene, in which Josabeth depicts her rescue of Joas, a continuing thought moves from spoken dialogue into recitative (Figure 59). Verbally this continuity is expressed by the first sung word ('And'). Musically, a smooth transition is achieved by the soft dynamic of the opening bars and by the hovering dominant seventh harmony, resolved only in bar 6. These five bars of unresolved harmony, together with the restless syncopations, also serve to characterise Josabeth's anxiety. We saw Poissl using similar techniques in *Aucassin und Nicolette*, starting musical numbers after dialogue with an extended dominant pedal (Figures 38 and 48).

---

<sup>377</sup> There is evidence that Poissl did compose the recitative version of Athalia's dream narration *Doch aus den Tiefen meiner eignen Seele* (Act I Sc 3) before the first performance, but decided not to use it in Munich. The Stuttgart and Frankfurt scores, both prepared before the revisions of 1815, contain it, and in both those theatres it was performed in 1815 as part of the dialogue version of the opera.

<sup>378</sup> 'Der Wettkampf von Olympia [sic] hat aber eine viel zu verschlungene Handlung, um leicht begriffen zu werden – eigentlich ist es ein Drama mit Gesang – wenn die Worte vollends nicht verstanden werden, wie es bey den meisten Sängern der Fall ist, so sieht der Zuhörer eine Handlung vorgehen, die er nicht versteht und bleibt unbefriedigt.' *MTJ*, 3 (1816), p. 2.

JOSABETH: And now I should not tremble, not be afraid for him, this last branch from the tree of David?

Allegro moderato

JOSABETH

Josabeth

Orchestra

Und ich soll jetzt nicht zit-tern, soll nicht

4

Jos.

za-gen? für ihn, den letz-ten Zweig aus Da-vids Stamm? Du willst mit

Orch.

Figure 59: *Athalia*, Recitative and Duet No. 2 (opening)

Building on another technique used in *Aucassin und Nicolette* (and inherited from Cherubini, see Chapter 4) Poissl also creates tension and continuity across passages of spoken dialogue by engineering a harmonic expectation at the end of a musical number which is only resolved at the start of the next. One example of this is the transition between No. 8, the Melodrama depicting Athalia's questioning of Joas, and No. 9, the Finale of Act II. After Joas's provocative last line ('What a father I would leave ... and for what a mother!'), the Melodrama closes with a sense that the final A major harmony is not a full resolution but a dominant (Figure 60).

ATHALIA (höhnisch): Ich sah mit Lust, wie ihr ihn unterrichtet.

(mit Haß im Blick) Eliakin, auf dir ruht meine Gnade. Laß dies Gewand und dies niedrige Geschäft.

Orch.

Die Fürstin bin ich, und bin kinderlos.

So folge mir, und sey in meinem Hause, wie mein eigener Sohn.

JOAS: Was wär ich als dein Sohn? Ach! Welchen Vater verließ ich dann -

ATHALIA: Nun -- JOAS: -- und für welche Mutter!

Allegro



Figure 60: *Athalia*, Melodrama No. 8 (end)

Twelve tense lines of dialogue between Athalia and Joad follow before the harmonic tension is resolved by the next musical number, which begins in D minor (Figure 61).

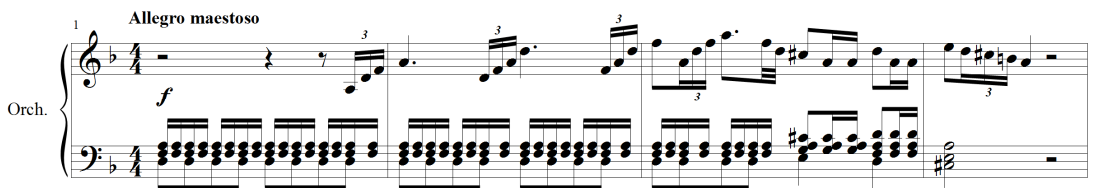
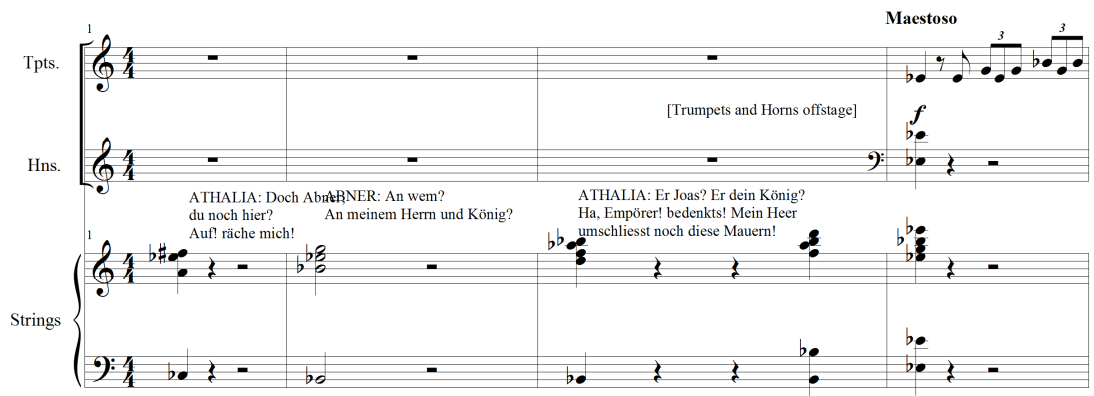


Figure 61: *Athalia*, Finale No. 9 (opening)

By this method the dialogue is incorporated into the ‘total effect’ not as an alien element separate from the music but as one framed and enhanced by musical tension.

There is a similar effect at the transition into the Finale of Act III. That is also preceded by a Melodrama, with an intervening dialogue scene. Athalia believes that she has tricked her opponents by surrounding the Temple. As she announces this the orchestral melodrama comes to a harmonic close in E flat major (Figure 62 bars 3-4). But the finality of this cadence is deceptive: the offstage fanfares, which Athalia believes come from her victorious soldiers, end on unresolved dominant harmony (bar 10).



The musical score for Figure 62 consists of three staves. The top staff is for Trumpets (Tpts.) in G-flat major, starting with a 5-measure rest followed by a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The middle staff is for Horns (Hns.) in G-flat major, starting with a 5-measure rest followed by a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The bottom staff is for the vocal line, with the text: ATHALIA: Hört ihr's? Es ruft nach mir! Man steht mir bei! Erzittert! The staff contains a 5-measure rest. A bracket labeled [Dialogue] spans the end of the Horns staff.

Figure 62: *Athalia*, Melodrama, Act III (end)

Ismael arrives and announces in a dialogue scene that, far from being victorious, Athalia's troops have been routed. The Finale then begins (Figure 63) with a dominant pedal which is a harmonic continuation of the interrupted fanfares.

The musical score for Figure 63 is for the opening of the finale. It features four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B) voices, a Chorus part, and an Orchestra (Orch.) part. The tempo is marked 'Allegro maestoso' and the time signature is 4/4. The key signature has two flats. The vocal parts enter with the text: 'Gott, Du ver-lässt die Dei - nen nicht!'. The orchestra provides a harmonic foundation with a dominant pedal point in the bass.

Figure 63: *Athalia*, Finale No. 15 (opening)

The 'total effect' is of one single, continuous musical and dramatic event despite the changes of register between melodrama, speech and song.

Poissl makes extensive and varied use of melodrama in *Athalia*. As in *Aucassin und Nicolette* it is used as a transitional texture between speech and song, capable of knitting together the different forms of utterance. Poissl follows the example of French *opéra comique* and deploys melodrama at moments of rising emotion, for example when Joad, after catechising Joas, reveals his royal identity to him (Figure 64). The scene moves from unaccompanied dialogue to melodrama and then (bar 9) to recitative.



[Dialogue]

JOAD: And would nothing lead you astray from the right path, as it did Joram and Ahasia?

JOAS: That was ingratitude – they deviated from God. Surely a child can never deny his father?

[Joad kneels before Joas. Music of No. 11 begins. Melodrama] <sup>379</sup>

JOAS [amazed]: My Lord, what are you doing? What moves you so?

JOAD: I pay homage to you, Joas my King! Be forever worthy of David your ancestor!

[Recitative]

JOAD: Blessed moment, have you appeared? Ah, to serve you my Lord, what happiness!

Andante

Orch.

JOAS: O Herr, was thust du? Was bewegt dich so?

JOAD: Ich huldige dir, Joas, meinem König! Sey immer Davids, deines Ahnhern werth.

JOAD

Se - li - ger Au - gen - blick! Bist du er - schie - nen? Ach! dir zu die - nen, Herr, welch ein

Figure 64: *Athalia*, Duettino No. 11 (opening)

After twelve bars this recitative itself gives way to a melodic duet for the two voices (Figure 65).

---

<sup>379</sup> [Dialogue] JOAD: Und würde dich nichts von dem rechten Pfad / Wie Joram und Ahasja einst verleiten? JOAS: Undankbar ist's, sie wichen ab von Gott; – / Kann denn ein Kind den Vater je verläugnen? (Joad kniet vor Joas nieder). [Music begins]. Frankfurt MS dialogue book, p. 36.

JOAS: Father, I cannot grasp your ways, but I will never abandon you, and will remain in humility eternally your child.

JOAD: Eternal Father, complete your task with Jacob's people. Your servant places it in all humility in your hands.

JOAS  
Va - ter! Ich kann es nicht fas - sen, Was Dei - ne We - ge mir sind. Doch

JOAD  
E - wi - ger Va - ter, voll - en - de Dein Werk an Ja - kobs Ge - schlecht, In

Orch.

5  
nim - mer will ich dich las - sen, E - wig in De - muth Dein Kind.

JOAD  
Dei - ne hei - li - gen Hän - de legt es in De - muth Dein Knecht, legt es

Orch.

Figure 65: *Athalia*, Duet No. 11 (continuation)

This sequence shows Poissl using speech and music, graded in different textures from unaccompanied spoken dialogue via melodrama and recitative to full melody, in order to trace a psychological and dramatic process – Joas's realisation of who he is and the resulting transformation of his relationship with Joad. The dramatic continuity is underlined by the use of a recurring triplet motif in the accompaniment of melodrama, recitative and duet, and finally (Figure 65 bar 8) in the vocal lines.

Melodrama is also used as a means of characterisation in its own right, not just as a transition between other registers. We see this in the treatment of Joas, several of whose scenes are set melodramatically. Poissl's use of melodrama was partly determined by practicality – he was worried that a child would not be able to sing recitative. But it also has the effect of setting Joas apart from the rest of the *dramatis personae* and emphasising his quasi-divine status. Poissl was later to present this as a deliberate artistic choice, not a compromise born of necessity:

Back then the melodramatic treatment of the boy's role seemed absolutely necessary in order to place this character in the appropriate light, and the resulting effect justified my thinking.<sup>380</sup>

This echoes a statement by Hoffmann that a judicious use of melodrama could 'heighten the romantic atmosphere'.<sup>381</sup> As Siegfried Goslich has pointed out, melodrama came to be associated in German Romantic opera with the miraculous.<sup>382</sup> Later this generally meant the magical or even the diabolical (as for instance in the the *Wolfsschlucht* [Wolf's Glen] scene in *Der Freischütz*). The melodramatic textures which frame Joas in *Athalia* are a signal of divine salvation, but can be seen as an early example of the same tendency to associate accompanied speech with the supernatural and other-worldly. As Poissl himself suggests in the letter quoted above, it is as if Joas is bathed in his own distinctive musical light. This distinctiveness is reinforced rather than undermined by the fact that in his crucial encounter with Athalia, the Queen also speaks melodramatically. This makes dramatic sense given Athalia's supplicant position at this point in the story. Troubled and puzzled by the boy, her only option is to communicate with this holy innocent in his own manner, in other words in 'his' register of melodramatic speech.

### **Characteristic motifs (I): direct and indirect reminiscences**

Like his graded use of speech and song, Poissl's use of reminiscence and recurring motifs can also be seen as an inheritance from French operatic models. Musical motifs which acquired 'character', or associations with particular aspects of the dramatic narrative, became an increasingly common part of the musical vocabulary of German composers in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Spohr's *Faust*, composed almost simultaneously with *Athalia* in 1813 but not performed until 1816, employs motifs first stated in the Overture to denote specific dramatic elements in the opera that follows. Well-known examples from the next ten years are Hoffmann's *Undine* (1816) Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821) and *Euryanthe* (1823) and Spohr's *Jessonda* (1823). The phenomenon was also increasingly referred to in German writings on music. Spohr himself pointed to the

---

<sup>380</sup> 'Damals schien mir die melodramatische Behandlung der Rolle des Knaben absolut notwendig, um diesen Charakter in das ihm gebührende Licht zu stellen, und die Wirkung, die daraus hervorging, rechtfertigte meine Idee.' Open letter to *Der Gesellschafter* (17 March 1817), reprinted in *Briefe*, p. 62.

<sup>381</sup> Hoffmann, Letter to Count von Soden (1808) in *Schriften zur Musik*, p. 17.

<sup>382</sup> Siegfried Goslich, *Die deutsche romantische Oper* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1975), p. 391.

programmatic nature of the themes in his *Faust* overture.<sup>383</sup> Weber pointed out internal motivic connections in this and several other contemporary operas.<sup>384</sup>

When Poissl was writing *Athalia* the precedents for the use of characteristic motifs were mostly French, and predominantly to be found in *opéra comique*. In Grétry's *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* (1784) for instance, the nine reprises of Blondel's song, carefully varied by the composer to fit each individual situation, acquire significance as a symbol of Richard's eventual rescue. In Cherubini's *Les deux journées* (1800) repetitions of a song, the 'Little Savoyard', also function as a symbol of rescue. In Méhul's *Ariodant* (1799), amongst other motivic processes, there is an orchestral 'cry of rage' which connects several musical numbers with related dramatic content.<sup>385</sup> German composers found in this technique a vehicle for their ideas both of 'characterisation' and of the 'total effect', the integration of musical elements across the span of an opera. We have noted Poissl's deployment of motifs in *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and *Merope* in 'characteristic' association with certain characters and aspects of the drama (Chapter 4). It is perhaps no coincidence that following his exploration of *opéra comique* in *Aucassin und Nicolette* we should see in his next opera, *Athalia*, a full flowering of motivic techniques.

At the most explicit end of the motivic spectrum, Poissl uses the direct repeat of music and text together. This is what Wörner<sup>386</sup> would call a 'direct reminiscence motif', comparable to Figaro's quotation of his own song 'se vuol ballare' in *Le nozze di Figaro*. Thus Joad's phrase from Act I 'Gott, Du verlässt die Deinen nicht!' ['God, you will not forsake your people'] is repeated by the Chorus in Act III to the same melody (Figure 66, cf. Figure 63). Poissl intended his audience to notice the repetition: in the printed libretto for the 1828 Munich revival the reprised line (Figure 63) was marked 'With a reminiscence from the Finale of Act I'.<sup>387</sup>

---

<sup>383</sup> See Clive Brown, 'Spohr, Faust and Leitmotiv', in *The Musical Times*, 125 (1984), pp. 25-27.

<sup>384</sup> Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, pp. 114 (of Dalayrac's *Léhéman*), 270 (of *Athalia*), 275 (of *Faust*), 297 (of Cherubini's *Lodoïska*). Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, pp. 83, 185, 193, 234.

<sup>385</sup> Robert T. Laudon, *Sources of the Wagnerian synthesis. A Study of the Franco-German Tradition in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Opera* (Salzburg: Katzwichler, 1979), pp. 32-33.

<sup>386</sup> Wörner, Karl, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Leitmotivs in der Oper', in *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, 14 (1932), pp. 151-172.

<sup>387</sup> 'Mit einer Reminiscenz aus dem Finale des ersten Actes'. *Athalia* libretto (1828), p. 57.

Maestoso

Joad

*f* Gott, Du verlässt die Deinen nicht!

Orch.

*ff*

Figure 66: *Athalia*, Finale No. 4

All Poissl's other motivic reminiscences fall into the category Wörner called 'indirect reminiscence motifs', in that the original text is not sung. Within this category however Poissl uses a very wide range of techniques. There is for example the repeat of a melody where similar sentiments are expressed, but different words are used. In Act I Joad reassures the anxious Josabeth (Figure 67).

JOAD: Jehovah's word is like a rock. One can build on it boldly.

Allegro moderato

$\bullet = 69$   $\bullet = 100$

Joad

Je - ho - vas Wort ist Fel - sen-grund, kühn läßt dar-auf sich bau - en.

Orchestra

*mf* *p*

Figure 67: *Athalia*, Duet No. 2

In the Finale of Act I Athalia demands to enter the inner sanctum of the Temple. For Joad this is an act of desecration, but he again expresses faith in God's justice, and allows the Queen to enter (Figure 68).

JOAD: What dwells in my bosom is eternally true – come, clear her way to the altar!

The musical score for Figure 68 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the vocal part, Joad, in bass clef with a common time signature. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 69, then changes to quarter note = 92. The lyrics are: "Was mir im Bu - sen lebt ist e - wig wahr; auf! öff - net ihr den Weg zu dem Al - tar!". The bottom staff is for the Orchestra, in treble and bass clefs with a common time signature. It includes dynamic markings *p*, *mf*, and *f*.

Figure 68: *Athalia*, Finale No. 4

The same music returns once again just before the final chorus of the opera. Joad’s faith has been vindicated, and he praises God ‘who now fulfils what His word promised to us’ (Figure 69).

The musical score for Figure 69 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the vocal part, Joad, in bass clef with a common time signature. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 92. The lyrics are: "der nun er - füllt, was uns sein Wort ver - heis - sen!". The bottom staff is for the Orchestra, in treble and bass clefs with a common time signature. It includes a dynamic marking *mf*.

Figure 69: *Athalia*, Finale No. 15

The sung text differs in each case, as does the continuation of the melody after the third bar, but the sentiment remains the same – trust in God and all will be well – and this connection is underlined by the near-identical music. Although this is an ‘indirect’ reminiscence, i.e. not as explicit as the repeated text and music in Figures 66 and 63, there is evidence that here too in practice the audience was led towards recognising the musical connection across three separate musical numbers. The metronome markings in Figures 67 and 68 are taken from the Berlin score and reflect actual performance practice.<sup>388</sup> We see that in both passages the first phrase was taken at a slower tempo than the second. This would

---

<sup>388</sup> Figure 69, though performed in the original Munich version, was omitted in Berlin.

emphasise the motto-like, sententious nature of the words and draw attention to the musical self-quotation.<sup>389</sup>

As noted, Poissl's 'indirect' reminiscences are impressively varied in type. They range from this kind of very explicit self-quotation to recurring musical gestures which can barely have been perceptible to the original audience. Though much more subtle, these will still have been intended at some level as contributions to 'characterisation' and the 'total effect'.

Again at the more explicit end of this scale is the accompaniment to the melodrama in Act II. In Figures 67, 68 and 69 we saw a common dramatic content characterised by identical music, but sung to varying texts. In the melodrama Poissl conveys his dramatic message slightly more subliminally, by reprising music that has previously been sung and thus imbued with specific dramatic content, but without using text at all in the reminiscence. The interrogation of Joas by Athalia is accompanied by orchestral quotations from religious music heard earlier in the opera. Though wordless, these phrases still carry associations of their original sung texts. Thus, near the start of the melodrama Josabeth tries to protect the child by answering Athalia's questions on his behalf. As Athalia demands that the child should answer for himself, the orchestra refers in melodic fragments (Figure 70 bars 1-2, 4-5, 7-9) to a prayer sung by Joas's fellow altar boys in Act I. This, appropriately to the current conversation, invoked the artless speech of children (Figure 71).

JOSABETH: Till now, heaven has...

ATHALIA: I am asking the boy himself. Why are you trying to reply in his place?

JOSABETH: He is so young. What explanation can you expect from such a youth?

ATHALIA: There is truth in the mouth of a child, so I demand that the boy speak!

JOSABETH: God, send down your wisdom upon him!

Orch. *p* [Woodwind]

JOSABETH: Der Himmel hat bis jetzt -  
ATHALIA: Ich frag ihn selbst,  
Was drängst zur Antwort du statt seiner dich?

JOSABETH: Er ist so jung, was für Erläuterung  
Kannst du von solcher Jugend hoffen?  
ATHALIA: Es liegt die Wahrheit in des Kindes Munde,  
Drum will ich, daß der Knabe rede!

Orch. *mf* [Strings]

JOSABETH: Gott! deine Weisheit send' auf ihn hernieder!

ATHALIA: Wie heißest du?

Figure 70: *Athalia*, Melodrama No. 8

<sup>389</sup> These metronome markings (seventy-nine annotations in Act I alone) must have been added to the score at the latest before the last Berlin revival of *Athalia* in January 1820, and possibly as early as the first performances there in 1817. As such they represent specific evidence of theatrical practice, and indicate many more variations of tempo than are given by the basic markings in the score. Bs: Mus. ms. 11715.

ALTAR BOYS: May the stammering of Thy children be pleasing to Thee.

The musical score is for a duet by Altar Boys. It features two vocal parts: Soprano (S) and Alto (A), and an orchestral accompaniment (Orch.). The tempo is marked [Andantino]. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "Lass Dei-ner Kin-der Lal - len Dir wohl ge - fal - - - len! Lass". The orchestration includes dynamics such as *pp*, *fz*, *p*, and *fz*.

Figure 71: Athalia, Boys' Chorus in Duet No. 2

The accompaniment of the melodrama has other such wordless references to texts previously sung. In the middle of the melodrama scene itself, Joas sings a two-verse *Romanze* about his adopted parents and his happy existence in the Temple. He declares that proclaiming the glory of God in the Temple is 'the highest goal' for which he yearns (Figure 72). When shortly afterwards Athalia (rather superfluously after this *Romanze*) asks the boy how he occupies himself, he replies that 'they instruct me in God's Law, teaching me to understand His holy word. I can already write it.' In the background the melody of the *Romanze* reinforces his reply (Figure 73).

The musical score is for Joas's *Romanze*. It features a vocal part for Joas and an orchestral accompaniment (Orch.). The tempo is marked JOAS. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: "Ist mei - ner Sehn - sucht höch - stes Ziel, Ist mei - ner Sehn - sucht höch - stes Ziel." The orchestration includes dynamics such as *fz* and *pp*.

Figure 72: Athalia, Joas's Romanze in Melodrama No. 8

The musical score is for Melodrama No. 8. It features an orchestral accompaniment (Orch.). The tempo is marked JOAS: Man unterweist mich in Gottes Recht, Verstehen lehrt man mich sein heilig Wort, Schon kann ich's schreiben. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The orchestration includes dynamics such as *pp*.

Figure 73: Athalia, Melodrama No. 8



Towards the end of the scene Athalia suggests that Baal and Jehovah are of equal status. Joas corrects her: ‘The Lord alone is God, and none other! Your god is and remains merely an idol’. The melody in the orchestra is also an affirmation of the true faith. It is a variant of the hymn ‘Gott Israels’ which was heard in Act I (Figure 74, cf. Figure 55).

Moderato  
Orch. *mf*  
JOAS: Der Herr allein ist Gott, und keiner mehr!  
Der Deine ist und bleibt nur ein Götze.

Figure 74: *Athalia*, Melodrama No. 8

The melodrama’s accompaniment also includes an example of a characteristic motif that was never anything but instrumental, and thus was never linked to specific words. However from its previous dramatic context it is associated with a particular dramatic idea, the anger and judgement of God. In the Finale of Act I Joad sings of the thunder and lightning that accompanied God’s descent from Mount Sinai (Figure 75).

JOAD: Its glowing summit loomed out of the cloudy night. Trumpets sounded to proclaim the Lord and his power, lightning and thunder came forth in his path and smoky vapour streamed out as he came near. Was he approaching in anger? Was he coming in judgement? No, he came in love.

[Moderato]  
Joad  
Orch.  
Joad  
Orch.  
JOAD  
se-hen. Es droht sein glü-hend Haupt aus wol-ken-dich-ter Nacht, Po-saun-ton kün-de-te den Herrn und sei-ne  
Macht, Und Blitz und Don-ner-sturm ging aus vor sei-nem Pfad, Und Rauch-dampf ström-te, da er sich ge-

Figure 75: Athalia, Finale No. 4

The passage is interesting in its own right as a piece of orchestral characterisation, both literal and abstract. The string tremolo serves its traditional purpose as a signifier of dramatic tension, but is also as an illustration of the stormy vapours described in the text. The repeated woodwind figure, with its jagged outline and chromatically raised first note, is an illustration of the lightning. However in a slightly modified form, *forte* and with a trill on the first note, it also becomes associated with the more abstract concept of Jehovah's anger (bars 9-10). In this form it reappears in the Joas/Athalia melodrama (Figure 76). Athalia asks the boy what the word of God is. As she asks the question, the motif of divine anger is quietly played in rhythmic augmentation in the orchestra (bar 1). When Joas replies, invoking God's punishment of sinners, his spoken phrases are punctuated by the same motif, now at its original speed, on basset horn and bassoon (bars 2-4). Again there are string tremolos, this time representing the tension of the onlookers as Joas's innocent replies touch on the very sins of which Athalia herself is guilty: blasphemy, pride and murder.

ATHALIA: And what does this word say?

JOAS: That God loves those who honour His name, punishes sooner or later those who blaspheme against it, casts down the proud and punishes the murderer.

ATHALIA (aside): Very well, I understand!

Figure 76: Athalia, Melodrama No. 8

A similar process of repetition and adaptation can be observed in the case of an orchestral motif associated with Athalia's desire for revenge. This returns in adapted form when this desire is frustrated. In the last section of her *scena* in Act II, Athalia sings that she will reach her goal, the downfall of Jehovah and his Temple, 'as rapidly as burning fire' (Figure 77).

Allegro molto

Athalia

Orch.

*p*

ATHALIA

Ath.

Rasch wie des Feuers Gluthen Will ich zum

Orch.

Figure 77: Athalia, Scene and Aria No. 6

At the end of the opera Athalia realises that her plans have come to nothing. Joas, whom she believed dead, has survived and reclaimed his kingdom. It is not Jehovah's temple which has been destroyed but Baal's. The accompaniment figure of Figure 77 returns, but in the minor key. A crescendo mirrors Athalia's growing realisation of failure, and the orchestral motif itself disintegrates into fragments (Figure 78).

ATHALIA (with cold despair, not looking at anyone except Joas): You are victorious, God of Israel! Yes, Joas lives! This is Ahaziah's son!

Allegro assai

(Athalia mit der Kälte der Verzweiflung, ohne jemanden außer Joas anzusehen)

Orch.

*p*

*cresc.*

Athalia

Du siegst, Gott Isra-els! Ja! Jo-as lebt! Es ist A-ha-sias Sohn! Ver

Orch.

*f* *p*

Figure 78: *Athalia*, Finale No. 15

Poissl's recurring motifs, here and elsewhere in *Athalia*, generally have a rhythmic and a melodic profile, both of which are re-stated on repetition. However, one of his most expressive re-uses of a 'characteristic' musical feature involves a purely rhythmical gesture. In this respect it is perhaps the most elusive of his motifs for the listener, the one least likely to be consciously perceived as a 'reminiscence'. Nonetheless it does acquire 'characterising' force, in that it is consistently associated with a particular dramatic idea. The rhythm is the slow 12/8 metre which is first heard in Act II when Joas is led onto the stage to meet Abner (Figure 79). This encounter with the boy has a revelatory quality for Abner. He is deeply moved for reasons he does not comprehend and asks if this is a 'sign from the Lord'.<sup>390</sup>

Andante  
[Violin solo]

Orch.

*p dolce*

JOAS

Der Gott, der in des Kin-des sanf-ten Zü-gen ein

Orch.

Figure 79: *Athalia*, Recitative and Quartet No. 7

All the appearances of moderate 12/8 rhythm in the piece have an association with Joas and the future redemption that he embodies. Had the premiere used the recitative version of

---

<sup>390</sup> 'Ha, wie der Anblick mich bewegt! Ist's Wink des Herrn?'

Athalia's dream narration in Act I,<sup>391</sup> this association would have been established earlier on. When the boy, as yet unnamed, is revealed in Athalia's dream, the moment is marked by a flute solo in 12/8 time (Figure 80).

ATHALIA: Now a beautiful boy stood before my eyes. He was dressed like the priests of Judah. His fair appearance caused me to reflect.

Figure 80: *Athalia*, Athalia's dream narration, Act I (recitative version)

When the boy re-appears in Act II to be interrogated by Athalia, he enters to music (Figure 81) of a very similar texture to Figure 79.

Figure 81: *Athalia*, Melodrama No. 8

In Act III when Joas discovers his true identity, it is also accompanied by 12/8 rhythm (Figure 64). When Joad, in mid-recitative, quotes Jehovah's promise of deliverance, the strings frame the divine words with this rhythm<sup>392</sup> (Figure 82).

---

<sup>391</sup> Poissl does appear to have composed this in time for the premiere but not used it (see discussion in 'Speech, song and melodrama' above).

JOAD: The time will come when all my enemies are defeated. When that time is accomplished I will give you a sign.

[Recitative]  
JOAD  
Es kommt die Zeit, da mei - ne Fein - de weichen. Ist sie er - füllt, so geb ich dir ein Zei - chen.

Figure 82: *Athalia*, Finale No. 9

The introduction to Joad's Scene and Aria *O Herr der Herrlichkeit*, an ecstatic vision of the future Messiah, also incorporates the 12/8 rhythm (Figure 7.31).

Andante quasi Larghetto  
1 [Clarinet solo]  
5

Figure 83: *Athalia*, Scene and Aria No. 14 (opening)

Just as the melodramatic textures used for Joas place the boy in what Poissl called his 'appropriate light', so this rhythm acquires 'characteristic' associations through its repeated use in parallel dramatic contexts. This is perhaps the subtlest manifestation in the piece of the motivic principle identified by Weber, in which the characteristic associations of a particular motif are revealed by repetition. It is through these repetitions that, in Weber's words, the listener's dramatic understanding of a musical gesture moves from 'hint' to 'certainty' (Chapter 3).

---

<sup>392</sup> The original Munich score gives no tempo indication, but marks added to the Berlin score (in two different hands) give performing tempi of *Andante* and crotchet = 76.

### Characteristic motifs (II): the integrated overture

As in almost all of Poissl's operas, there are motivic connections between the opera and the overture. We know from a letter to Wohlbrück that Poissl postponed composition of *Athalia's* overture until he could consult his librettist in person. He obviously saw the overture as an integral part of the opera's dramatic structure. The overture he eventually wrote is closely connected to the opera by motifs associated with the title character. These (A and B) form part of the first subject group of the Overture's *Allegro molto* (Figure 84).

[Allegro molto]

Orch. *f*

A

B

Figure 84: *Athalia*, Overture

Within the opera these two motivic cells re-appear unchanged, but also spawn a number of other, related 'Athalia' motifs. These vary in their individual form, but have a strong family resemblance in rhythm, texture and melodic contour. So the first music sung by Athalia herself in the 1814 premiere, the Terzetto with Abner and Mathan, begins with a driving accompaniment motif (C) which we have not heard in this exact form but which is clearly rhythmically related to B (Figure 85).

Allegro agitato

Ath. ATHALIA

Ach, daß der Wurm in Bu - sen schlie - fe, den Traum und Le - ben mir ge - bar! Dem Gott der

Orch. *p*

C

Figure 85: *Athalia*, Terzetto No. 3

The close motivic relationship is made explicit later in the Terzetto when the accompaniment changes first into a more explicit version of B (Figure 86 bars 1-2 and 4-5),

and then into another version of C (Figure 87) which separates the quaver figure in C's middle voices (bars 1 and 2) from the syncopated rhythm that overlays it (bar 3), and plays them one after the other.

MATHAN  
1  
Math. Gleich ei-ner Zau-ber-höh-le ver-  
Orch. *mf* *p* *mf*

**Figure 86: Athalia, Terzetto No. 3**

ATHALIA  
1  
Ath. fast will der Muth mir sin-ken,  
ABNER  
Abn. Ein Gott soll sie be- - - ra-then, der Las- - - - ter  
Orch. *p*

**Figure 87: Athalia, Terzetto No. 3**

The recitative version of Athalia's dream narration, preceding this Terzetto and probably composed for the premiere though omitted, also begins with a variant of C's middle voices (Figure 88 bar 1) and of the syncopated upper voice of B and C (bar 2).

Allegro molto  
1  
Ath. ATHALIA  
Doch aus den Tie-fen mei-ner eig-nen See-le steigt ein Phan-  
Orch. *mf*

**Figure 88: Athalia, Athalia's dream narration, Act I (recitative version)**

We also encounter these motifs in a number that does not involve Athalia in person, but is about her. At the beginning of Act II Athalia's worried underlings sing how 'trouble and disaster are brewing in the Queen's eyes' (Figure 89). The accompaniment figure (bars 1



and 5) and the syncopated Chorus entry (bar 3) are close relatives of the Athalia motifs established in Act I.<sup>393</sup>

[Allegro molto] ATTENDANTS OF ATHALIA  
S  
A  
Un - heil und Ver - der - ben brü - ten  
Orch. fz

Figure 89: Athalia, Entr'acte and Chorus No. 5

A minor-key variant of A introduces Athalia's Scene and Aria later in the Act (Figure 90 bars 1-2, cf. Figure 84 bars 1-4).

Allegro ATHALIA  
Ath. Nein! Die Ver-  
Orch. fz mf

Figure 90: Athalia, Scene and Aria No. 6 (opening)

Another orchestral figure, repeated several times later in the scene, is clearly related to this in its melodic contour and 'scrubbed' semiquaver texture (Figure 91 bars 1-2, cf. Figure 90 bars 1-2).

Moderato ATHALIA  
Ath. Ge - rätchet hab ich Va-ter, Mut-ter, Brü-der, selbst die nicht  
Orch. p f p f

Figure 91: Athalia, Scene and Aria No. 6

<sup>393</sup> Further occurrences of these motifs can be found in the Finale of Act I, at Athalia's entry and at her line 'Schweig! Opfern will ich hier und beten.' ['Be silent! I wish to make sacrifice and pray here'].

So the motifs heard in the Overture prove in the opera to be strongly associated with Athalia herself, and in particular with her anger. Retrospectively it acquires a programmatic quality, as a representation of the title character and her rage. Weber wrote of Spohr's overture to *Faust* that it 'only becomes fully intelligible after one has heard the opera',<sup>394</sup> and something similar could be said of the overture to *Athalia*. In fact it can be understood, like the overture of *Aucassin und Nicolette*, as a contribution to the narrative itself, a representation of the usurper raging outside the Temple walls. The calm of the opening scene inside the Temple, with its choruses of youths and maidens, is only fully effective through its contrasting juxtaposition with this overture.

Poissl later revised the *Athalia* Overture, probably for the piece's 1828 revival, and while his revisions slightly altered the implied dramatic content, they did confirm that he saw the piece as programmatic.<sup>395</sup> Many of his changes were refinements of rhythm and instrumentation, reflecting the more experienced composer he had become by the mid-1820s. However, more than a decade after the victory over Napoleon he also chose to give the overture a more explicitly triumphal message. He replaced the rather characterless second subject of the 1814 version, not reprised in the opera itself, with a theme associated in the opera with the Hebrews' victory. In the Finale of Act I this theme is sung to the words 'God tends and protects the children of Jacob' (Figure 92).

Allegro assai

The musical score is for the finale of Act I of the opera *Athalia*. It is marked 'Allegro assai'. The score is divided into three systems. The first system contains the vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are: 'Gott hegt und schüt-zet Ja-kobs Kin-der, Gott hegt und'. The second system contains the vocal parts with the lyrics: 'Gott hegt und schüt-zet Ja-kobs Kin-der,'. The third system contains the orchestral part (Orch.), marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The orchestration features a prominent melody in the upper strings, likely violins, with a steady accompaniment in the lower strings and woodwinds.

---

<sup>394</sup> 'In dieser Beziehung wird die effektvolle Ouvertüre erst nach dem Anhören der Oper ganz verständlich.' Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 275. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 193.

<sup>395</sup> MS score (Mbs) St. th. 6-2.

6

S  
A  
Ch.  
T  
B  
Orch.

schüt - zet Ja - kobs Kin - der. Und  
Gott hegt und schüt - zet Ja - kobs Kin - der. Und

6

*cresc.*

**Figure 92: *Athalia*, Finale No. 4**

As if to emphasise the triumphalist programme, in the revised overture this theme is introduced both in the exposition and the recapitulation by the ‘victory’ fanfare heard in Acts I and III (Figure 93 bars 1-6, cf. Figures 63 and 66).

1

[Allegro molto]  
[Trumpets]

Orch.

[f] *ff* [Tutti] *mf*

8

**Figure 93: *Athalia*, Overture (revised version)**

Now more closely connected to the opera than ever by characteristic motifs, the overture becomes a programmatic representation of the whole story, including its liberating outcome.

### Characteristic keys

In the scene of Polifonte’s death in *Merope*, the most harmonically adventurous of Poissl’s early works, we saw him using the progression between dark and light keys as an element of psychological characterisation (Chapter 4 and Supplementary Volume, pp. 10-13). Similar processes can be seen in *Athalia*. For example, Joad’s decription of God’s thunderous descent from Mount Sinai passes through a series of flat keys (F minor, B flat minor, C minor, D minor) while the fear of divine judgement is in the air (Figure 75). When God’s

benign intentions are revealed, the vapour clears and an enharmonic modulation takes the music by way of C major into the even brighter key of E major (Figure 94 bars 4-8).

JOAD: Was he approaching in anger? Was he coming in judgement? No, he came in love. The eternal one was not angry!

**Figure 94: Athalia, Finale No. 4**

In addition to this use of key relationships and key changes to express dramatic processes, in *Athalia* we also see an awareness that keys could be ‘characteristic’ in themselves, not just in harmonic juxtaposition with each other. In his *Ansichten* of 1841 Poissl names the ‘choice of basic key’ among a composer’s most important aesthetic decisions.<sup>396</sup> While individual interpretations of key characteristics differed, there was a general consensus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that each key did have an individual character, appropriate to certain areas of subject-matter. The logical consequence of this for German operatic aesthetics was that the appropriate key was as important an element of ‘dramatic truth’ as other musical elements such as vocal declamation, tempo and instrumentation. Rita Steblin<sup>397</sup> has given a useful overview of the debates on this subject during Poissl’s formative years, noting in particular the popularity of C. F. D. Schubart’s *Charakteristik der Töne* (see also Chapter 3) and the theories of Poissl’s mentor G. J. Vogler. In *Athalia* Poissl does not stick slavishly to any one of these systems, but we do find him making key choices that are obviously carefully considered and strongly informed by tradition and

<sup>396</sup> *Ansichten*, p. 114.

<sup>397</sup> Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1981, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1996).

aesthetic theory. If there is a congruence with any one particular theorist it is with Schubart and his subjective, 'Romantic' associations of tonalities with specific ideas. For instance the opening sequence of the opera, with its Choruses of youths and maidens in the Temple, is in A major, and perfectly reflects the 'youthful cheerfulness and trust in God' which Schubart associates with this key (Figure 53).<sup>398</sup> When, in the Finale of Act I (a piece in the overall key of C major), the Chorus invoke these very ideas of youth and faith, they also do so in A major until this music is interrupted and dragged into another key by bad news (Figure 95).

CHORUS: As pious children go to their Father, so may we, full of faith, look to Heaven.

Figure 95: *Athalia*, Finale No. 4

A major is the key in which Joas appears to Athalia in the recitative version of her dream (Figure 80) and the key in which his divine kingship is revealed to him by Joad (Figures 64 and 65). It is also the key of an Arioso Poissl composed for Joas himself in Act III but cut before the premiere (Figure 96).<sup>399</sup> The sung line is marked 'solemnly but childishly'.

---

<sup>398</sup> '[...] jugendliche Heiterkeit, und Gottesvertrauen'. Schubart, p. 379.

<sup>399</sup> Unlike some of the material cut before the premiere (see below), this Arioso was not included in later scores.

JOAS: By God's word and God's power I swear to be faithful to Him. Guarded by His spirit I shall dedicate myself to His people.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is for Joas (soprano) and the orchestra. The tempo is 'Andante ma non troppo'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major). The lyrics are: 'Bei Got - tes Wort, bey Got - tes Macht schwör ich ihm'. The second system continues the vocal line and orchestra. The lyrics are: 'treu zu seyn. Ich will von sei - nem Geist be - wacht mich sei - nem Vol - ke weihn.' The orchestral part includes a *pp* (pianissimo) marking.

**Figure 96: Athalia, Arioso in Ensemble-Stück No. 12**

B flat major, associated by Schubart with 'cheerful love, clear conscience, hope, yearning for a better world', is used for Joad's declaration of faith 'Jehovas Wort ist Felsengrund', a passage which leads to a duet for him and Josabeth in the same key (No. 2). The motto phrase itself is re-iterated elsewhere in the opera as we have seen, and always in B flat major (Figures 67, 68 and 69). Indeed so often does this key return in slow music expressing the piety of Joad and Josabeth that Poissl risks tonal monotony. It is the key of Josabeth's Arioso 'O Herr, vergib mein Zagen' in No. 1, of the Quartet 'Mit uns ist Gott' (No. 7), and of Joad's Prayer 'Nahen die verheissnen Zeiten' in the Act II Finale (No. 9).

The Act II Finale begins in D minor. At this point in the opera Athalia, unsettled by her encounter with Joas, takes revenge on the Jews by planting Baal's banner in the sacred ground of the Temple. This action reflects established 'characteristics' of this key, associated by Mozart and others with the idea of vengeance,<sup>400</sup> and by Schubart with a specifically female form of dejection breeding 'spleen and vapours'.<sup>401</sup> D major, traditionally the key of triumph and military success, ends the same Finale after a divine thunderbolt has destroyed the banner, to the joy of Joad and his people. The associations of this key are older than Schubart, but his description is eloquent:

<sup>400</sup> Examples are the damnation scene in *Don Giovanni* and the Queen of the Night's second aria 'Der Hölle Rache' in *Die Zauberflöte*. Goslich (p. 417) notes an established eighteenth-century tradition of revenge arias in D minor.

<sup>401</sup> 'Schwermüthige Weiblichkeit, die Spleen und Dünste brütet'. Schubart, p. 377.

The key of triumph, of “Halleluia”, of war-cries, of victory celebrations. For this reason one sets introductory sinfonias, marches, festival songs and choruses that rejoice to the heavens in this key.<sup>402</sup>

Vogler’s description relates even more specifically to the thunderbolt:

D [major] casts fire into men’s hearts. Now the whole body is enlivened, the spirit rises to heroic acts and is roused to bold, joyful, even somewhat wild songs of praise. The God of Thunder too has a claim to this key.<sup>403</sup>

*Athalia*’s ‘introductory sinfonia’, or overture, ends in this key too, a fact which underlines its programmatic closeness to the victorious tale told in the opera.

If proof were needed that Poissl knew Schubart’s *Charakterisik*, we find it at the moment in *Athalia*’s Scene and Aria (No. 6) where the Queen contemplates suicide (Figure 97). For eight bars the music is in the rare key of B flat minor, to which Schubart ascribes very particular characteristics:

Mockeries of God and the world, discontent with oneself and everything else, and the preparation for suicide all resound in this key.<sup>404</sup>

Other eighteenth-century writers such as Rousseau identify B flat minor as a gloomy key (unsurprisingly since it is so far to the ‘dark’, flat side of the tonal circle). However it is Schubart who introduces the specific idea of suicide. By the time *Athalia* articulates this thought herself in the second stanza, Poissl’s music has moved into the tonic major, but the preparatory emotions are there in the first four lines, in Schubart’s ‘preparation for suicide’ key.

ATHALIA: Oh vengeful conscience, you have done this to me. You attack my innermost life with your serpent bites.

Adagio

ATHALIA

Ath. O räch - en-des Ge - wis - sen! Du hast mir das ge - than, du fällst mit Schlan-gen-

Orch. *p*

<sup>402</sup> ‘Der Ton des *Triumphes*, des *Hallelujas*, des *Kriegsgeschrey*’s, des *Siegsjubels*. Daher setzt man die einladenden Symphonien, die Märsche, Festtagsgesänge, und himmelaufjauchzenden Chöre in diesen Ton.’ Schubart, p. 379.

<sup>403</sup> ‘Das D wirft Feuer in die Herzen. Nun wird der ganze Körper belebt, der Geist schwingt sich zu Heldenthaten, wird zu frechen, freudigen, ja etwas ausgelassenen Lobgesängen aufgemuntert. Auch der Donnergott hat Anspruch auf diesen Ton.’ Quoted in Steblin, p. 127.

<sup>404</sup> ‘Moquerien gegen Gott und die Welt; Mißvergnügen mit sich und allem; Vorbereitung zum Selbstmord – hallen in diesem Tone.’ Schubart, p. 378.

Ath.  
bis - sen mein inn-res Le - ben an! Kann dich mein Tod ver - söh - nen; und

Orch.

**Figure 97: Athalia, Scene and Aria No. 6**

In Joas's two songs 'Wenn die Weihrauchsäule' (in No.4, F major) and 'Nach meines Gottes Ebenbild' (in No. 8, C major, Figure 72) the keys seem to have been determined less by their particular associations than by the convention that simple, childish characters have simple keys, i.e. ones not more than one tonal step away from C major. There is a Mozartian precedent here in characters such as Papageno (G major, F major and G major in his solo songs). Schubart too says that one should express 'innocence and simplicity' with 'uncoloured' keys.<sup>405</sup>

The E major of Joad's solemn Act I Aria 'O Sinai, auf deinen Höhen' (Figure 98) would seem to fit neither Schubart's description of this key ('loud rejoicing, laughing pleasure'),<sup>406</sup> nor Vogler's, which emphasises the key's brightness:

E [major] is the very best at depicting fire when it strikes the eye with the force of its piercing flames.<sup>407</sup>

But here again Poissl's model is probably Mozart, and specifically Sarastro's 'In diesen heil'gen Hallen' with its humane, reassuring priestly sentiments and steady tempo. This association is reinforced by the 3/4 time and the dark-hued instrumentation, both of which recall Sarastro's other Aria 'O Isis und Osiris'. There Mozart's scoring is for middle-range instruments only: basset horns, bassoons, trombones, violas and cellos. Poissl's introduction creates a similar sound-world with divided violas and cellos.

---

<sup>405</sup> 'Unschuld und Einfalt drückt man mit ungefärbten Tönen aus.' Schubart, p. 377.

<sup>406</sup> 'E dur. *Lautes Aufjauchzen, lachende Freude*'. Schubart, p. 379.

<sup>407</sup> 'Das E kann das Feuer am allervorzüglichsten schildern, in so weit es durch die Heftigkeit der durchdringlichsten Flammen in das Auge fällt.' Quoted in Steblin, p. 127.



JOAD: Oh Sinai, on your heights God's will was manifested. As long as Earth's citadels stand, we will revere you as a sacred place.

1 *Larghetto* JOAD  
O Si - na - i, auf dei - nen

Orch. *p* [Violas, cellos] *p* [Strings]

7  
Hö - hen hat Got - tes Wil - len sich ver - klärt. So lang der Er - de Ves - ten

Orch. [Oboes, bassoons]

13  
ste - hen, sey uns als Hei - lig - thum ver - ehrt. Mehr als das

Orch. [Horns]

Figure 98: *Athalia*, Finale No. 4

The key of G major is used sparingly, and without its traditional bucolic associations,<sup>408</sup> but in such a way as to suggest a particular ‘characteristic’ connection within the opera. There is only one number in the opera that is actually set in G major. This is the climactic melodrama in Act III, which is played as the enthroned Joas, surrounded by the regalia of the Kings of Judah, is revealed to Athalia (Figure 99).

---

<sup>408</sup> Schubart equates G major with ‘everything that is rustic [‘Alles Ländliche’]. Quoted in Steblin, p. 124. Vogler describes it as the best key for expressing ‘naive actions, especially those of innocent rustic pleasure’ [‘naive Handlungen, besonders des unschuldigen ländlichen Vergnügens’]. Quoted in Steblin, p. 126.

JOAS: There is the child. Jehova's grace preserved him for us. This is Achaziah's son.

JOAD: Da ist das Kind. Jehova's Gnade hat es uns erhalten. Es ist Ahasjas Sohn.

Moderato

Flute

Harp

Viola

Cello Bass

Hp.

Vla.

Vc. Cb.

Figure 99: *Athalia*, Melodrama, Act III (opening)

The instrumentation itself is strikingly 'characteristic'. The use of lower strings throws the flute (associated with Joas in the recitative version of Athalia's dream, see Figure 80) and the harp (associated in the Bible with Joas's ancestor David, whose sword lies at his side) into strong relief. From bar 3 the harp plays the 12/8 rhythm associated with Joas and his divine status. But the key of G major can also itself be said to have acquired a 'characteristic' association. Its only previous appearance of any length is at a moment which is directly relevant to this scene. When, at the end of Act II, Athalia issues a challenge to Joad to produce the rightful King, her words are set in an emphatic G major (Figure 100).

ATHALIA: Come! Put up against me the King from the tribe of David that your God promised! That tribe is dead. I have succeeded in my task.

ATHALIA

Ath. 1 Auf! Stel - le mir den Kö - nig - doch ent - ge - gen, den dir dein Gott aus Da - vids Stamm ver -

Orch. 1 *f* *mf*

Ath. 6 hieß! Der Stamm ist hin. Mir ist mein Werk - ge - lun - gen, und

Orch. 6

Figure 100: *Athalia*, Finale No. 9

This revelation of the boy-king (Figure 99) is Joad's answer to this challenge, and the key is effectively reserved for use at this moment.

Perhaps the most remarkable use of a key for its symbolic, abstract characteristics is Poissl's choice of E flat major for moments associated with the messianic future. There was a tradition, older than Schubart but acknowledged by him, that this key symbolised Christianity:

E flat major, the key of love, of devotion, of intimate conversation with God, expressing the Holy Trinity with its three flats.<sup>409</sup>

*Athalia* is of course set in pre-Christian times, but the libretto explicitly links the figure of Joas with the Christian future and the emergence of a Messiah from the house of David. Before the final battle Joad has a vision of this coming salvation (Figure 101).

---

<sup>409</sup> '[...] der Ton der Liebe, der Andacht, des traulichen Gespräches mit Gott; durch seine drey B, die heilige Trias ausdrückend'. Schubart, p. 377.

JOAD: Now the veil of darkness conceals the line of David. No throne stands for it, and no victory wreath adorns it. But then an abundance of blessing will descend from heaven, and it will shine with the light of world-redemption.

JOAD **Recit.**

JOAD  
Schon deckt Da-vids Stamm des Dun-kels Hül-le Ihm steht kein Thron, ihn schmückt kein Sieges-kranz, Da senkt vom

Strings

**Andante colla parte**

Ww. [Woodwind] *pp* *cresc.*

Tbnes. [Trombones] *pp*

JOAD  
Him - mel sich des Se-gens Fül - le und ihm ent-

Str. *cresc.*

**poco più mosso**

Ww. *pp*

Tbnes. *pp*

JOAD  
strahlt der Welt-er - lö - - - sung - - - Glanz.

Str. *mf* *pp* *mf*

Figure 101: Athalia, Scene and Aria No. 14

The statement of E flat major here could hardly be more emphatic. Poissl composes an orchestral sunrise (bars 6-8), with waves of broken chords rising in the woodwind above sustained trombones. At the words ‘der Welterlösung Glanz’ [‘the light of world-redemption’] there is a full cadence in E flat major (bars 10-11).

The key is also used at other moments of revelation, for example when Joas emerges to meet Athalia in Act I, and she recognises him as the boy from her dream (Figure 102). The orchestral melody here is from the song ‘Wenn die Weihrauchsäule’ which we have previously heard Joas singing in the key of F major. There he was simply one of the Temple children, here he is playing his destined messianic role in the downfall of Athalia.

Figure 102: *Athalia*, Finale No. 4

In Act II Abner has his first intuition of the boy’s true identity. He does not yet understand who Joas is, but he senses a sign from God. The music underscoring his spoken lines is not only in E flat major but also incorporates the 12/8 rhythm associated with Joas and his divine destiny (Figure 79) . Similarly, the Priests’ hymn *Gott Israels*, originally in C major, returns in E flat major within the accompaniment of the Act II Melodrama, associated now with the proto-Messiah Joas (Figures 55 and 74).

When Joas’s kingship is revealed to his fellow Temple children they also pay homage in E flat major (Figure 103).

CHORUS: Flourish, blossoming bough! Jehovah tended you in the Temple.

Figure 103: *Athalia*, Chorus No. 13

In fact the whole opera moves towards an ending in E flat major. As seen in Figure 62, it is effectively established as the key of the Act III Finale at the moment when Athalia's defeat is confirmed by offstage fanfares. As if this key were not enough to seal the messianic tendency of the story, the final Chorus quotes, to the words 'who is and was and will be forever', the melody of 'and he shall reign for ever and ever' from Handel's *Messiah*, albeit a semitone higher than the original and with an audacious chromatic continuation (Figure 104).

[Allegro vivace]

S  
A  
Ch.  
T  
B

Der ist und war und sein wird e - - - wig - lich, Je - - -

Orch.

**Figure 104: Athalia, Finale No. 15**

With this use of a key charged with religious symbolism Poissl is embedding his opera's theological content, its vision of future Christian redemption and its associated suggestion of a contemporary national liberation, in the very musical structure of the piece.

### **Athalia's Scene and Aria: a musico-dramatic analysis.**

Poissl was arguably at his strongest when composing along the contours of a well-defined dramatic process. To understand how he approached a developing dramatic number we have to examine not just individual moments of characterisation, but also to see how these fit into a longer structure. This aspect of Poissl's mature style can arguably be seen at its fullest and most varied in his Finales, and as noted above Poissl seems to have been particularly proud of these. However, in a letter to Wohlbrück Poissl also singled out a shorter number, Athalia's Scene and Aria 'Nein! Die Verwirrung muß sich wenden' (No. 6), as 'unique of its kind'.<sup>410</sup> If we examine this number in detail we see, on a compact time-scale, how the techniques of characterisation developed in Poissl's previous works – among them differing forms of declamation, the structural use of harmonic processes and the deployment of

---

<sup>410</sup> '[...] einzig in ihrer Art'. *Briefe*, p. 24 (3 November 1813).

‘characteristic’ keys – are placed at the service of a developing dramatic and psychological process.

In musical form the scene (see complete transcription in Supplementary Volume, pp. 14-29) is an expanded version of an Italian multi-section Aria or *rondò*. Assigning a solo scene of this length and form to Athalia is in itself an act of characterisation, a statement about the significance of her role. The only other person in the opera with a comparable solo scene is Joad with his Act III Scene and Aria ‘O Herr der Herrlichkeit’, and this distinction marks the two out as the true protagonists of the piece, the *prima donna* and the *primo uomo*. In Méhul’s *Joseph*, in so many ways a model for *Athalia*, a similar principle applies. There the protagonist Joseph has the only two-section aria in the work, the Aria ‘Champs paternels’.<sup>411</sup>

In Wohlbrück’s scene, which has no precedent in Racine, Athalia journeys from initial aggression through conflicting emotions of doubt, guilt and fear to a renewed resolve. The overall tonal journey is from E minor to C major, keys which Schubart considered to be closely related – he writes in his *Charakteristik* of the transition from E minor to C major giving the ‘most perfect satisfaction to heart and ear’.<sup>412</sup> However the route between the two in this scene is far from direct, either emotionally or tonally. Athalia, unsettled by meeting the boy from her dream in the Temple, has just been advised by Mathan to use force against the Temple and its inhabitants. In the opening lines of the scene she says she is prepared to kill the boy. However the thought of violence conjures up images of her massacre of her own grandchildren. As doubts and conscience assail her, the music modulates in the direction of flatter keys: from A minor (bars 28-29) to F major (bars 30-32) to B flat major (bars 33-34) to E flat major (bars 36-37) and via G minor (bars 41-45) to the Chorus entry in C minor (bars 49-57). The Chorus, a group of attendants who set the scene before Athalia’s arrival and have now retired to a gallery at the back of the stage set,<sup>413</sup> at this point seem to represent Athalia’s own inner voice, establishing with these eight bars in C minor the psychological distance travelled since the beginning of her scene.

The orchestral phrases at bars 58-59 and the stage direction ‘as if waking from a dream’ seem to represent Athalia trying to shake off this depression. However the journey of keys

---

<sup>411</sup> The only other character in *Joseph* to have a solo number at all is the boy Benjamin, whose strophic Romance *Ah! lorsque la mort trop cruelle* is an expression of childish innocence, and thus a characteristic antecedent of Joas’s strophic Romanze *Nach meines Gottes Ebenbild*.

<sup>412</sup> ‘Von diesem Tone tritt man mit unaussprechlicher Anmuth wieder in den Grundton C dur zurück, wo Herz und Ohr die vollkommenste Befriedigung finden.’ Schubart, p. 380.

<sup>413</sup> ‘Das Gefolge tritt in die Gallerie zurück’ [‘The attendants withdraw to the gallery’], stage direction in printed libretto (1828), p. 22.

continues inexorably towards darker, flatter tonalities. By the time Athalia has reached her lowest point psychologically ('O rächendes Gewissen', bars 65-73) she is singing in B flat minor. This key, as we have seen, is associated with suicide in Schubart's *Charakteristik*. A tritone away from E minor, it also represents here not only the greatest possible harmonic journey from the opening of the scene but also the lowest point of Athalia's depression within the psychological arc of the scene. The emotional release of suicide is expressed by the transition from minor to major (bars 74-85), but still within the tonality of B flat.

At this point however Athalia recoils. Suicide, she realises, would be defeat, not victory. This radical change of heart is expressed with the kind of chromaticism Poissl used in *Merope* for extreme emotional states (bars 85-90), and the music wrenches itself from B flat major into A minor. As she talks herself back from the brink and into a readiness to storm the Temple and kill the child, her thoughts are punctuated by an orchestral motif (bars 98-100) which returns a few bars later a semitone higher (bars 110-112), as if representing her rising determination. On its third appearance (bars 122-124) it is a semitone higher still, and this time not only is an upper octave added to the instrumentation but major tonality is substituted for minor in the second and third bars (123-124). In harmonic terms this is a preparation for the C major aria to follow, but the harmonic shift is also a psychological one, the last step of Athalia's journey from depression to bloodthirsty exultation. The bright, 'pure' C major of the final section evokes clarity and determination, the clear-sightedness of someone who has exorcised her demons.

Within this expressive tonal framework Poissl uses most of the other characterising techniques at his disposal to achieve maximum dramatic clarity and psychological intensity. One technique, as throughout the opera, is the use and re-use of characteristic motifs in the orchestra. These create connections with other parts of the opera and are in turn illuminated by their use in these other contexts, thus contributing to what Weber would call the distinctive 'colouration' of the work, its overall consistency of character. For example, the opening orchestral motif (bars 1-3, 7-9) is derived from motif A in the overture, where it appeared in close proximity with other 'Athalia' motifs (Figure 84). Here in the Scene and Aria it becomes associated with Athalia's defiant opening text ('Nein! Die Verwirrung muss sich wenden, der meine Seele fast erliegt') and when it returns in modified form it is again associated with defiance (bars 98-99, 110-111, 122-123). When Athalia mentions the prophecy of her downfall ('Mit Blut hab' ich die Weissagung besiegt', bars 10-11), tremolo strings recall the 'dream' recitative from Act I, perhaps an indication that the sung version of this scene was an integral part of Poissl's original intention, even if it was cut at the first performance. There Jezebel's prophecy was also framed by string tremolos (Figure 105 bars 4-10).



ATHALIA: She spoke: 'Tremble, my poor daughter. Judah's dark god will defeat you too. Your downfall is near. Oh, how I pity you!'

ATHALIA

Ath. mir. Sie sprach: "Er-be-be, ar-me Toch-ter, sie-gen wird ü-ber

Orch. *p*

Ath. dich auch Ju-das finst-rer Gott. Dein Fall ist nah. O, wie be-jam-mr'ich dich!"

Orch. *mf*

Figure 105: Athalia, dream narration (recitative version)

There are other reminiscences of the dream recitative embodied in the orchestration. When Athalia tries to embrace Jezebel in the dream, the ghostly figure dissolves and Athalia sees a horrific vision of her mother's corpse being devoured by dogs. This is marked by the addition of trombones, instruments traditionally associated with the more frightening aspects of the supernatural (Figure 106).

Allegro molto

Woodwind *f*

Trombones *ff*

Athalia fiel, und vor mir lag... Ent-setz-lich!

Strings *f*

Figure 106: Athalia, dream narration (recitative version)

In the Scene and Aria Athalia has a vision of the bloody massacre she herself perpetrated, and again Poissl adds trombones to the orchestral mixture, creating a colouristic and rhythmical reminiscence of the earlier scene (Figure 107).

Woodwind

Trombones

Athalia

20 Weh mir! Die Toten ruhen

Strings

**Figure 107: Athalia, Scene and Aria No. 6 (bars 20-24)**

The rising semiquaver run followed by a syncopated figure (bars 20-24, 25-26, 30-31, 36-37) becomes associated with Athalia's horror at her own actions, its obsessive repetition in different keys conveying the inescapable nature of this disturbing vision. Wherever she looks she sees her victims. Significantly, it is a variant of this which modulates and finds a new harmonic resolution as she shakes off her depression (bars 87-90). A version of this motif also reappears in Act III at the moment of her defeat (Figure 108). There it leads to the falling demisemiquaver figure from bars 33-36 (cf. Figure 108 bar 5).

Allegro

Orch.

1

ATHALIA: Weh mir! Verrat! Rings um mich Feinde. Doch Abner, du noch hier? Auf! Räche mich!

Orch.

5

**Figure 108: Athalia, Melodrama, Act III**

Just as the motif of ‘God’s anger’ (Figure 75) could be heard both as a literal lightning-flash and as something with more abstract significance, so the orchestral triplet motif in the final *Allegro molto* (bars 136ff) is both literal and metaphorical in its characterisation. It has something of the darting nature of flames, which are alluded to in Athalia’s text (‘Rasch wie des Feuers Gluthen’), and this is particularly true when heard in short fragments (e.g. bars 140-141). However, as already noted, it also acquires an association with Athalia’s ambition and reappears towards the end of the opera when this ambition is thwarted (see Figures 77 and 78).

This use of keys and of motifs reflects a concern to connect the dramatic content of the moment to larger-scale structures and the overall ‘character’ of the opera. However there is also a great intensity of characterisation from phrase to phrase. This is largely achieved by what, in Poissl’s *Erklärung* and other writings of the period, is called ‘correct declamation’: the sensitive, ‘characteristic’ and dramatically-apposite moulding of the vocal line to the text, both in recitative and arioso (Chapter 3). This is a matter not just of correct long and short syllables but of a deeper understanding of the dramatic and psychological content of the text. Poissl shares Weber’s view that ‘the real task of melody is to reproduce and brightly illuminate the inner life expressed by the word’.<sup>414</sup> Wohlbrück’s recitative text is written in a series of fairly regular iambic pentameters and tetrameters. Metrical feet are rarely reversed or accents displaced. However Poissl’s setting treats this metre very flexibly, interpreting it in the way that an actor would, creating additional punctuation, pauses, emphases and changes of tempo. As with his purely instrumental motifs, there can be a simple illustrative idea at the back of this. At the words ‘Ich reiss ihn aus und werf ihn zu den Toten’ (bars 16-19) Athalia’s image of tearing a weed out of the Temple floor and casting it away is physically illustrated by the rise and fall of the voice. But Poissl’s word-setting is also based on a more abstract understanding of the content and of Wohlbrück’s sentence structure, engendering choices of emphasis, tempo and punctuation that are not necessarily prescribed by the original text.

The second extended passage of recitative (bars 90-135) provides many examples of this interpretative approach to the verse. If we take Poissl’s setting of this section as a whole we can see an overall progression from agitation to calm determination. This is reflected in the general slowing-down of the basic syllabic unit from the semiquaver (bars 91-92) to the crotchet (bars 128-132). The recurring orchestra motif at bars 98-100, 110-112 and 122-124, apart from its function tracking Athalia’s psychological recovery, also serves as a

---

<sup>414</sup> ‘Weiter ist es aber das eigentliche Geschäft der Melodie, das innere Leben, welches das Wort ausspricht, wiederzugeben und hell hervortreten zu lassen.’ Weber, *Sämtliche Schriften*, p. 372. Cf. Weber, *Writings on Music*, p. 241.

punctuation mark, dividing up sections of text with discrete content and helping the listener to do the same. Thus bars 90-97 contain three rhetorical questions which Athalia effectively answers in the next section (bars 100-109). In the third section (bars 112-121) she speaks of Jehovah's enmity but reassures herself that she has neutralised that threat by exterminating the tribe of David. In the last section (bars 124-135) she considers her one remaining enemy, the mysterious boy, and confidently predicts his destruction along with that of the Temple itself.

Within this general interpretative structure there are many rhythmic variants and subtleties. In the line 'Um so zu sterben hätte ich gelebt?' (bars 92-93), where an actor might choose to emphasise the second word ('to die *like this?*'), Poissl chooses instead to bring out the opposition of 'sterben' ('die') and 'gelebt' ('lived') with longer note-values. Similarly, in the line that follows, the first word 'Dem' would not necessarily be emphasised in a spoken rendition. However Poissl's setting, with a long first note (particularly long-seeming after the quick note-values of the previous phrases), has the effect of intensifying and effectively changing the meaning of the first word: instead of merely 'the people', it comes to mean (with implied contempt) '*that* people'. In bars 100-104 the natural strong-weak metre of the verse is fully respected through the rising list of 'Vater, Mutter, Brüder'. With a new pentameter starting at this point the emphasis on 'selbst *die* nicht schonend', underlined by Poissl's dotted rhythm, is also naturally present in the verse. However the strong emphasis on 'mein' is an interpretative choice, not prescribed by the verse metre and indeed stretching it to its emphatic limits. Again Poissl's emphasis effectively changes the meaning of the line from 'which my blood bore' to 'which *my own* blood bore'. This is reinforced by the dissonance of the D flat against the underlying chord, lending a painful harmonic colour to the idea of Athalia massacring her own grandchildren.

The descent through the root-position triad on 'Recht that ich!' (bar 105) is a musical signifier of firm purpose that we also see in 'Den Feind durchbohrt' (bars 128-9, echoed in 'Argwohn schweigt' in the next phrase). We also see it later in the opera, in Athalia's confident claim to Joad that David's tribe has been exterminated ('Der Stamm ist hin', Figure 100 bars 6-8). Related melodic forms expressing determination can be found elsewhere in the Scene and Aria, and not only in the recitative: 'Königin fühl ich mich wieder' (bars 106-7) and, with particular exuberance, 'seh' ich zerschmettert, die ihm dienen' (bars 174-177). These all spring from the same well of 'characteristic' vocal declamation. In bars 116-121, by contrast, Poissl composes something like sarcasm. Jehovah's devotion to the house of David is given an ironically lyrical treatment in the leisurely vocal line of 'Doch Davids Stamm, den er sich auserlesen', a lyricism ruthlessly

brushed aside by the faster note-values and conclusive cadence of 'ist auch bis auf den letzten Zweig erdrückt'.<sup>415</sup> In the next section of the recitative too Poissl creates his own distinctive emphases within the verse metre in the interests of dramatic intensity and clarity. So the stress on 'ein', delivered by the long note-value and high pitch (bar 125), is not intrinsic to the verse line but emphasises Athalia's success in eliminating all other threats – the boy is now the *one* enemy remaining. The stress on 'Baal' (bar 127) is already present in the verse metre, but Poissl underlines the dramatic irony with an exceptionally long note: if Athalia thinks that the dream was part of Baal's plan to protect her, she is deluding herself.

Recitative gives Poissl particular freedom for 'characteristic' vocal writing and correct declamation, but the principle embraces *arioso* style as well. Even the first Chorus contribution to the *scena* (bars 49-57) can be seen in its very neutrality as a piece of characterised writing within a melodic form. As indicated above, there is a deliberate ambiguity as to whether this chorus is an actual group of attendants or the voice of Athalia's own conscience. After the metrical freedom of the preceding recitative its inflexible regularity and adherence to the stresses of the verse give it a formal, ritualistic quality which underlines this feeling of anonymity. Athalia's next lines (bars 59-65), though marked 'Recitativo', are also essentially melodic, in the sense that their shape is not directly dictated by speech rhythms, but rather by a musical symmetry of the two phrases. However, unlike the Chorus's lines, Athalia's are personalised and emotional. The emphatic repetition of 'nimmer' in bars 63-64, already present in Wohlbrück's metrical text (the line is a pentameter), is reinforced by a change in note-values and a shift in the underlying harmony.

The *Adagio* is the most purely 'melodic' section of the scene so far, in that it is not dependent on the text for its musical logic. It would be musically cogent even if performed without words. Yet even here we see Poissl managing to use some of the techniques of verbal emphasis that he deployed in the recitatives. For instance the accusatory 'Du' ('You') at the start of the second phrase (bar 68) is emphasised by giving it a long note-value and placing it both on the downbeat of the bar and on the highest-pitched note of the phrase. However the most remarkable feature of the vocal writing in this central section of the scene is not Poissl's setting of the text but his introduction of Italian-style melismatic decoration in the B flat major section (bars 78-84). At first glance this might seem to be a

---

<sup>415</sup> The metronome markings in the Berlin score indicate that the contrast between these two lines – already conveyed by the note-values – was underlined by the tempo at which they were performed. Bars 117-119 are marked crotchet = 76, and bars 120-121 crotchet = 92.

piece of gratuitous vocal display of the kind that Poissl and his contemporaries criticised in Italian opera. It does follow a standard melodic schema: a relatively unadorned first phrase (bars 73-77) followed by an answering phrase with decorations (bars 78-81) which is itself repeated in varied, re-decorated and re-harmonised form (bars 81-85). But here as much as anywhere else in the scene Poissl is being led not by 'melody' but by characterisation. He is using the vocal conventions of Italian opera to his own characterising ends. Decorations and wide vocal leaps like this are traditional signifiers of intense emotion and, far from being unmotivated here, represent a moment of ecstasy as Athalia contemplates the release that suicide will bring. This is no less true of the vocal brilliance of the final *Allegro molto*, a highly-charged affair in the Revenge Aria convention, taking the singer to the upper extremes of her range, including a top C on her final 'Sieg gilt es, Sieg oder Tod' (bar 202). As in the *Adagio*, the vocal display serves a dramatic purpose. We have seen Athalia work herself up to a high level of excitement, hysteria almost, in the preceding recitative, and the vocal pyrotechnics are the appropriate expression of this state of mind.

In the larger scheme of the piece too, the vocal athleticism of the *Allegro molto* and the decorations in the *Adagio* can be seen as characterising devices. The vocal writing in the rest of *Athalia* is largely without ostentation. It is generally syllabic, not melismatic. Other characters have moments of high emotion, for instance Joad in his own ecstatic vision in Act III, but they remain rooted in a more austere vocal style consistent with the piece's origins in *opéra comique*. That Athalia should be the only character whose musical declamation is 'Italianate' is in itself an aspect of characterisation, an expression of her otherness within the story and an important component in the overall musical dramaturgy of the opera. A common theme of *Athalia's* press reception was that it had taken an aesthetic position equidistant between the poles of Italian and French opera.<sup>416</sup> The arioso sections of this Scene and Aria are surely among the moments which created that perception, moments of Italianism deployed as forms of deliberate characterisation within a work which in general looks to other aesthetic models.

### **The revised version of 1815**

In the summer of 1815 Poissl revised his two most recent works, *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, replacing their spoken dialogues with recitatives. Poissl's friend Baermann wrote in a letter that autumn that in the case of *Athalia* this revision had been made 'at the request of Count Brühl',<sup>417</sup> Intendant of the Berlin theatres. In 1817, after the

---

<sup>416</sup> E.g. *MTJ*, 1 (1814), p. 187; *AmZ*, 16 (1814), p. 443.

<sup>417</sup> Meyerbeer, *Briefe*, I, p. 286.

first Berlin performances, Poissl himself wrote in a Berlin journal that he had changed the dialogue into recitatives ‘through the wishes of Count Brühl’.<sup>418</sup> What is unclear is whether Poissl was led by aesthetic considerations as well as a pragmatic desire to see his piece performed in the Prussian capital. As noted above, contemporaries of Poissl such as Hoffmann and Mosel expressed a fundamental preference for continuously-sung opera. They considered the alternation of speech and song to be a barrier to the *Totaleffekt*. However from Poissl himself we have no statement as direct as this, and indeed no comment at all on the aesthetic issues raised by dialogue opera. If anything, in the letter to Wohlbrück about *Athalia*’s dream narration quoted above, we can detect a bias in favour of speech over recitative. His practice in later operas does not suggest a fundamental preference for through-composition. Of the six German-language operas he was to write after *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* only one, *Zayde* (1843), was through-composed.<sup>419</sup>

Whatever Poissl’s exact motivation, the revised version of *Athalia* which he and Wohlbrück created in the summer of 1815 is considerably easier to reconstruct than the original version of 1814. The score sent to Berlin (written by the same copyist A who was employed on the original Munich score) has been preserved there and shows little sign of further adaptation.<sup>420</sup> Table 6 shows the contents of this score, with the numbering system used in Table 5 preserved for ease of comparison with the 1814 version.

To compensate for the slower performing pace of recitative Wohlbrück abridged his original dialogues before Poissl set them to music. As a comparison of the two tables shows, these cuts were substantial, reducing the total amount of connecting text by about a third, deleting four scenes entirely (Act I Scenes 4, 6 and 7 and Act III Scene 2) and abolishing one minor character, the Levite Asarja. Some text previously spoken was absorbed into the Ensemble-Stück (No. 12) which was re-instated, but in a shorter form than in Poissl’s original plans.

---

<sup>418</sup> *Der Gesellschafter*, No. 44 (17 March 1817), p. 176. Reprinted in *Briefe*, pp. 62-63..

<sup>419</sup> Schrott, Dissertation (p. 311) confirms that the unperformed *Issipile*, composed in 1818 and lost in the Second World War, was not through-composed.

<sup>420</sup> Bs: Mus. ms. 11715.

<b>ATHALIA (1815 revision)</b>	
<b>Act I</b>	
Scene 1	<b>No. 1 Introduction:</b> <i>Sehet und fühlet</i>
Scene 2	<i>Ihr frommen Kinder</i>
Scene 3	<b>Recitative</b> (51 lines): <i>Der Zeiten Fülle, Josabeth, ist da.</i>
	<b>No. 2 Recitative and Duet:</b> <i>Und ich soll jetzt nicht zittern</i>
Scene 4	<b>Recitative</b> (17 lines): <i>Wie, Königin, du hier?</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (39 lines): <i>Doch aus den Tiefen meiner eignen Seele</i>
	<b>No. 3 Terzetto:</b> <i>Ach, daß der Wurm im Busen schliefe</i>
(Scene change)	
Scene 5	<b>No. 4 Finale:</b> <i>Gott Israels!</i>
<b>Act II</b>	
Scene 1	<b>No. 5 Entr'acte and Chorus:</b> <i>Unheil und Verderben</i>
Scene 2	<b>Recitative</b> (10 lines): <i>Denkt was ihr wollt</i>
Scene 3	<b>Recitative</b> (19 lines): <i>Jetzt, Fürstin</i>
Scene 4	<b>No. 6 (Scene and Aria):</b> <i>Nein, die Verwirrung muss sich wenden</i>
(Scene change)	
Scene 5	<b>Recitative</b> (13 lines): <i>Ich will mich denn zu ihrem Wunsche fügen</i>
Scene 6	<b>Recitative</b> (9 lines): <i>Sind denn Tyrannen stärker wohl als er?</i>
Scene 7	<b>No. 7 Recitative and Quartet:</b> <i>Der Gott, der in des Kindes sanften Zügen</i>
Scene 8	<b>Recitative</b> (13 lines): <i>Es naht die Fürstin!</i>
	<b>No. 8 Melodrama:</b> <i>Mein Vater!</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (3 lines): <i>Das ist zu viel. Ha! Allzufrecher Priester!</i>
	<b>No. 9 Finale:</b> <i>Hier pflanz, ich Baals Panier</i>
<b>Act III</b>	
Scene 1	<b>No. 10 Entr'acte and Chorus:</b> <i>Vor den Thoren droht und höhnt</i>
Scene 2	<b>Recitative</b> (35 lines): <i>Geht, Kinder!</i>
	<b>No. 11 Duettino:</b> <i>O Herr, was thust du?</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (3 lines): <i>Ich Joas?</i>
Scene 3	<b>Recitative</b> (39 lines): <i>Hier siehst du uns mit gottgeweihten Waffen</i>
	<b>[No. 12] Ensemble Piece:</b> <i>So huldigt nun, ihr heiligen Leviten</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (3 lines): <i>Mein Sohn! O gönne mir dich so zu nennen</i>
	<b>Chorus:</b> <i>Heil Joas, dem König in Israel!</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (8 lines): <i>Und nun, ihr heil'gen Priester</i>
Scene 4	<b>Recitative/Melodrama</b> (13 lines): <i>Geliebtes Kind! Mein Sohn!</i>
	<b>No. 13 Chorus:</b> <i>Wachse, blühender Zweig</i>
Scene 5	<b>No. 14 Scene and Aria:</b> <i>O Herr der Herrlichkeit!</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (4 lines): <i>Athalia naht sich der heil'gen Schwelle</i>
Scene 6	<b>Recitative</b> (14.5 lines): <i>Wie nun? Vertraust du noch der eitlen Schar?</i>
	<b>Melodrama/Recitative:</b> <i>Das ist das Kind</i>
	<b>Recitative</b> (10.5 lines): <i>Herr, der Tempel ist befreit</i>
	<b>No. 15 Finale:</b> <i>Gott, du verläßt die Deinen nicht!</i>

Table 6: *Athalia*, revised version (1815)



The main casualty of Wohlbrück's abridgements is the psychological and political subtlety of the libretto. Abner, the embodiment of honourable political compromise in the original version, becomes almost a background figure. His scenes alone with Athalia (Act I Sc 4 in the 1814 version) and with Mathan (Act I Sc 6) disappear completely, and his dialogue with Joad (Act II Sc 6) is reduced by two thirds. Athalia herself also loses much of her psychological complexity, and this is partly through the reduction of Abner's role. The cuts remove scenes in which she appears if not actually good, then at least capable of recognising goodness in him. She becomes generally less reflective and more unmotivatedly aggressive. Carl Zelter, who saw the piece in Berlin and reported to Goethe in generally positive terms, was nonetheless critical of this aspect:

The German text would be good in parts, if only the character of Athalia had a slightly higher standing. Here she is a coarse and stupid woman, a murderous rascal [...].<sup>421</sup>

In musical terms, Poissl takes pains to retain a consistent 'character' by incorporating the opera's existing motifs into his new recitatives. Athalia's very first appearance, previously a dialogue scene, is now introduced with one of her motifs (Figure 109, cf. Figures 87 and 88).



**Figure 109: Athalia, opening of Act I Sc. 4 (1815 version)**

Her forced entry into the Temple in Act III is accompanied by music associated with her anger in Act II (Figure 110, cf. Figure 90).

---

<sup>421</sup> 'Der deutsche Text hätte manche gute Stelle, wenn nur der Charakter der Athalie ein wenig höher stünde. Hier ist sie ein rohes und dummes Weib, ein Mordracker.' Letter of 28 February 1817. *Briefwechsel zwischen Zelter und Goethe in den Jahren 1799-1832*, ed. by Hans-Günther Ottenberg and others, in Johann Wolfgang Goethe *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Richter (Munich, 1991), XX/I, p. 500. Goethe was already acquainted with the work, and indeed his theatre in Weimar was already rehearsing it for a first performance on 15 March., Zelter appears to have been unaware of this.

Figure 110: *Athalia*, opening of Act III Sc. 6 (1815 version)

An aside of Joad's just before this, in which he thanks Jehovah for 'ensnaring the enemy', is given added characterisation by an orchestral reminiscence of the hymn 'Gott Israels' in the background. First heard in C major (Figure 55) and then in association with Joas in the 'Messianic' key of E flat major (Figure 74), the tune is now re-stated in the key of B flat major, associated throughout the opera with Joad and his faith (Figure 111).

Figure 111: *Athalia*, Act III Sc. 5 (1815 version)

Poissl's 'characterising' use of 12/8 rhythm in connection with Joas is also carried over into the new recitatives. As the excited Josabeth tries to kneel before the newly-revealed king, a melody in 12/8 is played over an agitated accompaniment (Figure 112).

5  
Jos. (Sie will vor ihm knien)  
Sohn! Sohn Da - vids! Kö - nig!

5  
Orch.

**Figure 112: *Athalia*, opening of Act III Sc. 4 (1815 version)**

The motifs re-stated here were all already part of the web of musical reminiscences in the dialogue version. However the creation of new music enabled Poissl to extend the motivic principle still further. In Act III Ismael accepts Joad's commands, saying that 'Jehovah's will always spoke through your mouth'. Under this line the accompaniment momentarily takes on a new texture (Figure 113 bars 3-4), a subtle musical reference (also in the rhythm of the sung line) to one of Joad's prayers in Act II (Figure 114 bars 1-2).

1 [Allegro moderato] JOAD ISMAEL Andante  
schir-mend um den Kö - nig stel-le. Durch dei-nen Mund sprach stets Je-ho-vas Wil - len. Wir fol - gen dir, und

1  
Orch. *p* [Strings] *f* *p*

**Figure 113: *Athalia*, Act III Sc. 3 (1815 version)**

1 Andante JOAD  
Na - hen die ver-heiss-nen Zei - ten, wo dein heil - ger Na - me siegt, wo bei

1  
Orch. [Strings] *p* [Woodwind]

**Figure 114: *Athalia*, Finale No. 9**

Poissl even creates a new characteristic motif within the added recitatives. This is associated with Mathan and his malign influence on Athalia. It bears a family resemblance to some of Athalia's own motivic material (cf. Figure 90 bars 1-2) and is first heard as Mathan urges her to use force against the Temple and its inhabitants (Figure 115).

Figure 115: *Athalia*, opening of Act II Sc. 3 (1815 version)

Later, when Athalia's approach to the Temple is announced, we hear the same music signalling Mathan's influence (Figure 116).

Figure 116: *Athalia*, opening of Act II Sc. 8 (1815 version)

Finally, an exuberant statement of the motif in D major, the key of victory, accompanies Ismael's announcement of Mathan's defeat and death (Figure 117).

ISMAEL: My Lord, the Temple has been liberated, no enemy is fighting now, the intruders have fled.

Figure 117: *Athalia*, opening of Act III Sc. 7 (1815 version)

Most of the new recitatives are composed for string orchestra only, and at times Poissl seems to be straining at the limits of string scoring. Figure 112 is an example of this. Here the 12/8 melody, for divided first violins in octaves, would surely sit more naturally on woodwind melody instruments over a string accompaniment. Similarly, the reminiscence of the ‘Gott Israels’ hymn in Figure 111 would be more idiomatically played by a choir of wind instruments, as it is when quoted within the original version of the opera (Figure 74). There may have been practical reasons for this limitation to strings, such as ease of rehearsal and flexibility in performance, but the effect is often of something provisional and not fully worked out.

In other ways too, despite the characterising force of motivic reminiscences, many of the new recitatives seem under-characterised and lack what Poissl would have called ‘dramatic truth’. For example Athalia’s first appearance in Act II, immediately after a Chorus (No. 5) in which we have been told how moody and angry she is, is accompanied by a brisk march in C major which conveys nothing of her state of mind (Figure 118).

ATHALIA: Think what you like! I must have certainty, must test more coldly and look more attentively!

The musical score for Figure 118 consists of two systems. The first system is the orchestral introduction, marked 'Allegro' and 'f [Strings]'. It features a melody in the upper voice of the strings, with a 12/8 feel, and a rhythmic accompaniment in the lower voice. The second system is the vocal entry, marked 'mf'. It features a vocal line with the lyrics 'Denkt was ihr wollt! Ich muss Ge-wiss-heit ha-ben, muss käl-ter prü-fen, auf-merk-sa-mer sch'n!' and an orchestral accompaniment that continues the rhythmic pattern from the first system.

**Figure 118: *Athalia*, opening of Act II Sc. 2 (1815 version)**

Poissl also fails to characterise the text to any significant degree in passages which serve mainly as plot exposition. For instance in Athalia’s first scene she is left to expound the pre-history of the opera over largely immobile harmonies (Figure 119).

ATHALIA: Listen to me, both! For the fact that, true to the faith of my ancestors, I pray to Baal and not to the god of the Jews, and that I had no qualms in bloodily avenging the crimes that David’s tribe committed on the sacred body of my mother – for these things I will render account to no-one.

[Moderato]

1 ATHALIA

Ath. Hört ihr mich bei-de! Dass ich, der eig-nen Almen Glau-ben treu, zum Baal, und nicht zum Gott der Juden be-te, dass ich

Orch. [p] [Strings]

7

Ath. die Fre-vel, wel-che Da-vids Stamm an mei-ner Mut-ter heil'-gen Leib voll - führ-te, mit Blut zu rä-chen kein Be-den-ken

Orch.

12

Ath. trug, und je-nen Stamm mit eig'-ner Hand ver - tilg-te, da - rü - ber geb' ich kei-ne Re-chen-schaft. Ich

Orch. f

**Figure 119: Athalia, recitative from Act I Sc. 4 (1815 version)**

However a striking exception to the general colourlessness of the new recitatives is the passage in which Josabeth narrates her rescue of the infant Joas from Athalia's massacre (see Supplementary Volume, pp. 30-33). It may be that here, as elsewhere, Poissl was spurred to greater inventiveness by the dramatic narrative. It may even be that, as with Athalia's dream narration, this music was part of Poissl's original musical conception for the 1814 version but was dropped before the premiere. Its unusually full instrumentation, alongside the predominantly string-accompanied recitatives of the 1815 version, might suggest that it was not composed at the same time. If it was written in 1815, it is one of the few added passages to approach the quality and characterising power of the recitatives in Athalia's dream narration or in her Scene and Aria. Shifting harmonies, tremolo strings and a jagged recurring motif in the bass all evoke the horror of the massacre. As Josabeth gradually realises that the child is still alive, the harmonies hover on a chord of the German sixth for five bars (26-30) and the semiquaver figure at the top of the string texture rises in successive steps. The emotional climax (bar 31) is marked by a harmonic resolution into a bright C major and by the addition of woodwind. Poissl also sensitively integrates the end of this music into the pre-existing opening of the following recitative. An added woodwind

phrase (bars 36-39) serves both a musical and a dramatic purpose. It modulates into the new key of E flat major, though avoiding a full resolution. In its melodic shape it also echoes Josabeth's last sung phrase (bars 38-39, cf. bars 33-34), as if she were reflecting on the story she has just told. The unresolved dominant seventh of bar 39 is then taken up by the strings in the introductory bars of the next section, but with a new agitated character as Josabeth's thoughts turn from the past to the worries of the present.

Unfortunately the vividness of this recitative is an exception within the new musical material. What is more, Poissl's revisions throw up some fundamental problems of style and characterisation. In the original 1814 version the role of Joas, except for his sung solos and ensembles, was spoken. His most significant scenes were spoken to orchestral accompaniment, i.e. performed as melodrama. In the 1815 revision, speech was removed from all the other roles and replaced with recitative, but Joas's lines remained spoken. This meant that his melodramatic conversations with the adult characters were now conducted in speech on his side and recitative on theirs. Poissl himself explained this decision in a Berlin journal:

In its original form the opera *Athalia* was not written entirely in recitatives; the dialogue was spoken, and only immediately after [sic]<sup>422</sup> the major musical numbers, where it was required by the heightened emotion, did recitative occur. At that time the melodramatic handling of the boy's role seemed to me absolutely necessary in order to place this character in its appropriate light, and the resulting effect justified my thinking. When later, through the wishes of Count Brühl, I came to change the dialogue into recitatives and the text was abridged for this purpose by the author, I gave much thought as to how the boy's dialogues should be treated. The characterisation of these dialogues was not to be impaired, but their performance was also not to be made too difficult. My re-thinking did not work: I found no form which I preferred to the existing one of melodrama, and so although this form is slightly strange in a grand opera I dared to choose it over all others, of whose success I could not be convinced in advance.<sup>423</sup>

---

<sup>422</sup> This is surely a slip of the pen. In the 1814 version recitatives precede some of the major musical numbers, but they never follow them except as the start of a new scene.

<sup>423</sup> 'Die Oper *Athalia* war in ihrer ersten Gestalt nicht ganz in Rezitativen komponirt, sondern der Dialog wurde gesprochen, und nur unmittelbar nach den bedeutendern Musikstücken, traten da, wo die gesteigerte Empfindung es erforderte, Rezitative ein. Damals schien mir die melodramatische Behandlung der Rolle des Knaben absolut nothwendig, um diesen Charakter in das ihm gebührende Licht zu stellen, und die Wirkung, die daraus hervorging, rechtfertigte meine Idee. Als ich später, durch den Wunsch des Herrn Grafen von Brühl, veranlaßt wurde, den vom Dichter zu diesem Behufe zusammen gedrängten Dialog in Rezitative umzuwandeln, sann ich vielfach darauf, wie jene des Knaben behandelt werden müßten, wenn der Charakteristik dieser Rolle nicht geschadet, und andererseits der Vortrag derselben nicht zu sehr erschwert werden sollte. Mein Nachdenken blieb ohne Erfolg; ich fand keine Form, die mir besser zusagte, als die schon bestehende melodramatische, und so wagte ich es denn, diese, in einer großen Oper freilich etwas fremdartige, jeder andern, von deren Gelingen ich mich zum voraus nicht überzeugen

Poissl's recognition that the juxtaposition of melodrama and recitative might seem 'slightly strange' is reflected in the detail of his musical revision. If we compare a passage of the Act II melodrama in its original 1814 version with Poissl's 1815 revision, we see him trying in the later version to minimise the contrast between the spoken and sung textures. In the original version at this point the characters' lines are spoken in the silences between orchestral phrases (Figure 120).

ATHALIA: What is your name?  
 JOAS: My name is Eliakin.  
 ATHALIA: From which tribe?  
 JOAS: They say I am an orphan. Torn from the tree as a delicate blossom, I was brought up by God's hand here in the Temple.  
 ATHALIA: And you have no parents?  
 JOAS: They have left me.

ATHALIA: Wie heissest du? JOAS: Ich heiss Eliakin. ATHALIA: Aus welchem Stamm? JOAS: Man sagt, ich sei ein Waise.

Orch. *Moderato*  
 1 *mf* [Strings] [Basset horns, bassoons] *f* [Strings] [Woodwind]

5 Als zarte Blüte von dem Stamm gerissen, zog Gottes Hand mich hier im Tempel auf. ATHALIA: Und Eltern hast du nicht? JOAS: Sie haben mich verlassen. ATHALIA: Verlassen? Und seit wann?  
*f* [Strings] *p* [Strings] *f* [Strings]  
 [Basset horns, bassoons]

Figure 120: *Athalia*, Melodrama No. 8 (1814 version)

In the 1815 version (Figure 121) Poissl extends the chords under Joas's speeches (bars 2, 4-6, cf. Figure 120 bars 2, 4-5). The intention is presumably to avoid an orchestral silence which would emphasise the contrast between his spoken lines and Athalia's sung ones.

ATHALIA: Wie heissest du? JOAS: Ich heiss Eliakin. ATHALIA: Aus welchem Stamm? JOAS: Man sagt, ich sei ein Waise.

Orch. *Moderato*  
 1 *mf* [Strings] [Basset horns, bassoons] [Strings] *pp* [Woodwind]

konnte, vorzuziehen.' *Der Gesellschafter*, No. 44 (17 March 1817), p. 176. Reprinted in *Briefe*, pp. 62-63.



5 Als zarte Blüte von dem Stamm gerissen,  
zog Gottes Hand mich hier im Tempel auf.

ATHALIA:  
Und El - tern hast du nicht?

JOAS: Sie haben mich verlassen.

Orch.

*mf* [Strings]

*p*

[Basset horns,  
bassoons]

**Figure 121: *Athalia*, Melodrama No. 8 (1815 version)**

With Poissl himself conscious of the stylistic anomalies in this scene, it is unsurprising that the Berlin critics noticed them too. A common perception was that the scene was somehow awkward, what one review called ‘a dissonance within the harmony of this excellent work as a whole’. Suggestions varied as to how this could have been avoided. Some felt that Poissl had been overly concerned about a child’s ability to sing recitative, and could have made Joas sing everything like the other characters:

In a grand serious opera where all the characters sing, it seems to us that the child’s spoken dialogue, which after all in the eighth scene of the second Act contains a lot of emotion, is a disruption, since *singing* is the heightened language of feelings, and it will always be in disharmony with speech.<sup>424</sup>

Others felt that the problem lay not in the spoken lines but, on the contrary, in the continued presence of sung sections in Joas’s role. In fact the child’s spoken lines were particularly effective, especially when delivered as melodrama:

No singing by a child, however good and pure, can have a comparable effect, as we have learnt from experiments in other operas. [...] So we would rather wish that the boy’s songs, so excellently composed in themselves, were not there at all, and that everything were spoken, to musical accompaniment.<sup>425</sup>

A third critic, from the *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt*, came closest to understanding Poissl’s original conception, and effectively proposed a return to the 1814 format, for this scene at least:

---

<sup>424</sup> ‘Eine Störung dünkt uns in der großen Oper, wo alle Personen singen, immer der Dialog des Kindes, in welchem in der achten Scene des zweiten Aktes ohnedies viel Affekt liegt und die erhöhte Sprache der Empfindung ja doch der, mit der Rede stets disharmonierende *Gesang* ist.’ *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt*, No. 39 (29 March 1817), pp. 309ff. Quoted in Waidelich, p. 338.

<sup>425</sup> ‘Kein Gesang des Kindes, sey er auch noch so gut und rein, kann hier auf ähnliche Weise wirken; – mehrere Versuche haben dies in andern Opern hinlänglich gelehrt. [...] Wir möchten im Gegentheil wünschen, daß die in sich so vortrefflich komponirten Gesänge des Knaben gar nicht da wären, und alles mit musikalischer Begleitung gesprochen würde.’ *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt*, No. 41 (12 April 1817), pp. 324ff. Quoted in Waidelich, p. 339.

In fact [in the original version] he accomplished very well the difficult task of making the *child* appear significant, for in the original composition of *Athalia*, when all the other characters *spoke* their dialogue, Joas was exalted by the melodramatic treatment to the same extent that he is now demoted by the lyric treatment. However Herr von Poissl had no alternative but to keep the melodrama, which in itself is very effective, since Joas could not sing any recitatives, and dialogue *without* music would have destroyed the whole impression. Nonetheless, might not the fine scene in the second Act, in which Athalia tries to interrogate the boy, *perhaps* be even better if it were treated melodramatically throughout, i.e. if Athalia herself were also not to sing?<sup>426</sup>

As this critic correctly identified, the problems with the scene had arisen from Poissl's revisions and were not present in the original version. In fact in the original version, where all the characters spoke, the use of melodrama was a positive gain in terms of characterisation, since it expressed Joas's special status. It surrounded his words with a kind of orchestral halo, and this halo was applied only to him and to those interacting with him. In the critic's words, the melodrama 'exalted' him. However, once the piece was given with continuous music, the relationship between Joas and the others was in danger of being reversed. He was now 'demoted' because he merely spoke while the others used the heightened language of song. The 'appropriate light' in which Poissl had originally placed Joas was negated. His own revisions had created problems in those very areas of dramatic truth and characterisation which were so important to him. Moreover, in 'demoting' the character of Joas and depriving him of his 'exalted', messianic qualities, he had arguably also diluted the central political message of the opera, the victory of legitimacy, liberation and true religion (Joas) over usurpation, tyranny and idolatry (Athalia).

### ***Athalia's* reception, nationalism and the problems of revision**

These critical voices questioning the wisdom of mixing speech and song were the first signs of a downward turn in journalistic attitudes to *Athalia*. Until this point the critical reception

---

<sup>426</sup> 'Vielmehr hat dieser die schwere Aufgabe, das *Kind* bedeutend erscheinen zu lassen, glücklich gelöst, indem er bei der ursprünglichen Komposition der *Athalia*, als alle übrigen Personen den Dialog *sprachen* und noch nicht durchgängig Recitative vorhanden waren, Joas durch die melodramatische um so viel höher stellte, als er gegen die durchaus lyrische Behandlung uns nun zurückgesetzt erscheint.'

'Herr v. Poißl konnte indeß allerdings keinen andern Weg einschlagen, als das an sich sehr wirksame Melodram beibehalten, da Joas keine Recitative singen sollte, Dialog *ohne* Musik aber den ganzen Eindruck gestört haben würde. Dürfte indeß die treffliche Scene des zweiten Akts, worin Athalia den Knaben auszuforschen strebt, nicht *vielleicht* noch mehr gewinnen, wenn solche durchaus melodramatisch behandelt wäre, also Athalia selbst auch nicht sänge?' *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt*, No. 43 (26 April 1817), p. 337. Quoted by Waidelich, p. 340.

of the opera had been almost unanimously positive. After the premiere on 3 June 1814, many reviews had associated the new opera with the recent liberation of the nation. Poissl and Wohlbrück may well have encouraged this association themselves. The *Münchener Theater-Journal*, edited by Wohlbrück's close associate Carl Carl, published a particularly glowing and patriotic review:

One of the most cheering and positive phenomena in the world of German art, which is bravely and joyfully stirring in the newly (and, may Heaven grant, lastingly) regained fatherland; one of the phenomena which seem to presage the long-desired golden age of national art and the foundation of a national art-type, which we previously lacked along with national strength and national will, is a musical work with which Freiherr von Poissl, well regarded for his *Merope* and *Oktavian*, surprised and delighted our audience on 3 June.<sup>427</sup>

The idea of the 'national' work of art is heavily emphasised here. The same terminology was used by Poissl himself two years later in his *Erklärung*. From the other camp, the Derbohr satire in the same journal mocked the self-proclaimed 'national' composer (see Chapter 3). The term was obviously a fashionable one in the musical journalism of the immediate post-Napoleonic period. It allowed loosely-defined connections to be made, as here, between artistic and political forms of the 'national'.

In artistic terms, the 'German' quality of the piece was seen by many in its equidistance between French and Italian models. This aspect was explored, for example, by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*:

If we take another look at the whole work, we see that the poet and composer have tried to stake out the territory of *German* opera. For while Italian grand opera pays much attention to singing but less to correct declamation and even less to dramatic truth, and while by contrast the French musical drama is mainly concerned with declamation and correct scenic treatment but regards the actual singing as very subordinate, in this new work we clearly see the attempt to find a middle way between these two extremes.<sup>428</sup>

---

<sup>427</sup> 'Zu den erfreulichsten und wohlthuedesten Erscheinungen in der deutschen Kunstwelt, welche jetzt in dem uns – der Himmel gebe für recht lange – wiedererrungenen Vaterlande muthig und freudig sich zu bewegen beginnt, zu den Erscheinungen, die das lang ersehnte schöne Zeitalter einer nationalen Kunst, der Begründung eines nationalen Kunst-Tyus, welcher uns bisher fehlte, wie früher die Nationalkraft und der Nationalwille – anzukündigen schien, gehört ein musikalisches Werk, womit am 3. Jun. der uns schon durch seine *Merope* und seinen *Oktavian* sehr vorteilhaft bekannte *Freiherr von Poißl* unser Publikum überraschte und erfreute.' *MTJ*, 1 (1814), p. 187.

<sup>428</sup> 'Uebrigens, um noch einmal einen Blick über das Ganze zu werfen, glauben wir bemerkt zu haben, dass dem Dichter und Componisten der Gedanke, die Gränze einer *deutschen* Oper zu bezeichnen, nicht fremd gewesen. Denn da die grosse italienische Oper alles für den Gesang, wenig für richtige Declamation, noch weniger für dramatische Wahrheit leistet; das französische musik. Drama hingegen Declamation und richtige scenische Behandlung sich zur Hauptsache macht, den eigentlichen Gesang aber für sehr untergeordnet hält: so ist

In the heady atmosphere of 1814 critical rhetoric could move far beyond issues of aesthetics and operatic style. The reviewer for the Weimar *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode* noted the ‘German’ operatic virtues of dramatic truth and characterisation, but also went on to portray Poissl and Wohlbrück as cultural freedom-fighters:

The music is very original, simple and grand, and is so closely entwined with the story, so purely dramatic, that it will take some time [...] for it to be fully recognised [...]. In all the years in which operas have been written, the establishment and maintenance of musico-dramatic characters and the nobility and truth of declamation can rarely have been so successfully achieved as they are in this work [...].

However pleasant and cheering the appearance of such a work is now to all art-lovers, it will be even more welcome to the general German public once its national tendency is grasped and appreciated. We have ended a glorious struggle against a foreign power which sought to rob us of our nationhood; but will our patriotism and national pride ever persuade us to shake off the intellectual yoke that we have gradually shouldered, through our excessive fairness towards the achievements of foreigners? The author and composer of the opera *Athalia* have proved that there are men with the courage to oppose the foreign idol; for in every aspect of this work we can see that it is neither Italian nor French, but, avoiding the errors of both genres and intelligently using the best of them, it is purely German, and belongs to us.<sup>429</sup>

The ‘intellectual yoke’ in this context means the French and Italian opera repertoire which dominated German stages. The writer explicitly associates this with the ‘foreign power’ recently defeated on the battlefield. But the use of the phrase ‘foreign idol’ also connects these ideas with the content of the opera itself – the defeat of *Athalia* and of her idolatrous cult of Baal.

---

in diesem neuen Werke das Streben, zwischen beyden Extremen die Mittelstrasse auszufinden, sichtbar genug.’ *AmZ*, 16 (1814), p. 443.

<sup>429</sup> ‘Die Musik ist höchst originell, einfach und groß, und so innig mit der Handlung verwebt, so rein dramatisch, daß ihre vollkommenste Anerkennung erst nach einiger Zeit [...] erfolgen wird [...]. Anlage und Haltung dramatisch-musikalischer Charaktere, und Erhabenheit und Wahrheit der Declamation mag wohl nicht oft, seit man Opern schreibt, besser gelungen seyn, als in diesem Werke [...].

So angenehm und erfreulich die Erscheinung eines solchen Werkes nun jedem Kunstfreund seyn muß, so wird dieselbe doch dem gesammten deutschen Publicum noch weit willkommener seyn, wenn erst einmal die Tendenz dieses Werkes nach Nationalität gehörig aufgefaßt und gewürdigt wird. – Wir haben rühmlich einen Kampf gegen fremde Gewalt beendet, die uns unsere Nationalität zu rauben trachtete, wird unsere Vaterlandsliebe, unser Nationalstolz uns denn nie dahin führen, auch Versuche zu wagen, um jenes geistige Joch abzuschütteln, das wir uns aus zu weit getriebener Gerechtigkeit gegen fremdes Verdienst nach und nach selbst aufgelegt haben? – Daß es nicht an Männern fehlt, die den Muth haben, den fremden Götzen zu bekämpfen, davon haben Dichter und Componist der Oper *Athalia* einen Beweis gegeben; denn diesem Werk sieht man es überall an, daß es weder *Italienisch* noch *Französisch* ist, sondern mit Vermeidung der Fehler beider Gattungen, und verständiger Benutzung des Guten derselben, rein Deutsch, und uns angehörig.’ *JLM*, 29 (1814), pp. 546ff. Quoted by Waidelich, p. 326.

If we take into account the nationalistic cultural and political context of 1814, the praise heaped on *Athalia* was perhaps disproportionate to its actual merits. The desire for a representative ‘national’ work of art, particularly in the field of opera, became self-fulfilling, and *Athalia* was certainly the beneficiary of this passing moment. By the same token, the decline in critical approval at the beginning of the 1820s can be explained by an ebbing away of that post-Napoleonic euphoria which supported the piece in the first place. Waidelich’s study of *Athalia*’s reception in Berlin shows how the generally positive reactions to the first performances in 1817-18 gave way to a much more negative reception when the opera was revived in 1820. The piece itself had not changed, but somehow its moment had passed. Performance statistics tell a similar tale: after 1822 only one performance of the work is recorded anywhere in Germany, and that is Poissl’s own attempt to re-stage the work in Munich in 1828.<sup>430</sup>

However, before we dismiss *Athalia* as a work of little artistic value or effectiveness carried along on an ephemeral wave of nationalist enthusiasm, it is worth noting that its early critical success was based on performances given in the original, dialogue-based form. This was the form in which it was generally extremely well received in Munich (1814-1816), in Stuttgart (1815), Frankfurt (1815-1816) and Prague (1816) and probably also in Darmstadt (1816-1821). The later critical backlash may well have been connected to a shift in the *Zeitgeist*, but it also coincided with the establishment of the ‘through-composed’ version of the piece. This version was performed first in Berlin (1817-1820) then in Weimar (1817), and probably also in Karlsruhe (1818-1822) and Mannheim (1819-1820). It seems to have become Poissl’s own preferred version – it was, after all, the one he chose for his new production in Munich in 1828. Nonetheless, as suggested above, his revisions did not necessarily work to the artistic advantage of the piece. It could be argued that Poissl’s own changes contributed to the piece’s ultimate failure, by undermining those dramatically-effective qualities of the first version which had helped to win it an audience in the first place. As Waidelich has pointed out, when the piece appeared in its original form ‘the heterogeneous concept of dialogue opera, stereotypically criticised by the aestheticians, did not alienate the first recipients. On the contrary, several of them appreciated the fact that music only appeared at those moments of the dramatic poem which were appropriate to it.’<sup>431</sup> An example of this is the review in the *AmZ*:

---

<sup>430</sup> For performance data see Appendix, Section 6.

<sup>431</sup> ‘Das von den Ästhetikern stereotyp bemängelte heterogene Konzept einer Dialogoper stieß den ersten Rezipienten jedoch nicht auf, ja es wurde vielmehr verschiedenorts gewürdigt [...], daß die Musik lediglich an den dafür angemessenen Stellen des dramatischen Gedichts in Erscheinung trete.’ Waidelich, p. 329.

The transition from declamation to singing is organised in its own fashion, very appropriately and sensitively, through pieces of melodrama and then recitatives leading to the aria and the chorus; as a result the passages which involve cool reflection or exposition stand separately, while heightened emotion is heralded by its own language.<sup>432</sup>

A later review in the *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* noted that ‘when the singing starts, speech seems no longer sufficient, and a more expressive idiom seems both natural and necessary’.<sup>433</sup> An audience attuned to the conventions of *opéra comique* would have no difficulty relating to Poissl’s careful deployment of speech, melodrama, recitative and song.

By contrast, in the negative reviews of *Athalia*’s revised version it was often the recitatives (many of them added for the revision) which were singled out for criticism:

Some of the recitatives are too long, and particularly in the exposition in Act I they should have been further abridged, as the music inevitably stretches out the words.<sup>434</sup>

This could well refer to *Athalia*’s harmonically-inert recitative in Act I Sc 4 (Figure 119). The *Königlich privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung* accused Poissl of misunderstanding the whole function of recitative:

His recitatives are almost always just a convenient opportunity for him quickly to let the *instruments* shine a little, and it is not uncommon for a complete theme to be artfully developed in the interludes while the poor singer recites his lines in desultory tones. This suggests that Herr von P. has no idea of the power of recitativic declamation, but this is not the place to teach him, particularly as we can refer him to a much finer teacher: Gluck.<sup>435</sup>

---

<sup>432</sup> ‘Der Uebergang von Declamation zum Gesange ist auf seine eigene Art durch melodramatische Sätze, dann durch Recitative, bis zur Arie und dem Chor, sehr passend und einsichtsvoll geordnet, so daß Stellen, dem kälteren Nachdenken und der Exposition angehörig, für sich bestehen, und die gesteigerte Empfindung sodann in ihrer eigenen Sprache sich verkündigt.’ *AmZ*, 16 (1814), pp. 441-442.

<sup>433</sup> ‘[...] so daß bey’ m Eintreten des Gesanges die Sprache nicht mehr zureichend scheint, und ein ausdrucksvolleres Idiom natürlich und nothwendig wird.’ *Morgenblatt*, 9 (1815), p. 816. Quoted in Waidelich, p. 329.

<sup>434</sup> ‘Zum Theil sind die Recitative wohl zu lang und hätten besonders bei der Exposition im ersten Akt mehr zusammen gezogen werden müssen, da die Musik doch schon unvermeidlich die Worte ausdehnt.’ *Dramaturgisches Wochenblatt* No. 39 (29 March 1817) pp. 309ff. Quoted in Waidelich p. 338.

<sup>435</sup> ‘Seine Rezitative sind ihm fast immer nur eine schickliche Gelegenheit, die *Instrumente* geschwind ein wenig brilliren zu lassen, und es ereignet sich nicht selten, daß ein vollständiges Thema kunstreich vom ganzen Orchester in den Zwischensätzen durchgeführt wird, während der arme Sänger in gleichgültigen Tönen seine Rede rezitirt. Von der Gewalt der rezitativischen Deklamation scheint auf diese Weise Hr. v. P. keine Ahnung zu haben; ihn in dieser Hinsicht belehren zu wollen, ist hier um so weniger der Ort, da wir ihn auf einen bei weitem trefflicheren Lehrer, auf Gluck verweisen können.’ *Königlich privilegierte Berlinische Zeitung von Staats und Gelehrten Sachen* No. 11/12 (25/27 January 1820). Quoted in Waidelich, p. 342.

This negative impression may have been exacerbated by poor performance, even from the opera's star:

Madame Milder-Hauptmann sang many things very attractively, but did not always stress the recitative correctly. For example at one point – to cite just one small detail – she placed the emphasis on the last syllable of 'Willkühr'.<sup>436</sup>

It is unclear to what extent Poissl's revisions were made out of aesthetic conviction or merely because the Berlin theatre required them. But perhaps the composer should have noticed the dangers identified by Hoffmann in his *Ariodant* review of 1816:

I consider the changing, re-working or adaptation of any work to be the most dangerous and damaging thing in the world. Every composer, even a second-rate one, receives his work as a revelation, and from this he takes his goals, which he strives to achieve with the means at his disposal. Note how often such changes and adaptations fail even when the composer does them himself, and particularly when he is trying to fit his work to the conditions of a particular commission.<sup>437</sup>

The revised, 'through-composed' version of *Athalia* caught the eye of later musicology, but it did so less for its own qualities than for reasons connected with the subsequent emergence of Wagner and the *Musikdrama*. There is a strong case for arguing that the original, dialogue-based version of the opera achieved a higher level of artistic consistency and dramatic effectiveness than the later one, and was a more successful embodiment of Poissl's own aesthetic aspirations. In complying with the Berlin commission Poissl may actually have been working against his own and the piece's best interests, not only in the short term but also in obscuring history's view of a remarkable and historically significant work.

---

<sup>436</sup> 'Mad. Milder-Hauptmann hat manches höchst ansprechend gesungen, das Rezitativ jedoch nicht immer richtig betont, so hob sie, – um nur eine Kleinigkeit zu erwähnen – bei "Willkühr" einmal die letzte Sylbe heraus.' *Der Gesellschafter, oder Blätter für Geist und Herz* Vol. 1 No. 35 (1 March 1817) p. 140. Quoted in Waidelich, p. 336, fn 54.

<sup>437</sup> 'Überhaupt hält Referent alles Abändern, Be- und Umarbeiten eines Werkes für das Gefährlichste und zugleich Schädlichste von der Welt. Jedem Meister, sei er auch subordinierter Natur, ging jedoch sein Werk auf und er schöpfte daraus seine Intentionen, die er durch die Mittel, wie sie ihm zu Gebote standen, zu erreichen strebte. Merkwürdig ist es, daß solche Änderungen und Umarbeitungen dem Meister selbst bei eigenem Werk so oft mißlingen, vorzüglich dann, wenn er das Werk nach einer bedingten Aufgabe fügen und ordnen will.' Hoffmann, *Schriften zur Musik*, p. 313.

## CHAPTER 6

### FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

Looking back on Poissl's career in 1835, Gustav Schilling, a friendly but not uncritical observer, saw *Athalia* as the composer's crowning achievement. In Schilling's view *Athalia* was rooted in the solid musical accomplishments of *Antigonus*, *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and *Merope*, but also reflected the 'changed direction' seen in *Aucassin und Nicolette*:

In the aesthetic and musical principles on which this work [*Athalia*] is founded, some people have sought to find a combination of the principles apparently followed by Gluck in *Iphigénie en Tauride* and by Méhul in *Joseph*; yet while we do not completely reject this opinion we cannot agree with it unconditionally. *Athalia* is so original in its conception and execution that one can hardly find any acceptable point of comparison.<sup>438</sup>

Schilling goes on to praise, among other qualities, *Athalia's* 'expressive truth' ['Wahrheit des Ausdrucks'], its 'sharp and sure characterisation' ['scharfe und sichere Charakteristik'], its 'excellent economy in the application of technical devices' ['glückliche Oekonomie in Anwendung der technischen Mittel'] and its 'high simplicity' ['hohe Einfachheit'].

All Poissl's operas merit further study, but those who look for a simple extrapolation of his artistic journey towards *Athalia* in later works will be disappointed. His next two operas, *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* and *Nitettis*, while building on some of *Athalia's* techniques of musical characterisation, show little of the 'original conception' which Schilling detected in *Athalia*. Instead they look back to the Italian templates of *Ottaviano in Sicilia* and *Merope*. Their arias and ensembles are dominated by conventional Italianate two-part forms. Except in their Finales they contain none of the dramatically flexible multi-section numbers seen in *Aucassin und Nicolette*, nor the strophic songs and melodramas found there and in *Athalia*. Vocal virtuosity, so sparingly used in both these operas, becomes a prominent feature again. The stylistic return to Italianism is underlined by the fact that a duet in *Der Wettkampf zu*

---

<sup>438</sup> 'In dem ästhetisch musikalischen Principe, das diesem Werke zum Grunde liegt, haben Einige schon eine Vereinigung der Principe finden wollen, von denen Gluck in seiner "Iphigenia in Tauris" und Mehul in seinem "Joseph" ausgegangen zu seyn scheinen; aber verwerfen wir auch diese Meinung nicht geradezu, so können wir doch unmöglich auch ihr unbedingt beipflichten. "Athalia" steht in Anlage und Durchführung so selbstständig und originell da, daß sich kaum irgend ein Vergleichungspunkt wo auffinden und annehmen läßt.' Schilling, p. 491.



*Olimpia* uses music discarded from *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, but with more *coloratura*.<sup>439</sup> Schilling saw all this as a backwards step, saying that *Der Wettkampf* and *Nittetis* contained ‘many beauties, but seem to suffer a deficiency of that unity which is so satisfying in *Athalia*, and which of course here too is the indispensable condition of a successful work of art’.<sup>440</sup> The composer who so successfully adapted *opéra comique* in *Athalia*, and was widely praised for it, only returned to this model of musical dramaturgy in *Der Untersberg* (1829), after its viability had been demonstrated by *Der Freischütz* and other examples of early Romantic opera.

Poissl’s last four operas also defy attempts to impose a simple developmental narrative. In terms of genre and style his later career sometimes resembles a series of swerves rather than a straight line. The man who positioned himself among the anti-Rossinians with his *Erklärung* of 1816 was at the same time writing a scene for insertion into a Rossini opera. In 1820 he even produced a very Rossinian *opera semiseria* of his own (*La Rappresaglia*). Even in specific matters of musical language Poissl would adopt certain techniques only to drop them without any obvious reason. Thus, having used reminiscence motifs very intensively in *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf*, he almost completely abandons them in *Nittetis* and *La Rappresaglia* (his only opera in which there is no thematic or dramatic connection between opera and overture) and uses them only very sparingly in *Die Prinzessin von Provence*. They then reappear with a vengeance in *Der Untersberg*, a work particularly replete with reminiscences.

The same apparent inconsistency can be seen in Poissl’s use of musical *couleur locale*. In *Der Untersberg* Poissl explores this mainstay of Romantic opera to a much greater extent than in any of his previous works. The opera’s opening chorus, an evocation of a bygone Catholic South Germany, not only incorporates an Angelus bell but is full of the kind of pseudo-Alpine musical gestures that Poissl had previously used in a popular ‘Song of the Alm’ (Figures 122 and 123).<sup>441</sup>

---

<sup>439</sup> The Duet ‘Vanne clemente e giusto’, composed for Livia and Ottaviano in Act III of *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, is adapted as the Duet ‘Laß mich, Geliebter, sterben’ for Aristeia and Megacles in Act III of *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*.

<sup>440</sup> ‘Doch aber scheinen sie uns an einem Mangel jener Einheit zu leiden, welche in "Athalia" so befriedigend wirkt, hier freilich aber auch rein unerläßliche Bedingung des völlig gelungenen Kunstwerkes ist.’ Schilling, p. 491.

<sup>441</sup> The *Alma-Lied* appears to have been written in 1826 for insertion into Ferdinand Kauer’s opera *Das Donauweibchen*. See MS score of *Das Donauweibchen*, Mbs, St. th. 166-2. Figure 123 is reproduced from the anthology *Lieder-Schatz*, Vol 2 (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, c. 1872), p. 12.

The image shows a musical score for a chorus. It is in 3/4 time, marked [Allegretto], and in the key of D major. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-6) features a Chorus with lyrics: "Hin - aus in die Fel - der," and an Orchestra (Orch.) with a piano [p] dynamic. The second system (measures 7-12) features a Chorus (Ch.) with lyrics: "hin - un - ter ins Thal! Schon glüht auf den Gip - feln der Ber - ge" and an Orchestra (Orch.). The vocal parts are written in treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in bass clef.

Figure 122: *Der Untersberg*, Chorus No. 1

The image shows the opening of a song titled "Alma-Lied". It is marked with the number 12 and the tempo "Mässig". The title "11. Auf der Alm." is prominently displayed. The composer is identified as "J. N. Frhrr. v. Poissl. (1826)". The score is in 3/4 time and features two verses of lyrics. The first system (measures 1-4) includes a vocal line with lyrics: "1. Auf der Al - ma, da fin - den die Küh 's be - ste Gras, und a was; denn i, lie - be Herr, ja, ja, i find' scho" and "2. Und wenn's regnet, wenn's schneit und wenn's don - nert und blitzt, o! so sitzt; was fürch' i mi nit, wenn mei Hans bei mir". The second system (measures 5-8) shows the piano accompaniment. The score is written in treble and bass clefs.

Figure 123: *Alma-Lied*, opening

However in his next and final opera *Zayde* Poissl almost completely eschewed this kind of musical colouring, even though the exotic North African and Spanish settings in the libretto might seem to cry out for it. The Moor *Almansor*, on campaign in Spain, sings of his North

African homeland in European tones not so different from, say, the 'Flemish Folksong' in Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmermann* of 1837<sup>442</sup> (Figures 124 and 125).

1 *Andante con moto* ALMANSOR  
Alm. O wie ganz an - ders ist es in der Hei - mat, wo die Ge - lieb - te wohnt, und mein ge -  
den - kend, viel - leicht der Sehn - sucht heis - se Trä - nen weint!  
Orch. *p*

Figure 124: *Zayde*, No. 13 Scena No. 13

1 [Con dolcezza] MARQUIS  
Ath. Le - be wohl, mein fland - risch Mäd - chen, wi - der Wil - len muss ich fort; doch ich  
lie - be dich von Her - zen, da - rauf ge - be ich mein Wort. Teu - rer weit als mei - ne  
Orch. *pp* *mf espress.* *pp*

Figure 125: *Zar und Zimmermann* (Lortzing), Lied mit Chor No. 9

<sup>442</sup> Albert Lortzing, *Zar und Zimmermann*, Vocal Score arr. Kogel (Leipzig: C. F. Peters, ca. 1895), pp. 109-110.

As noted in Chapter 2, the ‘Muslim’ religious music in the opera also makes no attempt to create a distinctive non-European or non-Christian colour. The only hint of geographical *couleur locale* comes with the use of a Spanish rhythmical figures, including a bolero, in the ballet music performed at King Boabdillah’s feast.

These stylistic inconsistencies make it all the more essential to approach Poissl’s later works, like his earlier ones, not merely as musico-dramatic texts but also in their wider, non-musical contexts. Only in this way can we fully understand Poissl’s artistic intentions in each piece, intentions which, as Chapter 2 has shown, often related to the prominent ideological questions of his time. This process of contextualisation could also be extended to the area of Poissl’s relationship with his audiences – not only their reception of his work but also his reciprocal response to perceived public taste. It would for instance be valuable to understand what exactly prompted his return to Italianism in *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, even though the acclaim heaped on *Athalia* might suggest that success lay more in the *opéra comique* model. It would also be good to question why he adopted more populist forms in the 1820s (*opera semiseria*, *Zauberoper*, Romantic opera), abandoning both the ‘high simplicity’ of *Athalia* and the aristocratic dramatic values of his Metastasio adaptations. Perhaps this was connected to the changing, increasingly bourgeois demographic of the Munich opera audience.

There was a wider audience too for whom Poissl composed: the German musical intelligentsia. Investigations could usefully be made into his relationship with the press, and in particular with the influential musical journals of Leipzig, Berlin and Vienna. The printed media did much to establish his reputation between 1812 and 1817, but then appeared to turn against him. Waidelich has argued that the success of *Athalia* was a *succès d’estime* supported by a network of connoisseurs, rather than a genuinely popular phenomenon.<sup>443</sup> Certainly Poissl was aware of the importance of journalistic support. He may only have been on the fringes of the *Harmonischer Verein*, the association of young composers around Weber which explicitly sought to support each others’ work by journalistic means, but in the period preceding the Berlin performances of *Athalia* we see Poissl urging Weber to lobby Wilhelm Gubitz, an influential Berlin journalist, on the piece’s behalf.<sup>444</sup> Poissl himself seems to have had a close relationship with Friedrich Rochlitz, the editor of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. A comparison between that journal’s review of *Nittetis* and a letter

---

<sup>443</sup> Waidelich, p. 319.

<sup>444</sup> *Briefe*, p. 43 (5 March 1816).

from Poissl to Rochlitz shortly after the opera's premiere suggests that the composer was in effect allowed to write his own review.<sup>445</sup>

However it would be wrong to see Poissl simply as a rootless composer blown to and fro by passing trends. Despite the extreme variations of genre in the later operas, they can still be understood in terms of his fundamental operatic aesthetics. As he himself wrote in the *Erklärung*, the composer must follow certain principles 'however various the genres are to which music is applied'.<sup>446</sup> The aesthetic compromises may sometimes be greater than they were in *Athalia*, where Poissl found a particular freedom of form and dramatic expression, but the aspirations are still visible. So for example even in the outwardly Rossinian *La Rappresaglia* one can see gestures towards the idea of 'characterisation' in the use of a recurring Polonaise rhythm in (sometimes ironical) association with the King of Poland and the wider idea of royal dignity.

In five of his later operas Poissl was also his own librettist, and this adds another layer of complexity to the negotiation between genre and aesthetic principle. The potential tensions are well illustrated by *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, whose libretto Poissl adapted from Metastasio's *l'Olimpiade*. As John Warrack has observed, Poissl's text is 'expertly written to suit the kind of opera he sought, with the narrative preserved in considerable detail but entirely dispensing with the archaic Metastasian forms'.<sup>447</sup> But as noted above, most of the musical numbers of the piece are based on the Italian *rondò*. This aria form, with its two or more sections and final major-key *Allegro* (often involving coloratura), implies a narrative or psychological development between the beginning of the aria and its end. The problem for Poissl, a composer concerned with 'dramatic truth', is that the Metastasian narrative in which the aria is embedded usually remains unchanged on either side of the aria. This is appropriate to the eighteenth-century A-B-A aria with its essentially contemplative, non-developmental structure, but is less well suited to the *rondò* with its inherent demand for narrative development.

So Poissl the librettist sometimes has to come to the rescue of Poissl the composer. An example of this is Argene's aria in Act II of *Der Wettkampf*. Argene has just heard that her beloved Licidas will marry Aristeia. Metastasio's original aria text has no significant overall emotional progression, particularly if sung in A-B-A form with a reprise of the first stanza:

What did he not say to me once! What gods did he not invoke! And how, oh God,  
how can he be so lacking in faithfulness!

---

<sup>445</sup> *Briefe*, pp. 64-66 (1 July 1817); *AmZ*, 19 (1817), pp. 547-548. The review appeared in issue No. 32 (6 August 1817).

<sup>446</sup> *MTJ*, 3 (1816), pp. 448-449.

<sup>447</sup> Warrack, *German opera*, pp. 293-294.

I lost everything for him; today I lose him as well. Alas, my affections! Love, is this the recompense you give me?<sup>448</sup>

The first two sections of Poissl's equivalent aria cover similar emotional ground to this, but the *rondò* convention demands a final section which is in a major key, has a fast tempo and is a vehicle for vocal virtuosity. At this point in the story nothing has happened to justify this kind of music – in the Metastasian narrative the unhappy situation remains unresolved. So Poissl the librettist creates a final section in which Argene imagines a hypothetical happiness, in the conditional tense:

Oh, if only my pleading could move you, and your power could lead him to me. How happy I would be then.<sup>449</sup>

With Argene evoking this imaginary ecstasy, the principle of dramatic truth is just about preserved in the florid musical setting (Figure 126).

The image shows a musical score for the final section of an aria. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is for Argene, with a vocal line and an orchestral accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The lyrics under the Argene vocal line are 'wär ich dann'. The second system is for Arg, with a vocal line and an orchestral accompaniment. The lyrics under the Arg vocal line are 'wie glücklich'. The third system is for Arg, with a vocal line and an orchestral accompaniment. The lyrics under the Arg vocal line are 'lich'. The orchestral parts include dynamics like (p), mf, and cresc. and articulation like fz.

Figure 126: *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, Aria No. 8 (final section)

---

<sup>448</sup> 'Che non mi disse un dì! / Quai numi non giurò! / E come, oh Dio! si può, / come si può così / mancar di fede? / Tutto per lui perdei; / oggi lui perdo ancor. / Poveri affetti miei! / Questa mi rendi, Amor, / questa mercede?' *l'Olimpiade*, Act II Sc 4.

<sup>449</sup> 'O daß dich mein Flehen rührte, / Deine Macht ihn zu mir führte, / O wie glücklich wär ich dann.' *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia oder die Freunde* (Munich: 1815), p. 29.

Another significant area ripe for investigation is the musical relationship between Poissl and Weber. In particular it would be interesting to examine the possibility that Weber's close acquaintance with *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* left traces in *Der Freischütz* and *Euryanthe*. If we accept, as established in this thesis, that Weber knew and performed *Athalia* in its original dialogue-based form, then *Athalia* is arguably more closely related to *Der Freischütz* than to the through-composed *Euryanthe*. Both pieces owe a formal debt to *opéra comique*, for example in their 'character'-led use of strophic songs and melodramas, but also in their incorporation of Italianate elements such as the expanded *rondò* arias which mark out their protagonists (Athalia and Joad in *Athalia*, Max and Agathe in *Der Freischütz*). The subject matter of *Athalia* is that of 'grand opera', and Poissl labelled it as such, but in its musical forms it is closer to Romantic opera. Through Weber *Athalia* may have contributed more directly to that generic strand, and thus to later developments in German opera, than has previously been acknowledged.

As noted in Chapter 3, *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, which was performed by Weber in 1820 in its revised, continuously-sung form (though he had also seen it in its dialogue-based form in Munich in 1815), may have helped Weber to crystallise his own thoughts about through-composed opera. It may incidentally also have left a melodic trace in *Der Freischütz*, which Weber was composing during the period of the *Wettkampf* performances. Agathe's relief on hearing Max's approaching footsteps (Figure 127) sounds very similar to Aristeia's when she hears that Megacles has survived his suicide attempt (Figure 128).

[Vivace con fuoco]

1

AGATHE

Ag. Him - mel, nimm des Dan - kes Zäh - ren für dies

1

Orch. *p*

**Figure 127: *Der Freischütz* (Weber), Scene and Aria No. 8**

Allegro

ARISTEA

Ar. Und nun winkt die Hoff - nung wie - der, und ge - grün - det ist mein Glück, und auf

Orch. *p*

**Figure 128: *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, Aria No. 17**

A more profoundly influential aspect can be seen in Poissl's recitatives. As noted above, Weber was conducting the continuously-sung version of *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* at a point when the idea of a through-composed opera was beginning to occupy him, and some features of Poissl's recitatives may have left their mark on *Euryanthe*, the work which was the outcome of this process.<sup>450</sup> The recitatives in *Der Wettkampf* are highly 'characteristic'. In particular, the orchestra takes an even more strongly characterising role than in *Athalia*, making much use of expressive orchestral colours, motivic reminiscences and characteristic keys. The orchestra becomes the vehicle of unspoken thoughts, as for example at the moment when Megacles realises that his only honourable escape is through suicide. This scene is set in recitative even in the original, dialogue-based version. The emergence of Megacles's intention, only obliquely stated by the singer, is expressed by the orchestra in a sudden turn towards low, dark instrumental colours and a flatter tonality (Figure 129 bars 4ff).

MEGACLES: I will stay here. I will never abandon you! But what am I saying – stay here? Can I even promise that?

The figure displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled '1', features a vocal line for Megacles in bass clef with lyrics: 'Schmer-zen Ich will ja blei-hen, nie ver-lass ich dich!'. Below it, the orchestral accompaniment includes a string section marked '(p)', a bassoon marked 'p', and violas/clarinets marked 'p'. The second system, labeled '6', features a vocal line for Megacles with lyrics: 'Was sag ich, blei-ben? Darf ich es denn ver-spre-chen? Wird mir der'. The orchestral accompaniment continues with strings, bassoon, and violas/clarinets.

Figure 129: *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, recitative from Act II

At moments like this the orchestra seems to communicate with the audience over the heads of the on-stage characters. This also happens in a recitative which Poissl added in his revision (Supplementary Volume pp. 35-36). As in the revised *Athalia*, some of the new

<sup>450</sup> Tusa, pp. 49-53.



recitatives for *Der Wettkampf* are of questionable quality. However in this example, using string-only accompaniment, we see a real aspiration to dramatic truth and character. This is demonstrated firstly by the ‘correct declamation’ of the metrical text: Poissl highlights certain syllables within the pentameter lines by means of longer notes and higher pitches, for example by emphasising ‘Lohns’ in bar 16 and ‘ich’ bar 27. We see a similar concern for individual characterisation in the shifting harmonies and agitated staccato chords of bars 21-24, expressive of Megacles’ shock when Licidas names Aristeia. Perhaps most interestingly we see a profound dramatic characterisation in the string tremolos and jagged bass figures which accompany bars 2-15. Traditionally these are signifiers of agitation and apprehension, and yet neither of the on-stage characters feels these emotions. Both men are pursuing the same woman, but neither is aware of this fact until Licidas mentions Aristeia’s name in bar 21. Until that point their conversation is easy and amicable. It is the audience, which knows more than either of the characters and thus is aware of the looming disaster, whose apprehension is expressed by the orchestra. This is the kind of characterisation which is proposed by Reischel in his article of 1797 (see Chapter 3): the use of music to ‘emphasise the emotion of the spectator’ [‘die Empfindung des Zuschauers hervorheben’], even if this emotion diverges from that of the actors themselves.<sup>451</sup>

Although Weber’s practice in *Euryanthe* differs in detail from Poissl’s in *Der Wettkampf*, his attention to the ‘characterising’ detail of vocal declamation is similarly striking. We also see him using the orchestra as Poissl does, to convey unspoken dramatic content to the audience over the heads of the on-stage characters. This happens for example in the Finale of Act II where Lysiart’s denunciation of Euryanthe uses the wide vocal intervals which are traditionally expressive of openness and honesty. However his lines are punctuated (and his veracity implicitly called into doubt) by a twisted violin motif associated with Eglantine, his absent accomplice (Figure 130 bars 4-5).

The image shows a musical score for Figure 130, titled 'Euryanthe (Weber), Finale No. 14'. It features two staves: a vocal line for 'LYSIART' and an orchestral line for 'Orch.' (strings). The tempo is marked '[Allegro]'. The vocal line begins with a first measure (marked '1') and contains the lyrics: 'Be - wun - derns-wür - dig ist's ge - lun-gen, dies stol - ze Herz im'. The orchestral line starts with a first measure (marked '1') and includes the dynamic marking '[pp]'. A specific section of the orchestral line is marked '[Violins]' and shows a melodic line with a wide interval. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C).

**Figure 130: *Euryanthe* (Weber), Finale No. 14**

---

<sup>451</sup> Reipschläger, p. 88.

Poissl was probably not the only model for Weber's 'characterisation', nor indeed for his use of the orchestra to speak to the audience over the heads of the onstage characters. There are examples in Spohr's *Faust*, whose premiere Weber conducted in 1816. There in Kunigunde's aria (No. 7) a 'hell' motif appears in the orchestra, mocking her words 'Treue Liebe gibt den Herzen Muth und Kraft' ['True love gives our hearts courage and strength'].<sup>452</sup> But Poissl was surely one of Weber's most important models, also in his use of innovative forms of characterisation within recitatives. *Euryanthe*, as we have seen, was received by many of its early audiences as 'characteristic' to the point of excess. Discussing *Euryanthe* in 1826, the correspondent of the *AmZ* noted 'expression – oh yes, in abundance', but went on to doubt whether this constituted 'song' or 'melody'. He specifically included the recitatives in this criticism:

Indeed at several points (including the accompanied recitative) one might in some sense ask, 'is this harmony?' and occasionally even, 'is this music?'<sup>453</sup>

In 1819 the *AmZ* criticised Poissl's recitatives for *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* in terms that pre-echoed criticisms of *Euryanthe*. The journal's Weimar correspondent hoped that Poissl would 'in his later works [...] avoid the alarming migrations in the modulations, especially in recitative.'<sup>454</sup> The many musical connections between these two composers merit closer investigation. Perhaps we should be seeing Poissl not as failed explorer of moribund operatic genres but as a radicalising influence on Weber. And it may well be in this area of musical characterisation (rather than in distracting issues of 'through-composition') that Poissl, through Weber at least, made his most significant contribution to the history of Romantic opera.

---

<sup>452</sup> Louis Spohr, *Faust*, ed. by Jonathan Stracey (New York: Garland, 1990), pp. 125-126.

<sup>453</sup> 'Ausdruck – o ja, die Fülle: aber ist das Gesang? ist es Melodie? ja, man dürfte in gewissem Sinne bey vielen Stellen (vollends der begleiteten Recitative) sogar auch fragen: ist das Harmonie? zuweilen wohl gar: ist das Musik?' *AmZ*, 28 (1826), p.800. See also Chapter 3.

<sup>454</sup> 'Herr v. P. möge in seinen späteren Werken [...] das ängstigende Herumtreiben in der Modulation, besonders im Recitativ, vermeiden.' *AmZ*, 21 (1819), p. 656.

## CONCLUSIONS

We often judge as trivial that for which we have not yet found a context. The historian's duty in approaching neglected terrain lies far less in crying injustice than in seeking to provide such a context.

The opening of Thomas Bauman's book on North German opera in the late eighteenth century<sup>455</sup> could equally well be applied to the study of Poissl. Until we understand the true context in which Poissl worked, he appears to be a trivial figure and an anachronistic one. This perception of anachronism begins with his biography. Alongside more 'modern', independent composers with performing careers such as Spohr and Weber, we see Poissl remaining dependent on aristocratic patronage and wedded to the Court Theatre system – a system perceived even by his own King Max Joseph as outdated and in need of reform. Poissl's works too appear to be out of step with his times. He belatedly follows operatic trends already established by others, or adopts genres which are in decline. The three German-language Metastasio adaptations of 1815-1818 look like a doomed, late resuscitation of a genre inextricably associated with the *ancien régime* and its values. *Die Prinzessin von Provence* is a *Zauberoper*, a genre perceived as old-fashioned even by a section of the audience when it was performed in Kassel in 1827.<sup>456</sup> *Der Untersberg* (1829) can be seen as a delayed response to the success of *Der Freischütz* (1821), trailing in the wake of other Romantic operas such as Spohr's *Der Berggeist* (1824) and *Pietro von Abano* (1827) and the *Vampyr* operas of Lindpaintner and Marschner (both 1828). *Zayde* (1843), premiered a few months after Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, shows little awareness of recent developments elsewhere in German opera, and has little to distinguish its musical style from Poissl's own works of two decades earlier.

And yet if we take the trouble to put Poissl into his real historical context, into what Reiner Nägele calls 'the concrete reality of the composer',<sup>457</sup> he emerges as an artist closely attuned to the currents of his time. This is certainly true of the ideological context in which he worked. If we read Poissl's works against the political ideas which were shaping Bavaria and the wider Germany we can often identify why he created certain works and why he was drawn to particular areas of subject-matter. So for example the Metastasian *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia* (1815), with its roots in *opera seria* and eighteenth-century Classicism, might seem anachronistic in form but it was highly contemporary in content. Together with Poissl's *Andromaque* adaptation it can be read as a metaphor of the German states at the end of the Napoleonic wars. Its ancient Greek setting also expresses a cultural Hellenism which

---

<sup>455</sup> *North German Opera in the Age of Goethe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>456</sup> *AmZ*, 29 (1827), p. 139.

<sup>457</sup> '[...] den konkreten kompositorischen Alltag'. Nägele, p. 18.

in Munich was associated with German political nationalism. Similarly, *Die Prinzessin von Provence* may have been clothed in the form of *Zauberoper*, an old-fashioned genre, but this form, led by special stage effects, was ideally suited to an event full of patriotic and political symbolism: the reopening of the Munich National Theatre. The new theatre was the visible expression of King Max Joseph's Enlightenment aspirations and of his hopes for a united Bavaria. *Der Untersberg*, with its libretto by Schenk, the architect of Bavaria's Catholic restoration, was arguably the most politically controversial of all Poissl's works. It was certainly received as such by a section of the audience, who protested in the theatre and caused the opera to be suspended from the repertoire. *Zayde* may seem like a throwback to earlier operas about the clash of religions and cultures such as Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) or Spohr's *Jessonda* (1823), but it takes a narrative perspective which differs significantly from these precedents, placing not the European characters but the Muslim ones centre-stage. In this it not only reflects the spirit of religious tolerance in the Munich of King Ludwig I, but also universalises a point made in different ways in *Athalia*, *Die Prinzessin von Provence* and *Der Untersberg*: that religion and national identity are inextricably connected.

Poissl has left us few directly political statements of his own, but the ones that we have are revealing concerning his wider world-view. Even in the *Erklärung*, ostensibly a discourse on the aesthetics of opera, the German national character is discussed and associated with positive qualities such as thoughtfulness, strength and security. Poissl's letter written just after the Battle of the Nations in the autumn of 1813 expresses abhorrence of the usurper Napoleon, sadness over the 'Bavarian blood' spilt on Napoleon's behalf and relief that the Franco-Bavarian alliance has come to an end. The letter explicitly includes the then Crown Prince Ludwig among those who will welcome this turn of events. Nearly thirty years later in the *Ansichten* Poissl also aligns himself with Ludwig, blaming the decline in Bavarian educational standards on the dissolution of monastic houses under King Max Joseph. This was a policy strongly opposed by the Crown Prince and reversed by him when he acceded to the throne in 1825. If we read Poissl's writings alongside both his biography and the internal evidence of the operas we can place him within the same strand of cultural and political thought as Ludwig himself – monarchist, nationalist and Catholic. All these qualities can be seen in some sense as Romantic, as defining themselves against the Enlightenment and its political consequences – revolutionary republicanism, Napoleon's hegemony over Germany and the secularism which followed in its wake.

It is unclear how close Poissl and Ludwig were personally, but there is a remarkable congruence between the projections of nationhood in the operas of this aristocratic composer and the political ideals of the man who became his monarch. The monarchical principle itself is a constant theme in the works, a principle also vigorously upheld by

Ludwig in the face of what he saw as the forces of republicanism. The opposition to Napoleon which crystallised around Ludwig in the years of the Franco-Bavarian alliance is reflected in coded form in *Antigonus* and *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, and then more overtly in *Athalia*. Ludwig was the guiding spirit behind the Hellenism, tinged with German nationalism, which is reflected in *Andromache* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*. *Der Untersberg* is set in those Middle Ages which, as Karl Borromäus Murr has written, 'were seen by the romantically inclined monarch as an epoch of national unity and of synthesis between the religious and the secular'.<sup>458</sup> The intertwining of religion and nationhood in *Zayde* and other Poissl operas has already been noted. This was a cause particularly close to Ludwig's heart.

There are even Ludwig-like figures within some of the operas. The royal heir Demetrius organises resistance to the invading Alexander in *Antigonus*. The patrician Cinna upholds Roman national honour against the Consul-turned-Emperor in *Ottaviano in Sicilia*. The future king Joas is the focus of national and religious hopes in *Athalia*. *Der Untersberg* even presents a historical ruler of Bavaria, Duke Welf, on stage and sets him in a landscape which was particularly associated with Ludwig, the borderland between Salzburg and Berchtesgaden. These are not just obsequious gestures by an artist towards his patron. They signal a much deeper ideological layer to the works themselves. Poissl aligns himself not only with Ludwig but with his vision of religion and nationhood, a vision which the Bavarian monarch was to personify not only for his own kingdom but also later for Germany as a whole.<sup>459</sup>

Against this ideological background we must also place Poissl in the context of German operatic aesthetics. This might seem an obvious course to take with a composer and his works, but Poissl has suffered more than most from a retrospective approach which assesses him not in terms of his own aesthetic aspirations but teleologically, in terms of later aesthetic systems and historical outcomes. This is particularly regrettable when his own aesthetic principles were clearly stated in his journalism and are reliably supplemented by the writings of like-minded contemporaries such as Weber. As the case studies in this thesis have shown, Poissl's aesthetic principles are a key to his musical dramaturgy. From his very first opera onwards we see him aspiring, albeit with varying degrees of success, to those qualities of 'dramatic truth', 'characterisation' and the 'total effect' which he himself identified as paramount.

---

<sup>458</sup> 'Das Mittelalter galt dem romantisch gesinnten Monarchen als eine Epoche nationaler Einheit sowie geistlich-weltlicher Synthese.' Murr, p. 112.

<sup>459</sup> Murr, pp. 126-129.

Poissl's misfortune is that these concepts were to spill over in some respects, but not in others, into the theory and practice of the *Musikdrama*. In particular, the idea of the 'total effect' can be seen as an aesthetic precursor of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This has tempted later writers to assess Poissl in terms of Wagner's aesthetics and Wagner's musical dramaturgy. But Poissl, like his contemporaries Weber, Spohr and Hoffmann, applied his aesthetics in ways which cannot always be understood in Wagnerian categories. A prominent example of this is *Athalia*, which post-Wagnerian musicology has repeatedly seen as part of the history of 'through-composed' opera, and thus as an antecedent of the through-composed *Musikdrama*. But strictly speaking *Athalia* was never truly 'through-composed', in the sense of having a unified artistic vision based on continuous singing. As this thesis has demonstrated, it began life as a piece with extensive spoken dialogues, and enjoyed significant success in this form. The closer the piece came to the state of 'through-composition' the less effective it was. The revisions of 1815, which left some spoken (melodramatic) elements intact anyway, entailed losses in artistic quality and consistency. Wohlbrück's abridgement of his libretto turned a nuanced political and psychological drama into something much coarser. Some of Poissl's new musical material was of noticeably lower quality than his original score. Most importantly, a fundamental problem of genre was created. The conversion of the piece to continuous music created very different, 'grand opera' expectations in its audiences, who were confused or even aggravated by anomalous elements such as melodrama. Poissl himself admitted that melodrama 'might seem slightly strange in a grand opera'. The attempt to move *Athalia* away from its dialogue-based roots was bound to end in failure, or at least in a series of uncomfortable aesthetic compromises.

The truth is that, despite the constant association of Poissl with 'through-composition' in the literature, there is no evidence that the issue was particularly important to him. The subject does not arise in his writings, despite his wide-ranging discussion of operatic aesthetics. The majority of his German-language operas were dialogue-based. The issues that really did concern him are best illustrated not by the revised, 'through-composed' *Athalia* but by the original version. Because the dramaturgical tools deployed in this first version are mostly irrelevant to the *Musikdrama* it has been largely ignored by musicological literature. It aspires to the 'total effect' not through the use of continuous music but through the subtle, graded combination of music, speech and melodrama. Great care is taken to integrate these elements with each other, and to use them in ways which also serve 'characterisation'. Italianate elements, such as the *rondò* arias for *Athalia* and *Joad* or the vocal decorations of *Athalia*'s Scene and Aria, accord perfectly with Poissl's desire for 'dramatic truth' and 'characterisation' but would have no more place in a *Musikdrama* than speech or melodrama. Poissl's own contemporaries understood his intentions here better than later writers – they saw him combining a French formal model (*opéra comique*) with Italian

elements to create something 'purely German'. Even his use of reminiscence motifs, though imaginative and possibly influential, is best understood not retrospectively, as something proto-Wagnerian, but as another aspect of his concern for 'characterisation' and the 'total effect'. Reminiscence motifs in themselves were not central to his operatic vision: they disappear almost entirely from many of his later operas. We should be wary of confusing the tools of musical dramaturgy (some of which, admittedly, were later also applied by Wagner) with those fundamental aesthetic aims which Poissl expressed in a number of different ways and across a number of different genres.

The most interesting aspect revealed by a close study of *Athalia* is the extent to which its ideological and aesthetic agendas are intertwined. The piece is a metaphor of the downfall of Napoleon, a vision of a free nation with religion at its heart. It is a political statement, and was received as such by some of its early audiences. But if we look at the opera from another angle, that of Poissl's operatic aesthetics, we see the ideological content being reinforced by the musical 'characterisation' of certain aspects of the narrative. So for example the theological content is underlined by recurring use of a 'characteristic' key, E flat major, in connection with a future Christian 'world-redemption'. In the context of Munich in 1814 this 'world-redemption' would have invited association with the hoped-for Bavarian (and indeed German) national liberation from Napoleon, and the 'characterising' musical technique is entwined with the theological and political messages. Similarly, the on-stage quasi-Messiah Joas is characterised and (in the words of one critic) 'exalted' by the distinctive texture of melodrama, rather in the same way that Christ's lines in Bach's *Matthäus-Passion* are given a distinctive accompaniment expressive of his divinity. This 'exaltation' of Joas throws, in Poissl's own words, an 'appropriate light' on this character, a figure whom the Munich audience may well have associated with Bavaria's own Crown Prince. Again the aesthetic and the ideological intentions are inseparable.

It is perhaps in this interaction between ideological content and aesthetic form, between message and medium, that Poissl will prove most interesting to future scholars. In both respects, the ideological and the aesthetic, he holds up a unique mirror to his age and its concerns. His operas not only bear witness to an important and influential strand in the political discourses of Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic Germany. They also embody the aspirations and experiments of a crucial generation of German opera composers. If we examine Poissl in his historical reality and without the distortions of hindsight he emerges not as a mere footnote to the *Musikdrama*, still less as an anachronistic or trivial figure out of touch with the great artistic and political issues of his time, but as a significant contributor to the story of opera and an exemplary artist of early nineteenth-century Germany.

## Appendix: Poissl's operas

Unless otherwise stated, descriptions and synopses relate to the version first performed. Genre descriptions under the titles are as given in the published libretto or, in the absence of this, in the MS performing material. S = Soprano, A = Alto, T = Tenor, B = Baritone or Bass. For operas first performed in Munich, the Munich source material is listed first. For German library sigla see List of Abbreviations. Materials cited are all for the complete opera. Materials relating to individual Overtures or Arias have not been included. Scores marked 'also in Opernprojekt' are included in the University of Cologne digital archive *Das Opernprojekt*, and can be read online at <<http://www.oper-um-1800.uni-koeln.de/>>, subject to technical limitations (see *A note on sources, references and music examples*, p. xi). All other URLs cited were accessed on 1 May 2012.

### 1. Die Opernprobe

Comic opera in two acts.

Language: German/Italian.

Libretto: Franz Danzi, after Gnecco's *La prova di un'opera seria*.

14 musical numbers connected by dialogue.

First performance: Munich, 23 February 1806.

#### Dramatis personae

Corilla, *prima donna* (S)

Violanta, *seconda donna* (S)

Blumenau, tenor (T)

Campanone, composer (B)

Don Grilletto, author (B)

Theaterunternehmer [impresario] (B)

Fischietto, prompter (B)

Chorus of copyists and choristers

The opera is set in and around an opera house in an unnamed German city.

#### ACT I

A room in the opera house. Fischietto supervises a group of music copyists. He urges them to write clearly despite the poor quality of the material provided by the composers [No. 1 Introduction (Fischietto, Chorus): *Nur hübsch groß und schön geschrieben*]. Don Grilletto appears and says that the first performance of the new opera is likely to be postponed for reasons including missing singers and disagreements between the prima donna and the composer.

Corilla's house. Corilla and her lover, the tenor Blumenau, quarrel over his infidelities [No. 2 Duet (Corilla, Blumenau): *Du allein, Tyrannin Liebe*]. Don Grilletto, Fischietto, the Theaterunternehmer, Violanta and the Chorus arrive to rehearse the new opera *Ettore in Trabisonda*. The composer Campanone presents his piece to them [No. 3 Aria (Campanone): *Meine Damen, Meine Herren*]. They sing an ensemble from the opera [No. 4 Quartet with Chorus (Corilla, Violanta, Blumenau, Don Grilletto, Chorus): *Vincer tu spero invano*]. All goes well until Campanone reveals that the next number will be an aria for the *primo uomo*. This provokes a jealous tantrum from Corilla, who threatens to withdraw from the piece [No. 5 Sextet (Corilla, Violanta, Blumenau, Fischietto, Don Grilletto, Theaterunternehmer): *Nein, ich singe nicht*]. With this argument unresolved, all leave except Corilla and Blumenau. He assures her of his continuing fidelity [No. 6 Aria (Blumenau):



*Glaubst du, dies Herz voll Liebe*]. Campanone returns but fails to appease Corilla [No. 7 Duet (Corilla, Campanone): *Ich erzürnen? Wie wär's möglich*].

The theatre wardrobe. Costumes for the new opera are being allocated. Corilla is determined to wear silk, not the woollen dress more appropriate to classical antiquity. She has violent disagreements with Don Grilletto and with the second soprano Violanta, and again threatens to walk out of the production. A general quarrel ensues [No. 8 Finale: *Was kommt Ihnen in den Sinn!*].

## ACT II

Corilla's house. Corilla accuses Blumenau of not supporting her in the quarrel, but the two eventually reach a reconciliation [No. 9 Duettino (Corilla, Blumenau): *Ewig treu werd ich dich lieben*]. The others arrive to tell Corilla that they have given in to all her demands. The theatre. Campanone sings the bass aria he has written [No. 10 Scene and Aria with Chorus (Campanone, Chorus): *Frenate il pianto*]. Corilla makes a fuss again – the aria is much too good and will overshadow her own. The composer and the librettist reflect on the thankless task of creating new operas [No. 11 Duet (Campanone, Grilletto: *Um su mak' ein Drama Serio*]. Corilla is appeased by further concessions from the impresario, and tries out one of her arias [No. 12 Scene and Aria with Chorus (Corilla, Chorus): *Morte volesti e fiera morte avrai*]. The post arrives and work is suspended while the company read out letters with operatic gossip from other theatres [No. 13 Sextet with Chorus (Corilla, Violanta, Blumenau, Campanone, Don Grilletto, Theaterunternehmer, Chorus): *Theure Freundin!*]. An attempt to re-start the rehearsal fails because the ballet company now needs the stage. Don Grilletto produces a freshly-printed playbill announcing the new opera, and all agree that they must work together to make it a success [No. 14 Finale: *Mit gnädigster Bewilligung*].

### MS performing material

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 88-1,1 (Score, Act I, also in Opernprojekt); St.th. 88-1,2 (Score, Act II, also in Opernprojekt); St.th. 88-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*); St.th. 88-3 (*Soufflierbuch*); Slg.Her 1251 (libretto, see also Online below).

### Online MS performing material (Mbs)

Slg.Her 1251: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00063316/images/>>

### Performances

Munich: 23/2/1806, 28/2/1806.

## 2. Antigonus

Serious opera in three acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: (?) the composer, after Metastasio's *Antigono*.

18 (?) musical numbers.<sup>460</sup>

---

<sup>460</sup> The performing material of *Antigonus* was lost in the nineteenth century. Twentieth-century writers assumed, it is unclear on what evidence, that the opera was through-composed (see Reipschläger, p. 122). The layout of the surviving libretto actually suggests the opposite, since it marks off certain sections of connecting verse as 'Recitativ' (pp. 9, 27,

First performance: Munich, 12 February 1808.

**Dramatis personae**

Antigonus, King of Macedonia

Demetrius, his son

Ismene, his daughter

Berenice, Princess of Egypt

Alexander, King of Epirus

Clearch, Commander of the Epirotes

Chorus of Ladies of the Princess, Macedonian commanders and warriors, Epirote captains and warriors

The opera is set in Thessalonica, the capital of ancient Macedonia. The Egyptian princess Berenice is betrothed to Antigonus, King of Macedonia, but harbours a secret love for his son Demetrius. Antigonus, suspicious of his son, has forbidden them to meet. Macedonia is under attack from Alexander, King of Epirus.

**ACT I**

The royal gardens. The women of the palace pray that King Antigonus may be kept safe in this time of war [Chorus (Ismene, Berenice, Chorus): *Wir fleh'n zu Euch, ihr Götter*]. Ismene tries to make Berenice admit that she is in love with Demetrius. Berenice says she can only love Antigonus. Demetrius arrives and urges Berenice to flee with him for her own safety. She refuses. Antigonus, defeated on the battlefield, returns to his palace and is angry to find his son with Berenice. He orders him to leave and Demetrius obeys [Aria (Demetrius): *Ich gehorche*]. In this time of great danger Antigonus releases Berenice from her obligation to him, but she insists that her place is at his side. A group of Macedonian soldiers begs Antigonus to lead them back into the fight. Antigonus leaves with them, to the dismay of Ismene and Berenice [Trio with Chorus (Antigonus, Ismene, Berenice, Chorus): *Hinaus! Dem Feind entgegen!*]. Ismene goes to watch the battle from the ramparts. Berenice, alone with her attendants, admits that she loves Demetrius [Aria with Chorus (Berenice, Chorus): *Konnt' ich dies Auge sehen*].

A valley outside the city. A group of Macedonian warriors gathers [Chorus: *Horcht auf!*]. Demetrius is concerned about the safety of his father and Berenice. He appeals to the warriors to follow him and liberate the fatherland [Aria with Chorus (Demetrius, Chorus): *Schwört hier bei diesem Stahl*].

A grand hall in the royal palace. Alexander enters in triumph [Finale: *Feiert die Siege des Helden!*]. When Berenice appears with the captured but still defiant Antigonus, Alexander offers her his hand in marriage and the crowns of both Macedonia and Epirus. She refuses and says she would rather die with Antigonus. Alexander, moved by the tears of Antigonus' daughter Ismene, offers the Macedonian King his freedom if he will renounce Berenice. Antigonus refuses. Both he and Berenice are imprisoned.

**ACT II**

A room in the palace. Alexander feels that his victory is incomplete – Antigonus may be a prisoner, but he still has the love of Berenice [Chorus (Chorus, Alexander) *Du hast gesiegt*]. Demetrius smuggles himself into Alexander's presence and offers to take his father's place in prison. Alexander is impressed by such filial devotion and offers to set both father and son free in return for Berenice's hand. He asks Demetrius to persuade Berenice. Demetrius agrees in order to free his father, and subsequently argues so persuasively on Alexander's behalf that Berenice doubts his love [Duet (Berenice, Demetrius) *Die Pflicht ist erfüllt*].

---

40, see 'Published libretto' below). This suggests that other passages were at the very least not sung in full *recitativo accompagnato*, and may have been spoken.

Alexander tells Demetrius he can go and release Antigonus [Duet (Alexander, Demetrius) *Im Arm der Liebe*].

A remote part of the palace. Antigonus, imprisoned, longs for death [Aria (Antigonus) *Du aller Leiden Ende*]. He is horrified to hear from Ismene of the agreement Demetrius has made with Alexander [Aria with Chorus (Ismene, Chorus) *Der besorgten Tochter Blicken*]. Demetrius defends his agreement, pleading that it was for the sake of the Macedonian nation [Trio (Antigonus, Demetrius, Ismene) *Ich will in schweren Ketten*]. Berenice arrives with an escape plan that will re-unite Antigonus with the troops rallied by Demetrius [Finale *Empfang, o güt'ger Himmel*]. However the plot is discovered and Antigonus is arrested again. He and Berenice are imprisoned.

### **ACT III**

A room in the palace. Alexander, his patience exhausted, declares that in the event of a Macedonian counter-attack Antigonus will be executed [Aria (Alexander) *Gleich dem Felsen im Sturm*]. Demetrius again comes to beg for his father's freedom, and Alexander is once more impressed by the son's devotion, but refuses. Demetrius draws his sword and forces Alexander to give him the ring that will authorise Antigonus' release. A lieutenant is sent to organise the escape while Demetrius guards Alexander. Once Antigonus is known to be free, Demetrius surrenders and offers himself up to be punished. However Alexander is again influenced by the pleading of Ismene and chooses to be merciful [Quartet (Alexander, Ismene, Clearch, Demetrius) *Ja sterben sollst du*]. Berenice confesses her love to Demetrius, but he feels he must relinquish all claims on her in order to secure his father's happiness. He runs away to seek death in battle [Scene and Aria (Berenice) *Welch Schrecken ergreift mich?*].

A plain outside the walls of Thessalonica. Antigonus, reunited with his warriors, tries to retake the capital [Finale *Laßt uns die Freiheit*]. He is trapped by Alexander but rescued by Demetrius. The tide of battle turns and Alexander's army is routed. In victory, Antigonus offers reconciliation and friendship to Alexander. Demetrius is allowed to marry Berenice, and Alexander marries Ismene.

### **Published libretto**

*Antigonus, ernsthafte Oper in drei Akten nach Metastasio* (Munich: 1808).

Munich (Mbs): Don.Lud. LII, 13; L. eleg. m. 1012; Bibl. Mont. 98.

Online: <<http://daten.digitalle-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00061995/images/>>

Online: <<http://www.archive.org/stream/deutscheschausp00stolgoog#page/n45/mode/2up>>

### **Performances**

Munich: 12/2/1808, 14/2/1808.

## **3. Ottaviano in Sicilia**

Heroic opera in three Acts.

Language: Italian.

Libretto: (?) Butturini, adapted by (?) the composer.

23 musical numbers connected by recitative.

First performance: Munich, 1 July 1812.

### **Dramatis personae**

Ottaviano, Emperor of Rome (T)

Scribonia, his wife (S)  
Cinna, Roman Senator (S)  
Livia, niece of Pompey (S)  
Murena, Roman Senator (B)  
Sempronio, Pretorian Captain (B)  
Chorus of Conspirators, Pretorians, Guards, Shepherds, Shepherdesses, People.

### ACT I

The harbour of Syracuse. Murena and the people prepare to welcome Ottaviano [No. 1 Introduction (Murena, Chorus): *Propizia sia l'aurora*]. Murena is secretly in league with Ottaviano's enemies.

A lonely place at the foot of a mountain. Ottaviano's wife Scribonia finds her lover Cinna, a proscribed Senator, hiding in the countryside [No. 2 Cavatina (Cinna): *Fra l'orror di mie sventure*]. Scribonia's marriage to Ottaviano has been dutiful but loveless, and now that he is rejecting her in favour of Livia, she is enraged. Appealing to Cinna's patriotism, she urges him to murder the tyrant [No. 3: Duet (Scribonia, Cinna): *Ingrata!*].

A great square in Syracuse. Ottaviano arrives in triumph [No. 4 March; No. 5: Chorus *Viva l'eroe del Tebro*]. He promises the Roman people peace and prosperity [No. 6 Aria (Ottaviano): *Per me di Roma il fato*]. They sing his praises [No. 7 Chorus: *Serbate, o Numi*].

A chamber inside the Praetorium. Alone with Ottaviano, Scribonia accuses him of infidelity. He rounds on her, saying he knows about her relationship with his enemy Cinna, which is cause enough for him to divorce her and punish them both. However, if she confesses all he will re-instate her as his wife. She refuses, as this would mean betraying Cinna [No. 8 Duet (Ottaviano, Scribonia): *Sempre ti vidi in volto*]. Ottaviano confides in Murena. He still loves Scribonia, but marriage to Livia would mean an end to Rome's civil war. When Livia appears she refuses his hand, stained as it is with the blood of her family. Only if he can prove himself a true son of Rome, not merely its oppressor, will she consider accepting him [No. 9 Trio (Livia, Ottaviano, Murena): *Se amar degg'io*].

A lonely place at the foot of a mountain. Cinna is now armed and ready to attack Ottaviano. But Scribonia warns him to go back into hiding, as they have been seen together and he is in great danger. Shepherds and shepherdesses rush in, terrified of Ottaviano's troops, who appear and arrest Cinna [No.10 Finale: *Ahimè, qual turbine*].

### ACT II

Gallery in the Imperial palace. Ottaviano's guards celebrate his victory [No. 1 Chorus: *Pago di tue vittorie*]. Livia urges Ottaviano to exercise clemency. Moved by her words, he frees Cinna and urges him to marry Scribonia. Ottaviano and Cinna are reconciled and share a vision of a peaceful future [No. 2 Duet (Cinna, Ottaviano): *Tornerà da tanti orrori*].

The Temple of Vesta. Scribonia, now divorced by Ottaviano, is still determined to have her revenge on him [No. 3 Aria (Scribonia): *Voglio che avvampi ognora*]. Murena and his soldiers are ready to start the insurrection. Cinna, now released, returns and tells them of his reconciliation with Ottaviano, but Murena rejects this as a trick, and Scribonia regards it as another betrayal of her. Despite his misgivings, Cinna is persuaded to rejoin the rebels [No. 4 Chorus and Aria (Chorus, Cinna): *Dal tiranno che l'opprime*].

Ottaviano's camp. He muses on the burdens of kingship [No. 5 Aria with Chorus (Ottaviano, Chorus): *Con il crin di lauri adorno*]. To his surprise the insurgents attack. The Praetorian Guards drive them back and capture their leaders.

### ACT III

Colonnade outside the Temple of Vesta. The people are moved by the sight of Cinna and Scribonia in chains and hope that mercy will prevail [No. 1 Chorus: *Ahi qual spettacolo*]. Cinna is ready to die but is horrified to see Scribonia among the condemned [No. 4 Aria with Chorus (Cinna, Chorus): *Qual volto, oimè*]. Scribonia declares herself happy to die with him [No. 4½ Trio (Cinna, Scribonia, Sempronio): *Di tanti tuoi tormenti*].

A great square. The people gather for Ottaviano's judgement [No.5 March; No. 6 Chorus: *Sempre ad umano esempio*]. Ottaviano pardons the conspirators to general rejoicing [No. 7 Chorus: *Viva, viva! Viva Augusto!*]. He lays down the imperial sceptre, but the people beg him to take it up again [No. 8 Chorus: *Padre! Signore!*]. He accedes to their wishes. Scribonia will marry Cinna, and Ottavio will marry Livia. Wishing to share the burden of power, he appoints Cinna to the post of Consul [No. 9 Final Chorus: *Questo si lieto giorno*].

#### **Published libretti**

*Ottavian in Sicilien: Heroische Oper in drei Aufzügen* (Munich: 1812).  
Munich (Mbs): L.eleg.m. 1139; L. eleg.m. 1083; Don.Lud. XXIII,6.

*Octavian in Sicilien: Heroische Oper in drey Aufzügen* (Munich: 1826)  
Munich (Mbs): Don.Lud. 755; Slg.Her 1238.

#### **MS performing material**

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 177-1 (Score, also in Opernprojekt); St.th. 177-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*); St.th. 177-3 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*); St.th. 177-4 (*Directionsbuch*); St.th. 177-5 (*Soufflierbuch*); St.th. 177-6 (*Inspizientenbuch*).  
Dresden (DI): Mus. 4644-F-2 (Score); Mus. 4644-F-2a (Score).

#### **Performances**

Munich: 1/7/1812, 5/7/1812, 6/8/1812, 26/1/1826 (in German), 9/4/1826 (in German).

## **4. Merope**

Heroic opera in two acts by Sebastiano Nasolini and Poissl.<sup>461</sup>

Language: Italian.

Libretto: (?) Tindario, adapted by Schlett.

17 musical numbers connected by recitative.

First performance: Munich, 1 September 1812

#### **Dramatis personae**

Merope, Queen of Messene (S)

Timante, her son (S)

Polifonte, tyrant of Messene (T)

Adrasto, confidant of Merope (B)

Ismene, confidante of Merope (S)

Nearco, confidant of Polifonte (B)

Polidoro, an old man (B)

Chorus of attendants of Merope, attendants of Polifonte, people of Messene.

#### **ACT I**

A subterranean vault with the graves of the Kings of Messene. Ismene, Adrasto and other followers of Merope gather to remember the dead King Cresfonte [No. 1 Introduction (Ismene, Adrasto, Chorus): *Ombra, che qui t'aggiri*]. The tyrant Polifonte, who has seized power in the Kingdom, announces that he wishes to marry the widowed Queen Merope.

---

<sup>461</sup> See Chapter 4 for detailed discussion of Poissl's adaptation and the involvement of other composers.

Adrasto is horrified at the prospect [No. 2 Duet (Polifonte, Adrasto): *La sorte mia felice*]. The Queen's son Timante, who has grown up abroad under the name Egisto, has returned to Messene but is arrested by soldiers who bring him to Polifonte [No. 3 Recitative and Cavatina (Timante) *Gran nume, che leggi*].

Merope's apartments. Merope mourns the loss of her husband and her son [No. 4 Cavatina (Merope, Ismene, Chorus): *Deh, consola*]. Polifonte sends the suspicious prisoner on to Merope. She notices the young man's similarity with her son but comes to the conclusion that it is not Timante. 'Egisto' says he has killed a stranger in self-defence, a young man of his own age, and thrown his body into the river Pamiso. Merope fears that the prisoner may be her son's murderer, and sends him back to Polifonte [No. 5 Duet (Merope, Timante): *Taci, va*].

A gallery connecting several apartments. Polifonte proposes to Merope but is rejected by her [No. 6 Aria (Polifonte): *Se intrepido fra l'armi*]. Old Polidoro, to whom Merope had entrusted the infant Timante many years previously, comes to tell her that the Prince absconded from his care two months ago. Now he has found Timante's bloodstained garment by the river Pamiso. This confirms Merope's belief that her son has been killed by 'Egisto'. She swears revenge on Polifonte, whom she believes to be behind the murder. Polifonte brings the prisoner back to her, demanding judgement and continuing to press his suit. Merope rages at both Polifonte and 'Egisto' [No. 7 Trio with Chorus (Merope, Timante, Polifonte, Chorus): *Barbaro, a tanto eccesso*].

## ACT II

Merope's apartments. Adrasto rallies support against Polifonte [No. 1 Introduction (Adrasto, Chorus): *Si vada, Messeni*].

A magnificent gallery overlooking the royal gardens. Merope decides to assassinate Polifonte herself, but finds that her supporters, led by Adrasto, have been overpowered and imprisoned [No. 2 Duet with Chorus (Merope, Polifonte, Chorus): *Che ascolto? Chi viene?*]. Demoralised, she withdraws. Polifonte releases the Queen's followers. Adrasto accuses Polifonte of inciting the murder of Timante. Polifonte rejects this and orders the alleged murderer 'Egisto' to be sent to Merope so that she may take vengeance herself. Adrasto also accuses Polifonte of murdering the late King Cresfonte. Polifonte says he will prove his innocence by swearing an oath at Cresfonte's grave [No. 3 Trio with Chorus (Polifonte, Adrasto, Nearco, Chorus): *No, quest'alma non tema gl'insulti*].

A remote place. Timante, himself unaware of his true identity, wonders whether he has indeed killed the heir to Messene [No. 4 Recitative and Aria (Timante): *Qual terra mai é questa?*].

The royal burial vault. Ismene, Adrasto and others loyal to Merope gather at Cresfonte's tomb and urge the shade of the dead King to indicate who killed him [No. 5 March. No. 6 Chorus: *Sorgi dal freddo cenere*]. Polifonte swears that he was loyal to the dead King, but Cresfonte's ghost appears and indicates that Polifonte is a traitor and a murderer [No. 7 Scene and Aria (Polifonte, Adrasto, Chorus): *Giuro, che il Rè difesi*].

A courtyard. Polidoro tells Ismene that he has good news for Merope, but will not reveal what it is.

A gallery leading to several apartments. The people urge Merope to execute 'Egisto' [No. 8 Scene and Aria with Chorus (Merope, Timante, Chorus): *I nostri gemiti*]. However she finds that she is incapable of shedding his blood. She entrusts Adrasto with the deed and sends the young man away to be executed. Meanwhile old Polidoro has recognised the Prince and tells the Queen. Merope, distraught that she has ordered the execution of her own son, sends Polidoro to rescue him. When Timante reappears alive, the people of Messene rally to their rightful King.

A courtyard. Polifonte has managed to capture Timante again. He orders Nearco to bring Timante before Merope in chains and threatens to kill her son if she will not give him her hand. Under extreme duress Merope agrees.

The ancient Temple of Hercules. Polifonte prepares to marry Merope in a grand ceremony [No. 9 March]. However Timante escapes, interrupts the marriage ceremony, kills Polifonte and is acclaimed King [No. 10 Scene and Chorus (Timante, Merope, Polifonte, Chorus): *Ah! Che tradimento!*].

#### **Published libretti**

*Merope: Drama eroico per Musica in due Atti* (Munich, Hübschmann: 1812).

Munich (Mbs): St. th. 252-3; Slg.Her 1135a; L.eleg.m. 1117 h.

Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00053797/images/>>

*Merope: Heroisches Singspiel in zwei Aufzügen, aus dem Italienischen und nach Gotters Bearbeitung von F. K. Hiemer.* (Stuttgart: 1813)

Munich (Mbs): Slg.Her 1135.

Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00053797/images/>>

#### **MS performing material**

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 252-1 (Score, 2 vols, also in Opernprojekt); St.th. 252-2 (*Musikoufflierbuch*).

Stuttgart (SI): Shelfmark unknown..

Frankfurt (F): Mus. hs. Opern 415 (Various MS performing materials including score).

#### **Performances**

Munich: 1/9/1812, 30/9/1812, 4/10/1812. Stuttgart (in German): 1/9/1813, 29/9/1813, 17/10/1813, 16/12/1813, 19/12/1813, 20/7/1814, 3/12/1815, 27/10/1816. Frankfurt (in German): 6/7/1814.

## **5. Aucassin und Nicolette**

Singspiel in three acts.

Language: German

Libretto: F. K. Hiemer after Sedaine's *Aucassin et Nicolette*

13 musical numbers connected by dialogue.

First performance: Munich, 28 May 1813

#### **Dramatis personae**

Garins, Count of Beaucaire (B)

Aucassin, his son (T)

Bongars, Count of Valence (B)

The Governor of the castle (B)

Nicolette (S)

First Officer (B)

Second Officer (speaking role)

Bredau, a soldier (T)

Marcou, a soldier (B)

A shepherd (speaking role)

Chorus of soldiers and people

#### **ACT I**

A room in the fortress of Beaucaire. The castle is being attacked by the forces of Count Bongars [No. 1 Introduction (Aucassin, Garins, Chorus): *Nicolette! Nicolette!*]. Count Garins appeals to his son Aucassin to join in the defence but Aucassin refuses to do so unless his father will allow him to marry Nicolette, a foundling brought up by the castle's

Governor. As the battle reaches a crisis Garins concedes that Aucassin, if victorious, may see his beloved once more. However when Aucassin goes off to fight, Garins expresses his disapproval of Nicolette to her foster-father the Governor. The Governor, defending the girl, tells how a gipsy woman once read in Nicolette's hand that she was of noble blood [No. 2 Duet (Governor, Garins): *Einfach, herzlich und bescheiden*]. Garins summons Nicolette and orders her to reject Aucassin. She says that Aucassin would never believe that she was doing this of her own free will [No. 3 Trio (Nicolette, Garins, Governor): *Nichts! Mich lasst reden*]. However, mindful of Aucassin's happiness, she suggests an alternative: that she should be exiled from the castle, even banished to a convent. The Governor supports this proposal, fearful that otherwise Garins will have Nicolette killed.

Aucassin's victory is announced. We hear that he has routed the enemy and captured Bongars. Garins quickly orders Nicolette to be imprisoned in a tower of the castle [No. 4 Recitative, March and Chorus (Garins, Chorus): *Der Siegeston erschallt!*]. Aucassin returns with the captured Bongars and claims his promised prize – one more meeting with Nicolette. Garins refuses, reneging on his promise. Aucassin, incensed, renounces all loyalty to his father [No. 5 Finale: *Schwört mir, so oft es auch gefällt*]. He releases Bongars, making him promise to renew his attacks. Garins has Aucassin imprisoned in a dungeon.

## ACT II

The castle courtyard at night. Aucassin is heard singing a sad song in his dungeon [No. 6 Entr'acte and Song (Aucassin): *Mein Freund und Tröster du*]. Outside, the guards Marcou and Bredau comment on his plight and note that, unknown to Aucassin, Nicolette is imprisoned in a nearby tower [No. 7 Trio (Aucassin, Bredau, Marcou): *Wie, was, nach einer solchen Schlacht!*]. To their amazement Nicolette makes a daring escape down the tower, and the guards eavesdrop as she converses with Aucassin through a window [No. 8 Recitative, Quartet and Chorus (Nicolette, Aucassin, Bredau, Marcou, Officer, Chorus): *Barbar!*]. She urges Aucassin to forget her and obey his father. Bredau sings a song to warn Nicolette that other soldiers are nearby, and she flees just before they appear. Bredau then deliberately sends the soldiers off in the wrong direction.

When Garins appears, Bredau evades punishment by feigning stupidity – he says he saw something descending the tower but thought it was a monster. Now that Nicolette is assumed dead in the forest, Garins is persuaded to release Aucassin. The Governor advises Aucassin to plunge into new activities to distract himself from thoughts of Nicolette. However Aucassin still feels he cannot live without her [No. 9 Recitative and Aria (Aucassin): *Sie soll ich meiden, vergessen?*]. A shepherd appears with a coin and a cryptic message from a beautiful woman he has seen in the countryside. To prove her identity she has sent a lock of her hair. Aucassin, realising it is Nicolette, resolves to go and find her, but before he sets off he writes a message for Garins [No. 10 Finale: *Ihr mögt hier zittern*].

Garins and Bongars return, having made peace and agreed a treaty based on the marriage of Aucassin to Bongars' daughter. Garins reads Aucassin's message, which says that he has left for ever. He assembles a search party to look for his son.

## ACT III

A forest. Nicolette sits morosely weaving wreaths of wild flowers [No. 11 Entr'acte and Romance (Nicolette): *Im düstern Walde muß ich sitzen*]. Hearing the shepherd approach, she runs away. The shepherd has been employed by Aucassin to help search for Nicolette, but the day is hot, and having taken his payment in advance he prefers to sit down and relax. Aucassin himself appears and sees the wreath which Nicolette has dropped in her haste. He calls Nicolette's name, she replies from afar and they are reunited [No. 12 Recitative and Duet (Nicolette, Aucassin) *Geliebte Nicolette!*]. Garins' search party finds them and Aucassin draws his sword, prepared to fight to the death [No. 13 Finale *Ergebt euch!*].



However his father tells him that Nicolette is his – she is Bongars' long-lost daughter who was abducted as a child. All are united in celebration.

**Published libretto**

*Aucassin und Nicolette, ein Singspiel in drei Aufzügen* (Munich, Zängl: 1813)

Munich (Mbs): L.eleg.m. 1914 d; L.eleg.m. 1014 d; Sgl.Her 134.

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00053218/images/>>

Online: <<http://reader.digital-sammlungen.de/resolve/display/bsb10578324.html>>

**MS performing materials**

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 13 (Score, also in Opernprojekt); St.th. 13-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*).

**Performances**

Munich: 28/5/1813, 30/5/1813

## 6. Athalia

Grand opera in three acts

Language: German

Libretto: J. G. Wohlbrück after Racine's *Athalie*

15 musical numbers connected by dialogue (original version)<sup>462</sup>

15 musical numbers connected by recitative (revised version)

First performance: Munich, 3 June 1814

**Dramatis personae**

Athalia, widow of King Joram of Judah (S)

Joas, her grandson, King of Judah. Ten to twelve years old (S)

Joad, High Priest (B)

Josabeth, his wife, sister of Joas' father (S)

Abner, a leading commander of the Kings of Judah (B)

Mathan, High Priest of Baal, Athalia's confidant (B)

Asarja and Ismael, captains and princes of the Levites (speaking roles)

Joas' nurse (silent role)

Maidens and youths from the tribe of Levi (children's chorus SSAA)

Chorus of Priests, Levites, courtiers of Athalia, warriors of Athalia

**Synopsis: see Chapter 5.**

**Published libretti**

*Athalia, eine große Oper in drei Akten* (Munich, Storno: 1814)

Munich (Mbs): L.eleg.m. 1014 a.

*Athalia, eine große Oper in drei Aufzügen* (Frankfurt am Main: 1815)

Berlin (Bs): Tp 683/2 Mus.

*Athalia, eine große Oper in drei Aufzügen* (Berlin: 1817)

Berlin (Bs): 20 ZZ 2190; Tp 683/1 Mus; Tp 683/2 Mus.

*Athalia, eine große Oper in drei Aufzügen* (Munich: 1828)

---

<sup>462</sup> See detailed account of the original and revised versions of *Athalia* in Chapter 5.

Munich (Mbs): L.eleg.m. 1014 b.

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00053153/images/>>

### **MS performing material**

Munich (Mbs): St. th. 6-1 (Score); St. th. 6-2 (Score – revised version of Overture only); St. th. 6-3 (*Directionsbuch*); St. th. 6-4 (*Soufflierbuch*); St. th. 6-5 (*Inspizientenbuch*).

Berlin (Bs): Mus. ms. 11715 (Score); Mus. ms. TO 220 (*Soufflierbuch*).

Frankfurt (F): Mus. Hs. Opern 457, 1-10 (Various performing materials including score, partbooks, orchestral parts, *Soufflierbuch*).

Stuttgart (SI): HB XVII 521 a-b (Score).

Weimar (WRdn): op. 127 (Score)

### **Performances**

Munich: 3/6/1814, 17/6/1814, 16/6/1815, 27/9/1816, 5/12/1828. Stuttgart: 21/5/1815, 3/9/1815. Frankfurt: 17/9/1815, 27/9/1815, 1/11/1815, 16/5/1816, 4/3/1820. Prague: 21/5/1816, 31/7/1816. Darmstadt: 4/2/1816, 18/2/1816, 31/3/1816, 9/6/1816, 23/2/1817, 28/3/1817, 14/12/1817, 28/3/1819, 22/8/1819, 30/7/1820, 28/10/1821, 11/11/1821. Berlin: 25/2/1817, 28/2/1827, 31/8/1817, 26/12/1817, 16/1/1818, 21/1/1820, 7/2/1820. Weimar: 15/3/1817, 19/3/1817. Karlsruhe: 7/6/1818, 23/4/1821, 21/6/1821, 24/10/1822. Mannheim: 22/12/1819, 23/1/1820.

## **7. Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia, oder Die Freunde**

Grand opera in three acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: the composer after Metastasio's *l'Olimpiade*.

First performance: Munich, 21 April 1815

### **Dramatis personae**

Clistenes, King of Sicion (B)

Aristea, his daughter (S)

Argene, a noble Cretan (S)

Licidas, prince of Crete (T)

Megacles, a noble Athenian youth (B)

Amint, tutor of Licidas (B)

Alkander, confidant of Clistenes (T)

Pamene, one of Aristea's ladies (S)

The High Priest of the Temple of Zeus (B)

Chorus of priests, athletes, people, shepherds, shepherdesses, attendants of the King, ladies of Aristea.

### **ACT I**

A shady valley in Elis, ancient Greece. Licidas and Amint wait for the arrival of Megacles [No. 1 Introduction (Licidas, Amint): *Sieh des Himmels Thore offen!*]. Licidas wishes Megacles, whose life he once saved, to compete on his behalf in the Olympic Games. When Megacles arrives he readily agrees to help Licidas and hurries off to register for the Games [No. 2 Trio (Licidas, Megacles, Amint): *Ach zög're nicht!*].

Open country at the foot of a mountain. Argene, abandoned by her lover Licidas, is living disguised as a shepherdess [No. 3 Chorus and Dance (Argene, Chorus): *Freundlicher Wohnsitz froher Gefühle*]. She has been befriended by King Clistenes' daughter Aristeia, who is also unhappy. Aristeia will soon be obliged to marry the winner of the Olympic Games, but pines for her true love Megacles. King Clistenes summons Aristeia to the Games and lists the princely competitors, who include Licidas, to Argene's dismay. The two unhappy women comfort each other [No. 4 Recitative and Prayer (Aristeia, Argene): *Weh mir! All meine Hoffnung*]. Megacles returns from registering for the Games under Licidas' name. Licidas reveals that the victor's prize is Aristeia. Megacles is dismayed but cannot honourably reveal to Licidas that he loves Aristeia. When Megacles pretends to sleep, Licidas sings a lullaby over his friend [No. 5 Aria (Licidas): *Stille Ruhe*] before leaving. Aristeia arrives and Megacles admits to her that he is competing, but not that he is doing so on behalf of Licidas. Aristeia is delighted but Megacles is deeply unhappy as he joins the athletes on their way to the competition [No. 6 Finale/Duet (Aristeia, Megacles, Chorus): *Ihr güt'gen Götter!*].

## ACT II

A room in the royal palace of Olympia. Aristeia and Argene wait to hear the result of the Games [No. 7 Duet (Aristeia, Argene): *Freundlich lachte mir das Leben*]. Alkander comes with the result: 'Licidas' has won. Both women are dismayed. Argene contemplates suicide, but would still forgive Licidas if he returned to her [No. 8 Recitative and Aria (Argene): *Zu sterben? Auch Argene weiß zu sterben*].

A great square in the city of Olympia. Megacles is celebrated as winner of the Games in a great procession [No. 9 March. No. 10 Chorus: *Muth und Kraft und Kunst und Stärke*]. Megacles says he must leave and proposes 'Egist' (Licidas) as a companion for Aristeia in his absence. But Aristeia herself arrives before he can go, and is confused to see Megacles treated as the man who has won her [Recitative and Quintet with Chorus (Aristeia, Megacles, Licidas, Clistenes, Alkander, Chorus): *Wie gerne, Vater*]. She is even more confused when, once the crowds have withdrawn, 'Egist' declares his love for her. Megacles asks Licidas to go away for a moment while he explains the deception to Aristeia. She faints [No. 12 Recitative and Prayer (Megacles) *O Himmel!*]. When Licidas returns, Megacles leaves Aristeia in his care and goes off, determined to kill himself [No. 13 Aria (Megacles): *Wenn sie erwacht zu neuen Qualen*]. When Aristeia awakes she is shocked and furious to find Licidas instead of Megacles. She tells Licidas that Megacles is her true love. Licidas, unsure what to do, is now confronted by Argene, who threatens to tell Clistenes of the deception. Amint rushes in to say that Megacles has drowned himself. Licidas is blamed by Argene and Aristeia for Megacles' death [No. 15 Finale: *Götter! Unsterbliche!*].

## Act III

A room in the palace. Aristeia's companions mourn the death of Megacles [No. 16 Chorus: *Dieses Hauses weite Hallen*]. However Pamene arrives with the news that he has been saved, and Aristeia is overjoyed [No. 17 Recitative and Aria (Aristeia): *Ihr weintet meinem Schmerz*]. She and Megacles are reunited, but news arrives that a distraught Licidas has tried to assassinate Clistenes. Megacles proposes to offer himself for execution in Licidas' place. Aristeia tries unsuccessfully to dissuade him, but declares that if he dies she will die with him [No. 18 Recitative and Duet (Aristeia, Megacles): *Ihr Götter! Wie!*].

In front of the Temple of Zeus. Licidas is to be executed [No. 19 March and Chorus: *Von dir kommt Tod und Leben*]. Megacles offers himself in place of his friend [No. 20 Finale: *Laß deine Donner schlafen*] but is refused. Then Argene arrives and offers herself for execution. She is Licidas' wife and so is entitled to die in his place. Licidas denies this to save Argene's life, but she produces a golden necklace as proof. The necklace in turn proves that Licidas is actually the long-lost son of Clistenes, Filint. The High Priest pardons Licidas and all praise the gods.

### **Published libretti**

*Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia oder die Freunde* (Munich: 1815)

Munich (Mbs): Bibl. Mont. 985; Slg. Her 1909.

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055155/images/>>

*Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia oder die Freunde* (Dresden: 1820)

Dresden (DI): Lit. Germ. rec. B. 2813, 68.

*Der Wettkampf zu Olympica, oder die Freunde* (Munich: 1821)

Munich (Mbs): Bibl. Mont. 976.

### **MS performing materials:**

Munich (Mbs): St. th. 124-1 (Score, also in Opernprojekt); St. th. 124-2

(*Musiksoufflibuch*); St. th. 124-3 (*Inspizientenbuch*); St. th. 124-4 (*Inspizientenbuch*).

Berlin (Bs): Mus. ms. 17716 (Score, also in Opernprojekt).

Dresden (DI): Mus. 4644-F-4 (Score, also in Opernprojekt).

Stuttgart (SI): HB XVII 525 a-c (Score).

Weimar (WRdn): op. 131 (Score, also in Opernprojekt).

### **Performances**

Munich: 21/4/1815, 14/7/1815, 13/11/1821, 25/11/1821. Stuttgart: 3/11/1815. Darmstadt: 14/7/1816, 27/10/1816. Dresden: 16/3/1820, 30/4/1821. Also some performances in Weimar.

## **8. Dir wie mir, oder Wie sich alle betrügen**

Comic opera in two acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: Johann Baptist v. Zahlhas.

Composed 1816, unperformed.

### **Dramatis personae**

Albert Walter, a painter (B)

Kunigunde, his wife (S)

Balthasar Blumser, a goldsmith and town councillor (B)

Nanette, his wife (S)

Placidus Dünndorn, a bookseller (T)

Lisette, his wife (S)

Damian, Albert's paint-mixer (B)

### **ACT I**

The house of the painter Albert Walter in a German city. The painter Albert is suspicious of his wife Kunigunde and has ordered his deaf assistant Damian to keep an eye on her. He scolds Damian for not following Kunigunde when she left the house [No. 1 Duet (Albert, Damian): *Schurke, gesteh!*]. Damian is subjected to verbal abuse and physical blows from his master but seems largely unperturbed. Albert sings of the untrustworthiness of women. The only reliable women, he claims, are those we see in paintings [No. 2 Ariette (Albert): *Ein Weib ist eine Schmerzquelle*].

Kunigunde returns. She is also jealous, claiming that the depictions of two goddesses in Albert's paintings bear a suspicious resemblance to two ladies of the town [No. 3 Duet (Kunigunde, Albert): *Wem gleicht hier diese Juno?*]. That was the reason for her absence this morning – she had visited the ladies, Nanette and Lisette, to confirm the likeness. Albert denies any impropriety and turns the accusation against his wife, suggesting that her visits this morning were because of her interest in the ladies' husbands, Blumser and Dünndorn. Kunigunde dismisses the idea that she should be attracted by the pompous Blumser or the pretentious Dünndorn. Eventually the couple are reconciled, but after Albert has left the house Kunigunde sings of her worry at having a handsome husband, particularly as his work brings him into contact with attractive women [No. 4 Aria (Kunigunde): *Einen schönen Mann zu haben*].

Kunigunde overhears Damian singing a song about the battles between men and women [No. 5 Ariette (Damian): *Hell und dunkel durcheinander*]. He admits that his master has ordered him to spy on her. He also reveals that Nanette and Lisette are making eyes at Albert, though he has never given them any encouragement. Kunigunde decides to take revenge on all of them.

Her plan is helped by the arrival of Blumser, obviously besotted with Kunigunde after her earlier visit to his house [No. 6 Terzett (Blumser, Kunigunde, Damian): *Madam, ich bin Ihr Diener*]. As Kunigunde fends off Blumser's advances there is a knock at the door and Blumser hides behind a painting. The new arrival is Dünndorn, equally amorous [No. 7 Quartet (Kunigunde, Blumser, Damian, Dünndorn): *Das ist mein Mann*]. Dünndorn stumbles on Blumser's hiding-place, and after an exchange of compliments they both pay court to Kunigunde. Albert returns to find the two men on their knees in front of his wife [No. 8 Finale: *Ha! Was muß ich sehen?*]. Nanette and Lisette arrive, returning Kunigunde's earlier visit, and are shocked to hear what their husbands have been up to. They threaten dire punishments, while Albert and Kunigunde enjoy the husbands' embarrassment.

## ACT II

The same evening, Albert and Kunigunde celebrate their reconciliation [No. 9 Duet (Kunigunde, Albert): *Wohlan, so ist Friede geschlossen*]. Damian arrives with letters from Blumser and Dünndorn, both asking for assignations with Kunigunde [No. 10 Trio (Kunigunde, Albert, Damian): *Diese Briefe sind leise geschrieben*]. This time husband and wife plot their revenge together [No. 11 Ariette (Albert): *Wir kühlen der Rache Verlangen*]. Kunigunde replies to the letters, inviting both men to come to her house. Albert leaves, and Kunigunde encourages Damian to drink wine so that he falls asleep [No. 12 Aria (Kunigunde): *Die Männer sind geübte Diebe*].

Blumser and Dünndorn arrive. Kunigunde plies them with wine [No. 13 Quartet (Kunigunde, Dünndorn, Blumser, Albert): *Weise lebt der Zecher*]. There is knocking at the door, and Kunigunde hides the two men in the bedroom. Albert enters, feigning outrage when he sees the dinner table set for three. Kunigunde says that this is because she has invited Nanette and Lisette. She goes off to fetch them. While she is away the drunken Damian nearly ruins the plan by glimpsing Blumser and Dünndorn hiding in the bedroom. Kunigunde returns with Nanette and Lisette. They all sit down to drink with Albert [No. 14 Drinking Song (Kunigunde, Lisette, Nanette, Dünndorn, Blumser, Albert, Damian): *Es ströme der Trauben allmächtige Glut*].

When the wine runs out Kunigunde takes Nanette to the cellar to fetch another bottle. Once they have gone, Albert begins to flirt with Lisette, much to the dismay of her husband Dünndorn, watching from the bedroom [No. 15 Duet (Lisette, Albert): *Schöner Ritter, laßt das Kosen*]. Kunigunde and Nanette return with a fresh bottle of wine, but Albert, in feigned drunkenness, knocks it to the floor. Lisette goes to the cellar with Kunigunde, and Nanette is now the object of Albert's advances [No. 16 Duet (Nanette, Albert): *Wenn Seelen sich zu Seelen finden*]. Kunigunde and Lisette return and, as the talk turns to ghosts, Lisette glimpses her husband at the bedroom door. Kunigunde proposes that they all search the

bedroom to prove that there is no-one there [No. 17 Finale: *Kunigunde, leuchte du voran!*]. Blumser and Dünndorn are discovered and, as Albert says, their embarrassment is a tit-for-tat ('dir wie mir') punishment for their behaviour towards Kunigunde. Kunigunde states the moral, that one should never covet other people's happiness. All agree before bidding each other goodnight.

### **MS performing material**

Munich (Mbs): St. th. 146-1 (Score, also in Opernprojekt); St. th. 146-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*); St. th. 146-3 (*Soufflierbuch*, see also Online).

### **Online MS performing materials**

St.th. 146-3: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007738/images/>>

## **9. Nittetis**

Grand opera in three acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: the composer after Metastasio's *Nitteti*.

First performance: Darmstadt, 29 June 1817.

### **Dramatis personae**

Amasis, King of Egypt (B)

Sammetes, his son (T)

Beroe, a shepherdess, beloved of Sammetes (S)

Nittetis, Princess of Egypt (S)

Amenofis, Prince of Cirene, friend of Sammetes (B)

Bubastes, Egyptian commander (B)

Chorus of ladies of Nittetis, priestesses of Isis, warriors and people

### **ACT I**

Nittetis, daughter of the late King of Egypt, loves Sammetes, son of the new King, but has never declared her feelings. Since King Amasis took power she has been hiding in the countryside, worried for her safety. There she has befriended the shepherdess Beroe, but has never met Beroe's lover, the shepherd 'Dalmiros'. 'Dalmiros' is really Sammetes in disguise.

The royal gardens by the Nile in the Egyptian capital, Canopus. The Egyptians are assembling in the capital to hail their new King Amasis [No. 1 Introduction (Chorus, Amenofis, Sammetes): *Holder Tag, sey uns willkommen*]. Sammetes arrives late and explains to Amenofis that his beloved Beroe and another shepherdess have been abducted by his father's soldiers. Beroe and Nittetis appear, under guard. Nittetis assures her friend that it is she, the Princess of Egypt, who has attracted the attention of the authorities, not the simple shepherdess Beroe [No. 2 Cavatina (Nittetis): *Gerne weint bei fremden Leiden*]. Left alone, Beroe has a chance meeting with Sammetes, who is forced to admit his true identity. Beroe feels she is not worthy to be a prince's wife, but Sammetes insists that their love will triumph [No. 3 Recitative, Duet and Chorus (Beroe, Sammetes): *Geliebte, höre mich!*]. Sammetes leaves for the ceremony and a group of shepherds and shepherdesses arrive in a boat on the Nile. Their song reminds Beroe of the simple life she has left behind [No. 4 Recitative and Aria (Beroe): *Ihr süßen Töne*].

A great square in Canopus. The people hail their new monarch Amasis [No. 5 March and Chorus: *Die Friedenssonne strahlet*]. Amasis, it transpires, has brought Nittetis to the capital as an act of national reconciliation [No. 6 Chorus: *Heil Amasis*]. He promises to be a just ruler [No. 7 Chorus: *Die Friedenssonne strahlet*]. Amasis confides to Amenofis that he would like Nittetis to marry his son and so unite the country's warring factions. Amenofis is given the task of persuading his friend, a painful duty as he himself is secretly in love with Nittetis [No. 8 Aria (Amenofis): *Schweige, klopfendes Herz!*]. Beroe comes looking for Sammetes. Amenofis warns her to forget him, as he will now have to marry Nittetis. She now feels even more strongly that she should renounce her claim on him and return to her old life. However Sammetes himself is horrified at the idea of the arranged marriage and insists he will remain faithful to Beroe [No. 9 Recitative and Finale: *Wohl mir, daß ich dich endlich finde!*].

## ACT II

A room in the palace. Saddened by Sammetes' obvious lack of interest in her, Nittetis suspects that he is in love with someone else [No. 1 Entr'acte, Chorus, Scene and Aria (Chorus, Nittetis): *Trockne die Thränen*]. Meanwhile Amasis has discovered Sammetes' love for Beroe. He sends word of it to Nittetis, who is distraught to discover that her best friend Beroe is also her rival.

The King's apartments. Amasis interrogates Beroe, who says she will renounce Sammetes and if necessary die for the country's good. Amasis is impressed by the young shepherdess's nobility [No. 2 Duettino (Beroe, Amasis): *Die Göttin wird mich hören*]. When Nittetis meets Beroe she says that she too is prepared to renounce Sammetes in favour of Beroe, a solution which Beroe cannot accept [No. 3 Recitative and Duet (Beroe, Nittetis): *So soll es seyn!*]. Beroe remains firm towards Sammetes too, bidding him farewell and telling him not to follow her [No. 4 Recitative and Aria with Chorus (Beroe, Sammetes, Bubastes, Chorus): *Du irrst, Geliebter*]. However Sammetes confesses to Nittetis that he can only love Beroe, and sets off in pursuit of her [No. 7 Aria (Sammetes): *Nein, ich kann ihn nicht ertragen*]. Amenofis brings word that the King wishes to see his son, but meanwhile Sammetes has committed sacrilege by breaking into the Temple of Isis and abducting Beroe.

The harbour at Canopus. As a thunderstorm threatens, Sammetes drags Beroe to the harbour, pursued by the enraged priests and priestesses of Isis [No. 8 Finale: *Laß mich zum Tempel wiederkehren!*]. Amasis arrives and subdues his son. A thunderbolt strikes the ships in the harbour, a sign of divine anger at Sammetes.

## ACT III

A hall of columns in the palace. The atmosphere at court is sombre because Sammetes faces a death sentence [No. 1 Entr'acte and Chorus: *Dumpfe Klagetöne schallen*]. Nittetis pleads with Amasis to pardon his son. He grants this but only on condition that Sammetes agrees to marry Nittetis [No. 1.5 Duet (Nittetis, Amasis): *Des grauen Vaters blutend Herz*].<sup>463</sup> Nittetis goes off to persuade Sammetes. Amasis hopes she will succeed because otherwise Sammetes will still have to pay for his crime [No. 2 Recitative and Aria (Amasis): *Sie eilt zu ihm!*]. An old shepherd has arrived at the palace with important news for Amasis.

The tower where Sammetes is imprisoned. Beroe makes a last attempt to persuade him to marry Nittetis. She threatens to commit suicide if he will not [No. 3 Recitative and Duet (Beroe, Sammetes): *Und du kannst diesen Rath mir geben!*]. Sammetes agrees to do his duty, but longs for death. Beroe leaves and Nittetis arrives. She has organised an escape. But before this can happen soldiers arrive to take Sammetes to the King. Out of loyalty to

---

<sup>463</sup> This duet was added for the Munich performances. It is not included in the Darmstadt libretto.

Beroe's wishes Sammetes allows himself to be led away [No. 4 Recitative and Aria with Chorus (Nittetis, Sammetes, Bubastes, Chorus): *Ihr Götter! Alles ist verloren!*].

A magnificent hall in the royal fortress at Canopus. Beroe is puzzled to be greeted as a Queen by Amenofis. The King arrives in pomp [No. 5 March] and makes an announcement. It has emerged that Beroe, not Nittetis, is the daughter of the former King. The girl known as Nittetis is actually Amasis' own daughter, exchanged with the princess as an infant and long thought lost. So the union of Sammetes and Beroe fulfils both love and duty. All sing the praises of divine providence [No. 6 Finale: *Sammetes mein!*].

#### **Published libretto**

*Nittetis. Große Oper in drei Akten* (Darmstadt: 1817)  
Stuttgart (SI): A 21 C/1323

#### **MS performing materials**

Munich (Mbs): St. th. 85 (Score, also in Opernprojekt).  
Berlin (Bs): Mus. ms. 17717 (Score)

#### **Performances**

Darmstadt: 29/6/1817, 25/8/1817, 31/8/1817, 11/1/1818, 3/5/1818, 29/11/1818, 25/4/1819, 3/2/1822, 27/10/1822, 4/1/1824, 23/5/1824, 28/1/1827. Munich: 30/1/1818, 15/2/1818.  
Berlin: 1/12/1819, 7/12/1819.

## **10. Issipile**

Opera in two acts.<sup>464</sup>

Language: German.

Libretto: the composer, after Metastasio's *Issipile*.

Unperformed.

#### **Dramatis personae**

Toant, King of Lemnos (B)

Issipile, his daughter (S)

Eurinome, widowed princess of royal blood (S)

Jason, Prince of Thessaly, betrothed to Issipile (T)

Learch, son of Eurinome, rejected lover of Issipile (B)

#### **ACT I**

Eurinome has incited the women of Lemnos to punish their menfolk, who she claims are bringing home concubines from their foreign wars and favouring them over their legitimate wives [No. 1 Introduction (Eurinome, Chorus)]. The King's daughter Issipile pretends to cooperate with the plot but secretly rejects it and is determined to save her father, even at the cost of her own life [No. 2 Cavatina (Issipile)]. King Toant and his victorious soldiers return

---

<sup>464</sup> The performing materials for *Issipile*, which were held in the Hessische Landesbibliothek, Darmstadt (shelfmark Mus. 712), were destroyed in the Second World War. However they were studied in the 1930s by Ludwig Schrott, who gives a verbal description of the opera, without music examples, in his unpublished dissertation *Der Opernkomponist Johann Nepomuk von Poissl* (see Postscript to Chapter 1). The dramatis personae, synopsis and list of musical numbers given here are based on Schrott's description (pp. 298-309) and on Metastasio's *Issipile*. Some details are necessarily speculative.



from the conquest of the Thracians [No. 3 March and Chorus]. The King dismisses his troops and leads a prayer for peace [No. 4 Recitative and Chorus (Toant, Chorus)]. Toant asks why his daughter is so sad. Eurinome fears that Issipile may betray the women's plan, but Issipile evades her father's questions [No. 5 Recitative and Trio (Issipile, Eurinome, Toant)]. The source of Eurinome's bitterness towards the King is the banishment of her son Learch after he attempted to rape Issipile. Learch is believed to have died in exile [No. 6 Aria (Eurinome)].

Issipile brings her father to a place of safety. He is unhappy to see her put her life in danger for his sake. Learch has returned secretly to Lemnos in the hope of disrupting Issipile's forthcoming wedding to Jason and claiming her for himself. He observes Issipile's concealment of her father [No. 7 Trio (Issipile, Learch, Toant)]. Toant prays for happiness for his daughter [No. 8 Recitative and Prayer (Toant)]. Issipile herself hopes that a hero will emerge to prevent the women's treason and restore Toant's legitimate rule [No. 9 Aria (Issipile)].

Jason arrives in Lemnos for his wedding to Issipile, but discovers bloody chaos as the women carry out their massacre. [No. 10 Finale] To conceal Toant's escape Issipile is obliged to pretend, in the presence of Eurinome, that she has killed her father. Jason is appalled to find that his beloved is a murderer.

## **ACT II**

Learch has recruited a gang of pirates to help him abduct Issipile [No. 11 Introduction (Learch, Chorus)]. Meanwhile Toant has left his hiding-place, fearing that Issipile will be killed in his place if it is known that she has spared him. Jason, troubled by the thought that Issipile is a murderer, longs for death [No. 12 Recitative and Cavatina (Jason)]. She comes to plead her innocence to Jason, but cannot prove it because she does not know where Toant is [No. 13 Recitative and Duet (Issipile, Jason)]. Jason summons his Argonauts to quell the treasonous women [No. 14 Recitative and Aria with Chorus (Jason, Chorus)].

Learch has taken Toant hostage and threatens to kill him if he will not grant him Issipile's hand. Toant refuses and calmly contemplates death [No. 15 Duet (Learch, Toant)]. Issipile witnesses the battle between the Argonauts and the women of Lemnos, uncertain who has won [No. 16 Scene and Aria (Issipile)].

At the harbour Learch and his pirates board a ship, still holding Toant hostage [No. 17 Finale]. Jason arrives with the captured Eurinome, Learch's mother, and threatens to kill her if Learch harms Thoas. Issipile, appearing to give in to Learch and join him on the ship, produces a dagger and stabs him. She is praised as her father's saviour. All give thanks to the gods.

## **11. La Rappresaglia**

Comic opera in two acts.

Language: Italian.

Libretto: Felice Romani

First performance: Munich, 7 April 1820.

### **Dramatis personae**

The King of Poland (T)

Baron Lowinski (B)

Elisa, his daughter, betrothed to the Duke of Kalitz (S)  
The Duke of Kalitz (B)  
Grifone, the Duke's courier (T)  
Cristina, Elisa's maid (S)  
Chorus of Elisa's ladies, servants, peasant men and women

## ACT I

The garden of Lowinski Castle in Poland. The Duke of Kalitz is expected at the castle. There he is to be granted the hand of Baron Lowinski's daughter Elisa. The Baron approves of the match – he is a terrific snob and the Duke, though impoverished, comes from a very ancient family. The Baron tells his servants to prepare suitably grand celebrations. [No. 1 Introduction (Cristina, Baron, Chorus): *Qui chiamar fa il padrone*]. The only obstacle to the Baron's plans is a young officer who has been lodging in the castle and paying too much attention to Elisa. Unknown to him, the 'officer' is the King of Poland in disguise. The King has fallen in love with Elisa and is determined to marry her but conceals his true identity to test her love [No. 2 Recitative and Cavatina (King): *Dove mi trasse non volendo*].

A hall in the Baron's house. Despite her companions' cheerfulness Elisa is depressed by the news that her father wants her to marry the Duke. She is in love with her 'officer', but resigns herself to her fate [No. 3 Recitative, Chorus and Aria (Elisa, Chorus) *Figlia son di padre amante*]. The King realises that the Duke, an old friend, will see through his disguise. However he hopes to catch the Duke before he meets Elisa and make him relinquish his claim. Elisa promises she will remain faithful to her lover, however attractive the Duke may be [No. 4 Recitative and Duet (Elisa, King): *Ho già deciso*]. The Baron tries to persuade the 'officer' to move out of the castle, but the young man loses his temper and hints that he is more than he seems. The Baron jumps to the conclusion that he is really the Duke in disguise, and the King goes along with the misunderstanding, happy to be treated as Elisa's official betrothed.

Outside the castle. The real Duke arrives. His interest in the marriage is mainly financial [No. 5 Aria (Duke): *Sposa bella e ricca dote*]. Two months previously he showed Elisa's portrait to the King, and the King fell in love with it. Now, hearing that the King is inside and has stolen both his identity and his bride-to-be, the Duke decides to retaliate. He sends word into the castle that the King is about to arrive.

A hall in the Baron's house. The Baron is now favouring the match between Elisa and her 'Duke'. However when the 'King' arrives the real King finds himself trapped in his false identity (No. 6 Quartet (Elisa, King, Baron, Duke). The Duke enjoys his friend's discomfort, and as 'King' pretends to make advances to Elisa (No. 7 Finale *Tant' è mia bella Elisa*). However in a moment alone together the King and the Duke, who are old friends, reach an understanding. The Duke waives his claim to Elisa's hand and they join forces for further mischief. To test Elisa's fidelity, the Duke will continue to pretend that he, as the 'King', is in love with her. The Baron's household puts on an elaborate ceremony of greeting for their royal guest, who promises that before the end of the day he will reveal a great secret.

## ACT II

A hall in the Baron's house. The whole household is convinced that the 'King' is in love with Elisa [No. 8 Introduction (Cristina, Grifone, Chorus): *Bravo, bravo, cospettone*]. The Baron's scruples about breaking the agreement with the Duke are quickly overcome by the prospect of his daughter becoming Queen. But Elisa refuses to break her previous promise [No. 9 Terzetto (Elisa, Baron, Duke): *Se v'alletta, o bella Elisa*]. The Duke feigns outrage and threatens the girl's father with dire consequences if she does not obey. The Baron believes that his famous powers of persuasion will win his daughter over [No. 10 Aria (Baron): *Era l'anno seicento e ottant'uno*]. Meanwhile the King is delighted to hear of Elisa's steadfastness. When a deputation from the household asks him to give her up in favour of the 'King', he refuses and assures them that all will be well. [No. 11 Chorus, Recitative and Aria (King, Chorus): *Qui vedete gli abitanti*].

Another room in the castle. The 'King' continues to test Elisa, and the 'Duke' plays along, releasing Elisa from her promise so that she can follow her royal destiny [No. 12 Recitative and Quartet (Elisa, King, Baron, Duke): *Qui uno sforzo ci vuol*]. Despite this apparent betrayal by the man she loves, Elisa swears that having once pledged herself she will never marry someone else. The King and the Duke are convinced of Elisa's fidelity at last. The Baron is ordered to assemble his household. The Duke announces that Elisa may marry the husband of her choice but that she will be forced to become Queen as well. After a moment of puzzlement the Duke reveals his true identity and that of the King, who takes Elisa as his Queen amid general rejoicing [No. 13 Recitative and Aria with Chorus (King, Elisa, Baron, Chorus): *Ah! Ch'io più resister non sò*].

### **Published libretti**

*La Reppresaglia* [sic] / *Die Wiedervergeltung* (Munich, Hübschmann: 1820)

Munich (Mbs): Don.Lud. XXIII,5; Slg.Her 1914.

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055159/images/>>

*La Reppresaglia* [sic] / *Die Wiedervergeltung* (Dresden: 1821)

Dresden (DI): MT 1662 Rara.

Stuttgart (SI): A 21 C/1323.

### **MS performing material**

Berlin (Bs): Mus. ms. 17718 (Score, also in Opernprojekt)

Dresden (DI): Mus. 4644-F-500 (Score, also in Opernprojekt); Mus. 4644-F-500a (Score)

### **Performances**

Munich: 7/4/1820, 28/4/1820. Dresden: 21/11/1821, 24/11/1821, 1/12/1821.

## **12. Die Prinzessin von Provence**

Original magic opera in three acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: the composer.

First performance: Munich, 23 January 1825.

### **Dramatis personae**

Godwin, rightful Duke of Provence (B)

Blanka, his daughter (S)

Lucinde, a fairy (S)

Branor, a sorcerer, usurper of the throne of Provence (B)

Alfred, a British knight of the Round Table (T)

Ulfar, his squire (B)

A peasant from the valley where Godwin lives (speaking role)

The Provençal commander (speaking role)

An officer from the army (speaking role)

A knight from the army (speaking role)

Three sylphs (SSA)

Three salamanders (SSA)

Chorus of peasants, invisible spirits, familiar spirits of Branor, sylphs, salamanders, water spirits, genies and attendants of the Fairy, knights and officers of the army

Ballet of peasants, attendants of the Fairy, sylphs, salamanders and water spirits

## ACT I

The opera is set in Arthurian times in a coastal area of Provence. Sinar, the rightful Duke, has been ousted by the evil sorcerer Branor, and is living unrecognised in his own land as the fisherman Godwin.

An open area in front of Godwin's hut. Godwin's daughter Blanka is receiving the congratulations of the countryfolk on the morning of her eighteenth birthday [No. 1 Introduction (Chorus, Blanka): *Freundlich steigt die Morgen-Sonne*]. She and her father have been living among them for exactly ten years, and she thanks them for all their kindness. When the villagers have gone we learn that Godwin and Blanka enjoy the protection of a benevolent fairy. The fairy has prophesied fateful events for this day, and father and daughter have had similar dreams, about a knight who will champion Blanka's cause and restore her to her royal birthright. Blanka is disturbed by this – she is happy with her humble life and worried when her father interprets the dream to mean that he should take up arms on her behalf [No. 2 Duet (Godwin, Blanka): *Mein Arm vermag die Lanze noch zu schwingen*]. A peasant brings the news that in the capital the country's noblest knights have rebelled against Branor's tyranny. Godwin wants to join them, but a Chorus of invisible spirits is heard telling him to go down to the seashore [No. 3 Chorus: *Eile nicht! Wage nicht!*].

The seashore. Branor's evil spirits conjure up a storm [No. 4 Chorus: *Auf! Vollziehet des Meisters Wort!*]. The countryfolk, hurrying to the shore, rescue the shipwrecked knight Alfred and his squire Ulfar. Blanka recognises Alfred, a knight of the Round Table, as the man from her dream. He reveals that he has dreamed of her too [No. 5 Quartet (Blanka, Alfred, Ulfar, Godwin): *Was ist mit mir geschehen!*]. Blanka and Godwin take the two rescued men back to their hut. Branor's spirits gather on the shore to gloat over the deaths caused by the storm [No. 6 Chorus: *Wenn des Meisters Worte schallen*]. Branor himself descends from the sky in a ball of fire and tells the spirits that their work is not yet done. (No. 7 Recitative and Aria with Chorus (Branor, Chorus): *Ihr triumphiert zu früh!*).

In front of Godwin's hut. Three Sylphs, sent by the fairy, leave magic armour for Alfred [No. 8 Trio (3 Sylphs): *Wie die Herrscherin befohlen*]. Ulfar emerges, cheered by Godwin's hospitality, and speculates on the job he would take if Alfred were ever to become ruler of Provence [No. 9 Recitative and Aria (Ulfar): *Wenn Alfred dieses Landes Thron bestiege*]. Alfred finds the armour and decides to take the fight to Branor [No. 10 Recitative and Duet (Blanka, Alfred): *Nun Blanka naht die ernste Stunde*].

A rocky valley with a raging torrent below Branor's fortress. The sorcerer and his spirits wait for Alfred [No. 11 Finale: *Senke Nacht dich hernieder!*]. A bridge across a gorge is the only path to the fortress. When Alfred crosses it, watched by Blanka, Godwin and their peasant companions, the spirits stir up the waters below. The bridge collapses and Alfred is swept away. In desperation Blanka calls out the fairy's name ('Lucinde'), something she is only permitted to do once. Alfred is saved, carried aloft on a golden shell.

## ACT II

Inside Godwin's hut. Godwin and Blanka are comforted by the sounds of a spirit chorus [No. 12 Chorus: *Höre des Trostes freundliche Töne*]. Blanka is worried for Alfred, and plagued by guilt because in calling out Lucinde's name she has used the last of the magic powers available to her. Her father urges her to pass the time by singing a favourite melancholy song [No. 13 Song (Blanka): *Du hörst mein Lied ertönen*]. The spirit chorus sounds again briefly. A stranger arrives, craving shelter. He reveals himself as Branor, who threatens them with death unless Godwin renounces the throne and Blanka gives him her hand in marriage [No. 14 Melodrama and Trio with Chorus (Branor, Godwin, Blanka, Chorus): *Erkennt mich denn!*]. When they refuse, Branor summons his spirits to kill Godwin

and abduct Blanka. However the Fairy appears and saves them [No. 15 Recitative and Aria (The Fairy): *Steht auf, ihr seyd befreyt*].

A dark rocky valley. Three flaming Salamanders lead Alfred and Ulfar to the entrance of a cave [No. 16 Trio (3 Salamanders): *Verweilet nun an diesem Orte*]. There the men fall asleep and are visited by dancing dreams [No. 17 Chorus: *Schließt um ihn den Zauberreigen*]. Alfred has a dream in which he and Blanka, both wearing royal insignia, are united and blessed by Godwin and the Fairy. The two men wake and enter the cave [No. 18 Finale: *Auf! Daß das Schwert es vollende*]. As they do, the cave is transformed into the Fairy's magnificent palace. There they are re-united with Godwin and Blanka. Magical creatures of many kinds honour them with songs and dances.

### **ACT III**

The camp of the Provençal army near Branor's castle. The Provençal knights are eager to free their land from the tyrant's rule [No. 19 Chorus: *Froh, wie die Schnitter zur Erndte wallen*]. However a venerable commander urges them to wait for the knight who, it has been promised, will lead them to victory. When Alfred appears he declines their offer of the general's baton, and to the surprise of the warriors announces that he will take on Branor in single combat, wearing a talisman which ensures that neither side can use magical powers. Ulfar is sent to deliver the challenge. Alfred asks the others to withdraw. In a moment of contemplation before the fight he remembers his aged father, to whom he owes his sense of justice, and Blanka, for whom he will be happy to die [No. 20 Recitative and Aria (Alfred): *Sie naht, die ernste Stunde der Entscheidung*]. Branor appears, contemptuous of his opponent [No. 21 Finale *Lasset mich den Frevler sehen*]. After a short fight Branor is severely wounded, but before Alfred can deliver a fatal blow the earth opens amid thunder and lightning. Branor and his followers are swallowed up and a chorus of spirits is heard promising infernal punishment. The Fairy descends from the clouds with Blanka and Godwin. She blesses the union of Blanka and Alfred, and presents Godwin to the assembled Provençal knights as their rightful Duke. The clouds part to reveal the distant capital bathed in light.

### **Published libretti**

*Die Prinzessin von Provence: Original Zauber-Oper in drey Akten* (Munich, Hübschmann: 1825)

Munich (Mbs): Don.Lud. LX,30

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0001/bsb00016754/images/>>

*Gesangstexte der Zauber-Oper: Die Prinzessin von Provence, in drei Acten* (Braunschweig: 1826)

Munich (Mbs): Slg.Her 1368

Wolfenbüttel (W): M: Lo Sammelbd. 46 (49)

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00059811/images/>>

### **MS performing material**

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 159-1 (Score, also in Opernprojekt); St.th. 159-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*); St.th. 159-3 (*Klavierauszug*); St.th. 159-4 (*Textbuch*); St.th. 159-5 (*Directionsbuch*); St.th. 159-6 (*Soufflierbuch*).

Dresden (DI): Mus.4644-F-3 (Score)

### **Performances**

Munich: 23/1/1825, 24/1/1825, 3/2/1825, 12/4/1825, 26/7/1825, 8/1/1826, 1/8/1826, 6/8/1826, 5/11/1826, 6/1/1827, 5/8/1827, 26/9/1827, 30/12/1827, 10/10/1828, 8/1/1832.  
Braunschweig: 26/5/1826, 25/9/1826 and other performances. Kassel: 28/7/1826 and other performances.

### 13. Der Untersberg

Romantic opera in three acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: Eduard von Schenk

First performance: Munich, 30 October 1829.

#### **Dramatis personae**

Welf II, Duke of Bavaria (B)

Odorich, exiled ruler of Amalfi (B)

Astralis, his daughter (S)

Guido, son of Astolf the usurper of Amalfi (T)

Florestan, his friend, a knight (B)

Diethold, a peasant (B)

Ottwald, a peasant (speaking role)

Walburg, a peasant (speaking role)

A Peasant (B)

A Girl (S)

Elidor, a spirit (speaking role)

Chorus of knights, attendants of the Duke, huntsmen, peasants, spirits

#### **ACT I**

The opera is set in the early twelfth century in and around the Untersberg mountain near Salzburg. Odorich, driven from his homeland by the usurper Astolf, has taken up residence inside the mountain with his daughter Astralis. His magical powers give him command over the mountain's spirits.

A wooded valley with the Untersberg visible in the background. A group of peasants prepares to gather the harvest from the fields [No. 1 Introduction (Chorus, Peasant, Girl): *Hinaus in die Felder*]. When the angelus bell sounds they pause to pray, but before they can proceed to the fields they hear a mysterious chorus from inside the mountain. According to Diethold there are spirits living inside the mountain. He accidentally discovered their cave while out on the mountain searching for roots [No. 2 Couplets with Chorus (Diethold, Chorus): *Jüngst gieng ich dort zur Felsenwand*]. Walburg says she has met one of the spirits – a maiden dressed in white who gave her a ring. Duke Welf II of Bavaria arrives with a hunting party [No. 3 Huntsmen's Chorus: *Halloh! Halloh! Halloh!*]. Among Welf's companions is the Italian knight Guido, son of Astolf the usurper of Amalfi. Guido is afflicted by melancholy – rumour has it that Odorich, the rightful ruler of Amalfi, is gathering an army of spirits in an unknown location with the intention of reclaiming his Dukedom. Guido's wish is to find Odorich and effect a reconciliation between him and his father. The peasants warn the Duke that hunting on the mountain may anger the spirits, but he is determined to continue. Florestan sees the ring given to Walburg by the mysterious maiden and recognises the coat of arms of Amalfi. He keeps this knowledge to himself. The hunting party sets off [No. 4 Trio and Chorus ( Guido, Florestan, Duke, Chorus): *Was bang und warnend diese hier*]. Guido remains behind alone [No. 5 Recitative, Cavatina and Duet (Guido, Astralis): *Eilt ihr dahin im tobenden Gewimmel*]. Astralis appears to him and sings a song, accompanying herself on a lyre. He is captivated by her beauty, and when she disappears he decides to follow her onto the mountain. Florestan tries to dissuade him, as the hunting party has been driven back from the slopes by eruptions of fire [No. 6 Finale: *Zurück, ihr Verwegnen!*]. However Astralis appears again to summon Guido and he follows her. His companions try to drag him back but they are repulsed by flames.

#### **ACT II**

A dark cavern inside the Untersberg. Odorich addresses his spirits [No. 7 Scene and Aria with Chorus (Odorich, Chorus): *Ihr Geister, ew'ge Kräfte der Natur*]. He knows that his

daughter has fallen in love with his enemy's son. He is not opposed to their love, but insists that the young man should undergo trials to prove his worthiness. Odorich warns Astralis that she will be sorely tested in this new phase of her life [No. 8 Duet (Odorich, Astralis): *Bewahr', Astralis, meine Worte*]. When Guido arrives, Astralis urges him to flee for his own safety, but he refuses and explains to the innocent girl that their feelings for each other are love [No. 9 Duet and Trio (Astralis, Guido, Odorich): *Rein, wie die Lilie des Feldes*]. Odorich interrupts them and separates the lovers. One of Odorich's spirits brings him a written message from Florestan, who has realised Odorich's true identity from the coat of arms on the ring [No. 9 ½ Melodrama (Elidor, Odorich): *Gebieten, ich suche dich*]. Odorich reads that the people of Amalfi have risen against the usurper and are inviting him to return. He is delighted but still instructs his spirits to torment Guido [No. 10 Finale *Herbey ihr Geister!*]. The young man will be enslaved and condemned to hard labour, forced to build a new castle with blocks of marble hewn from the Untersberg. When Astralis protests, Odorich orders Guido's death. A storm is conjured up and Guido is thrown from a high rock. However, unseen by Astralis (who has fainted), he is rescued by spirits. The stage is transformed into a beautiful valley with moonlit waterfalls at the foot of the mountain. The spirits lay the sleeping Guido down by a mountain spring.

### **ACT III**

A valley at the foot of the mountain, as at the end of Act II. Not knowing whether his message has reached Odorich, Florestan searches for his friend [No. 11 Scene with Chorus (Florestan, Chorus): *Ein Tag ist verschwunden*]. The Duke has also gathered a party to search for Guido. Florestan explains that Guido has fallen into the hands of his father's arch-enemy. The Duke, even more concerned, is about to continue his search when Odorich appears, clutching Florestan's message. He announces that for his daughter's sake he will leave the Untersberg and seek reconciliation with the usurper Astolf. He also reveals that Guido is sleeping safely nearby. He wakes the young man but, wishing to test his character once more, tells him that Astralis has died (No. 12 Finale *Den Tod? Astralis todt?*). Guido is distraught but declares that even in death he will remain true to her. He asks to see her body. When the 'corpse' is revealed it becomes clear that Astralis is only sleeping. The lovers are united with the blessing of Odorich, who renounces his power over the mountain spirits and prepares to return to Amalfi as Duke.

### **Published libretto**

*Gesänge aus der Oper: Der Untersberg* (Munich, Hübschmann: 1829)

Munich (Mbs): Slg.Her 1812; L.eleg.m. 1202; Bibl.Mont. 983

Online: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055000/images/>>

### **MS performing materials**

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 383-1 (Score, 2 vols., also online); St.th. 383-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*);

St.th. 383-3 (*Directionsbuch*, also online); St.th. 383-4 (*Soufflierbuch*); St.th. 1829

(*Inspizientenbuch*).

Dresden (DI): Mus.4644-F-5 (Score).

### **Online MS performing materials (Mbs)**

St.th. 383-1: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00004983/images/>>

St.th. 383-3: <<http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007737/images/>>

### **Performances**

Munich: 30/10/1829, 3/11/1829, 15/11/1829, 3/10/1830, 22/3/1831.

## 14. Zayde

Romantic-tragic opera in four acts.

Language: German.

Libretto: the composer.

First performance: 9 November 1843.

### **Dramatis personae**

Boabdillah, King of Granada

Alderamon, Emir of a Moorish tribe on the African coast

Almansor, his son

Zayde, foster-daughter of Alderamon, a seer

Elvira, a young Spanish lady

Omar, a former pirate, now Vizier to King Boabdillah

Don Fernando, emissary of King Ferdinand to Boabdillah

Fatime, a Moorish woman, servant and confidante of Elvira

Chorus of Moorish knights and warriors, Imams, people, Spanish knights, African and Asiatic dancers, courtiers of Boabdillah, slaves and servants in Boabdillah's palace and in the Emir's palace

The opera is set in North Africa and Spain around 1490, just before the fall of the Moorish Kingdom of Granada. Before the opera begins Elvira is abducted by Omar, a Moorish pirate, and taken to North Africa. On the way to Omar's castle she and Fatime are rescued by Almansor, who gives the women refuge in the castle of his father Alderamon. Also in the castle is Zayde. Alderamon promised Zayde's late father that she and Almansor would marry, but Almansor himself is unaware of this promise. Zayde has loved the Prince since childhood and looks on with dismay as Almansor and Elvira fall in love. From Spain King Boabdillah summons his North African brethren to defend the Kingdom of Granada. Alderamon and Almansor are chosen to lead the Moorish army.

### **ACT I**

Alderamon's palace. Zayde decides that she will renounce her claim on Almansor for the sake of his happiness [No. 1 Recitative and Aria (Zayde): *Nun wieder eine lange Nacht durchwacht*]. Alderamon welcomes this. He approves of the love between his son and Elvira but until now has felt bound by his promise to Zayde's father. He assures Zayde that he will not reveal the truth about her love [No. 2 Recitative and Duet (Zayde, Alderamon): *Zayde, theure Tochter*].

Fatime congratulates Elvira on her forthcoming wedding [No. 3 Recitative and Chorus (Fatime, Elvira, Chorus): *Erheit're dich, Gebieterin*]. Elvira herself is doubtful that Alderamon will let his son marry a Christian, but her doubts are proved groundless when the betrothal is proclaimed. Alderamon tells Elvira and Almansor that their actual wedding must wait until Almansor returns from the war in Spain. Elvira must set an example to the other women whose menfolk have to go to war [No. 4 Recitative and Quartet with Chorus (Elvira, Fatime, Almansor, Alderamon, Chorus): *Gegeb'nem Worte treu*]. Elvira cannot bear the prospect of separation and forms a plan: she and Fatime will go to Granada disguised in men's clothing. Then she will be near Almansor whatever fate befalls him. She brushes aside the fact that their old enemy Omar is now also in Granada as Vizier to the King.

In a ceremony in the mosque the warriors receive the Caliph's banner and the people pray for Allah's protection [No. 5 Chorus: *Allah, dein Volk von Gefahren umgeben*]. Almansor and Elvira promise to bear their separation with cheerfulness [No. 6 Recitative and Duet (Elvira, Almansor): *Du hier, Elvira, harrst du mein?*]. There is a grand ceremony of



farewell [No. 7 Finale: *Allah, zu dir, in der Himmel Hallen*]. However this is interrupted by Zayde, dressed in armour and ready to join the departing army. She prophesies grave danger for the Moorish kingdom, and also for Almansor, who can only be saved by the purest form of love. Both Zayde and (secretly) Elvira take this as a justification for going to Spain.

## ACT II

Granada, a few weeks later. The people thank King Boabdillah for summoning the Moorish army from North Africa [No. 8 Chorus: *Endlich ist es dir gelungen*]. He warns them that the future is still uncertain [No. 9 Recitative *Ja, froher Hoffnung Sterne blinken*]. Omar tells Boabdillah that the King of Spain has sent an emissary to negotiate peace. The King agrees to meet the emissary at a feast where all his allies will be present. Omar also reveals that he has captured Elvira, who was in Granada disguised as a man. He suggests that she may be a spy – she is after all the niece of a famous Spanish general. The King shows little interest in interrogating her and leaves her in Omar's custody.

Elvira, imprisoned, reflects on her new misfortune. She is in Omar's power again, but more importantly she is separated from Almansor at a time of great danger for him [No. 10 Recitative and Aria (Elvira): *Ermüdest du denn nie*]. A message is smuggled out to Zayde. Omar is thrilled at the prospect of taking revenge on both Elvira and Almansor [No. 11 Recitative and Duet (Elvira, Fatime, Omar): *Elvira, fasse Muth!*].

Zayde, at the Alhambra, foresees the destruction of the Kingdom not just by external forces but also by the enemy within [No. 12 Monologue (Zayde): *O herrlich' Monument ruhmvoller Zeiten*]. From the smuggled message she learns of Elvira's imprisonment and Omar's plot to kill Almansor. This confirms her vision of the moral decay within the Kingdom. Although its downfall is inevitable she resolves to do what she can to prevent the worst. Meanwhile Almansor is afflicted by melancholy. He longs for his homeland, where he believes Elvira to be [No. 13 Scene (Almansor): *Hier bin ich endlich recht*].

The Moorish princes gather for a feast [No. 14 Recitative and Festive March (Omar, Don Fernando): *Hieher befahl der König*]. Omar, escorting the Spanish emissary Don Fernando, sees Zayde talking with the King. Don Fernando is received with great pomp (No. 15 Ballet). Boabdillah invites him to present his peace conditions [No. 16 Recitative and Finale: *Die Tafel ist bereit*]. However the Spanish demands are humiliating – the dissolution of the Moorish kingdom and the conversion of its people to Christianity. Boabdillah and his people angrily reject these terms and vow to continue their fight.

## ACT III

Omar plans to murder Almansor, topple the weakened Boabdillah and take power in Granada [No. 17 Recitative and Duet (Omar, Don Fernando): *Hier sind wir ungestört*]. Don Fernando, approached by Omar, refuses to be associated with a murder plot. However he assures him that if Almansor comes close to the Spanish lines in battle he will not be spared.

Almansor waits to hear whether Zayde has secured Elvira's release [No. 18 Recitative and Aria (Almansor): *Noch immer kehrt Zayde nicht zurück*]. Zayde comes with news that the King has discovered Omar's treachery and Elvira has been released [No. 19 Recitative and Aria (Zayde, Almansor): *Almansor, frohe Kunde bring' ich dir*]. But Boabdillah is not prepared to arrest and punish Omar until after the imminent battle, lest this should demoralise the troops. Almansor hurries off to be re-united with Elvira. Zayde, comforted by her faith in Allah, plans to sacrifice her own life to save Almansor if necessary.

The Moors prepare to join battle [No. 20 Chorus: *Auf! Das Sclavenjoch zu brechen!*]. Alderamon gives a rousing address to the troops [No. 21 Recitative and Duet (Alderamon, Omar): *Ja, meine theuren Waffenbrüder*]. When Omar appears Alderamon reproaches him for his imprisonment of Elvira. Omar swears by the name of the Prophet that he took her hostage in order to force her uncle, the Spanish general Don Diego, to withdraw from the battle. Alderamon believes him. He also agrees to Omar's proposal that the Moorish troops led by himself and Almansor should be in the vanguard against the Spaniards. He does not realise that this is part of Omar's plan to kill Almansor.

#### **ACT IV**

The women of Granada wait for news of the battle [No. 22 Chorus: *Ferner hört und immer ferner*]. Elvira too waits anxiously [No. 23 Recitative, Aria and Recitative (Elvira, Fatime, Almansor): *Ach, nicht vermögen all' die Siegesbothen*]. In the end Almansor returns and Alderamon is reported safe. However the general rejoicing is clouded by the news that Zayde has been fatally wounded. Almansor tells the story: Omar, treacherously disguised in Spanish uniform, tried to kill Almansor in the heat of battle, but Zayde interposed herself and took the blow from Omar's spear. Almansor's men have killed the traitor. Zayde is brought in, close to death [No. 24 Finale *Zayde! – Schwester!*]. She confesses her love for Almansor and blesses his union with Elvira, but also repeats her prophesy that the Kingdom of Granada is doomed.

#### **Published libretto**

*Zayde: romantisch-tragische Oper in vier Akten* (Munich: 1843)

Munich (Mbs): L.eleg.m. 1213 od; Slg.Her 1975; Slg.Her 1975a.

Stuttgart (SI): A 21 C/1325

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055287/images/>>

Online: <<http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0005/bsb00055289/images/>>

#### **MS performing materials**

Munich (Mbs): St.th. 640-1 (Score, 4 vols.); St.th. 640-2 (*Musiksoufflierbuch*); St.th. 640-3 (*Textbuch*).

Stuttgart (SI): HB XVII 526 a-d (Score, 4 vols.)

#### **Performances**

Munich: 9/11/1843, 12/11/1843, 3/12/1843.

## Bibliography

- Anon [Poissl, Johann Nepomuk Freiherr von], *Beleuchtung eines Artikels in Nro. 64 des heurigen Jahrganges der "Leipziger Theater-Chronik"* (Munich: Jaquet, 1834).
- Anon [Poissl, Johann Nepomuk Freiherr von], *Ideen über zweckmässige Leitung eines deutschen Hoftheaters, nebst einem Anhang zur Beantwortung der Frage: Ist der Fortbestand des Theaters am Isarthor der Kunst in München nützlich oder schädlich?* (Munich: Fleischmann, 1820)
- Arnold, Hermann, 'Johann Nepomuk von Poißl: Mensch – Werk – Wirken', in *Beiträge zur Geschichte im Landkreis Cham*, 13 (1996), pp. 145-170
- Bartels, Adolf, *Chronik des Weimarer Hoftheaters 1817-1907* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1908)
- Bäuerle, Adolf, *Director Carl: Roman und Wirklichkeit* (Pest: Hartleben, 1856)
- Bauman, Thomas, *North German Opera in the Age of Goethe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985)
- Bawr, Alexandrine Sophie Baronesse de, *Geschichte der Musik für Freunde und Verehrer dieser Kunst*. ed. by August Lewald (Nürnberg: 1826)
- Becker, Heinz, ed., *Die Couleur Locale in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1976)
- Becker, Heinz: 'Meyerbeers Wiener Reisetagebuch 1813', in *Festschrift Rudolf Elvers zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. by Ernst Hettrich and Hans Schneider (Tutzing: Schneider, 1985), pp. 29-47
- Becker, Wolfgang, *Die deutsche Oper in Dresden unter der Leitung von Carl Maria von Weber 1817–26* (Berlin-Dahlem: Colloquium, 1962)
- Beer, Michael, *Michael Beer's Briefwechsel*, ed. by Eduard von Schenk (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1837)
- Biedenfeld, Ferdinand Freiherr von, *Die komische Oper der Italiener, der Franzosen und der Deutschen* (Leipzig: Weigel, 1848)
- Boder, Wolfram, *Die Kasseler Opern Louis Spohrs: Musikdramaturgie im sozialen Kontext*, 2 vols (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2007)
- Braunmüller, Robert, '"Väterliche Rührung": der Spielplan des Münchner Hof- und Nationaltheaters in der Zeit Max' I. Joseph', in *Münchner Theatergeschichtliches Symposium 2000*, ed. by Hans-Michael Körner and Jürgen Schläder (Munich: Utz, 2000), pp. 76-111

- Brewer, Bruce, 'Giovan Battista Rubini: a performance study', in *The Donizetti Society Journal*, 4 (1980), pp. 117-165
- Brown, Clive, *Louis Spohr, A critical biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984)
- Brown, Clive, 'Spohr, Faust and Leitmotif', in *The Musical Times*, 125 (1984), pp. 25-27
- Brühl, Carl Graf von, *Neue Kostüme auf den beiden königlichen Theatern in Berlin unter der General-Intendantur des Herrn Grafen von Brühl*, 23 vols (Berlin: Wittich, 1819-1831)
- Brunner, Johann, 'Das Geschlecht der Poyßl', in *Der Bayerwald*, 31 (1933), pp.139-141
- Bücken, Ernst, 'Carl Maria von Weber', in *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Moderne* (Potsdam: Athenaion, 1929), pp. 56-78
- Bücken, Ernst, *Der heroische Stil in der Oper* (Leipzig: Kistner & Siegel, 1924)
- Burkhardt, C. A. H., *Das Repertoire des Weimarischen Theaters unter Goethes Leitung 1791-1817* (Hamburg: Voss, 1891)
- Bužga, Jaroslav, 'Carl Maria von Webers Prager "Notizen-Buch" (1813-1816)', in *Oper heute*, 8 (1985), pp. 7-44
- Carl, Carl [Karl Andreas Bernbrunn], '*Kann man also Honoriger seyn als ich es bin?*': *Briefe des Theaterdirektors Carl Carl und seiner Frau Margaretha Carl an Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer*, ed. by Birgit Pargner and others (Munich: Lehner, 2004)
- Charlton, David, *Grétry and the Growth of Opéra-Comique* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986)
- Corti, Egon Caesar, Count, *Ludwig I. of Bavaria*, transl. by A.B.G. Stamper (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1938)
- Dahlhaus, Carl, 'Die Kategorie des Charakteristischen in der Ästhetik des 19. Jahrhunderts', in *Die "Couleur locale" in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Heinz Becker (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse 1976), pp. 9-21
- Dahlhaus, Carl, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1980)
- Dahlhaus, Carl, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, transl. by J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989)
- Danzi, Franz, *Briefwechsel* ed. by Volkmar von Pechstaedt (Tutzing: Schneider, 1997)
- DeLong, Kenneth, 'The Conventions of Musical Biedermeier', in *Conventions in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music. Essays in Honour of Leonard G. Ratner*, ed. by Wye Jamieson Allanbrook and others (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), pp. 195-223

- Dent, Edward J, *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, ed. by Winton Dean (Cambridge, CUP, 1976)
- Didion, Robert, and Joachim Schlichte, eds, *Thematischer Katalog der Opersammlung in der Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1990)
- Engelhardt, Markus, "'Außer Gebrauch gekommen" – Johann Nepomuk Poißl und seine Metastasio-Bearbeitungen', in *Belliniana et alia musicologica: Festschrift für Friedrich Lippmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Lindner (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2004), pp. 70-83.
- Engelhardt, Markus, 'Metastasio "ottocentesco": la situazione nei paesi di lingua tedesca', in *Metastasio nell'Ottocento*, ed. by Francesco Paolo Russo (Rome: Aracne, 2003), pp. 127-135
- Engländer, Richard, 'The Struggle between German and Italian Opera at the Time of Weber', in *The Musical Quarterly*, 31 (1945), pp. 479-491
- Ensslin, Wolfram 'Die Polacca in den Opern Ferdinando Paërs', in *Belliniana et alia musicologica: Festschrift für Friedrich Lippmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Lindner (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2004), pp. 84-101
- Estermann, Alfred, ed., *Die deutschen Literatur-Zeitschriften 1815-1850* (München: Saur, 1991)
- Fambach, Oskar, *Das Repertorium des Königlichen Theaters und der Italienischen Oper zu Dresden 1814-1832* (Bonn: Grundmann, 1985)
- Fambach, Oskar, *Das Repertorium des Stadttheaters zu Leipzig 1817-1828* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1980)
- Fend, Michael, "'Es versteht sich von selbst, daß ich von der Oper spreche, die der Deutsche und Franzose will...": zum Verhältnis von Opéra comique und deutscher romantischer Oper', in *Die Opéra comique und ihr Einfluß auf das europäische Musiktheater im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Herbert Schneider and Nicole Wild (Hildesheim: Olms, 1997), pp. 299-232
- Fétis, François-Joseph, ed., *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique* (Paris, Brussels: 1835-44)
- Fiege, Gertrud, *Caspar David Friedrich* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977)
- Finscher, Ludwig, 'Weber's 'Freischütz': Conceptions and Misconceptions', in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 110 (1983-84), pp. 79-90

- Fischer, Georg, *Marschner-Erinnerungen* (Hannover: [s.n.], 1918)
- Flaherty, Gloria, *Opera in the Development of German Critical Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976)
- Fuchs, Dismas, *Chronologisches Tagebuch des Grossherzoglich Hessischen Hoftheaters, von der Begründung bis zur Auflösung desselben* (Darmstadt: Leske, 1832)
- Gämmerler, Franz, *Theater-Director Carl, sein Leben und sein Wirken* (Vienna: Wallishausser, 1854)
- Gansmeir, J. A. *Der glückliche Zufall für die Rechtschaffenheit* (Straubing: Betz, 1785)
- Gaul, Magnus, *Musiktheater in Regensburg in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tutzing: Schneider, 2004)
- Geyer-Kiefl, Helen, *Die heroisch-komische Oper ca. 1770-1820* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1987)
- Goedeke, Karl and others, *Grundriß zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung aus den Quellen* (Dresden, Stuttgart, Tübingen: Ehlermann and others, 1885-1960)
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, 'Briefwechsel mit Zelter', ed. by Hans-Günter Ottenberg and Edith Zehm, in *Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Richter and others, Vols. 20.I and 20.II (Munich: Hanser, 1991)
- Gollwitzer, Heinz, *Ludwig I. von Bayern: Königtum im Vormärz* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1986)
- Göpfert, Bernd: *Stimmtypen und Rollencharaktere in der deutschen Oper von 1815-1848* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1977)
- Goslich, Siegfried, *Die deutsche romantische Oper* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1975)
- Gottwald, Clytus, ed., *Die Handschriften der Württembergischen Landesbibliothek Stuttgart. 2. Reihe Die Handschriften der ehemaligen königlichen Hofbibliothek. 6. Band: Codices musici 3* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004)
- Grandaur, Franz, *Chronik des Königlichen Hof- und National-Theaters in München. Zur Feier seines hundertjährigen Bestehens* (Munich: Ackermann, 1878)
- Gross, Manfred, 'Johann Nepomuk von Poißl: Komponist, Theaterdirektor und Textdichter in einer Person', in *Der Bayerwald*, 68 (1976), pp. 20-23
- Güthenke, Constanze *Placing modern Greece: the dynamics of Romantic Hellenism, 1770-1840* (Oxford: OUP, 2008)

- Hadamowsky, Franz, *Die Wiener Hoftheater (Staatstheater) 1776-1966. Verzeichnis der aufgeführten Stücke mit Bestandsnachweis und täglichem Spielplan*, 2 vols (Vienna: Prachner, 1966)
- Hagelweide, Gert, ed., *Deutsche Zeitungsbestände in Bibliotheken und Archiven* (Düsseldorf: Droste-Verlag, 1974)
- Harten, Ulrike, and others, eds, 'Die Bühnenedwürfe', in *Karl Friedrich Schinkel: Das Lebenswerk* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2000)
- Hauk, Franz, *Johann Caspar Aiblinger (1779-1867): Leben und Werk* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1989)
- Heidlberger, Frank, 'Jephtas Gelübde': Charakteristische Form und musikalische Gestalt in Meyerbeers Frühwerk', in *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. by Sieghart Döhring and Arnold Jacobshagen (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1998), pp.1-26
- Heinemann, Michael and Hans John, eds, *Die Dresdner Oper im 19. Jahrhundert* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995)
- Henderson, Donald G., and Alice H. Henderson, eds., *Carl Maria von Weber: a Guide to Research* (New York: Garland, 1990)
- Hoffmann, E. T. A., *Schriften zur Musik*, ed. by Friedrich Schnapp (Munich: Winkler-Verlag, 1963)
- Holmes, Edward, *A ramble among the musicians of Germany, giving some account of the operas of Munich, Dresden, Berlin, &c* (London: Hunt and Clarke, 1828)
- Holzbauer, Ignaz von, *Günther von Schwarzburg*, ed. by Hermann Kretzschmar (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902)
- Howard, Patricia, *Gluck and the birth of modern opera* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1963)
- Jagemann, Karoline, *Die Erinnerungen der Karoline Jagemann*, ed. by Eduard von Bamberg (Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1926)
- Kaiser, Hermann, *Das großherzogliche Hoftheater in Darmstadt 1810-1890* (Darmstadt: Eduard Roether Verlag, 1964)
- Kimbell, David, *Italian Opera* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991)
- Klingemann, August, *Kunst und Natur. Blätter aus meinem Reisetagebuche*, Vol. 3 (Braunschweig: Meyer, 1828)
- Knispel, Hermann, *Das großherzogliche Hoftheater zu Darmstadt von 1810-1890* (Darmstadt: [s.n.], 1891)

- Kühnicke, Björn, '“Vaterland” und “Heiligthum”: Jean Racines *Athalie* als national-religiöse Erlösungsphantasie auf der deutschen Opernbühne der frühen Restaurationszeit', in *Deutsch-französische Literaturbeziehungen. Stationen und Aspekte dichterischer Nachbarschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. by Marcel Krings and Roman Luckscheiter (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 113-130
- Küstner, Karl Theodor von, *Vierunddreissig Jahre meiner Theaterleitung* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1853)
- Kutsch, Karl Joseph, and Leo Riemens, eds, *Großes Sängerlexikon*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. edn., 5 vols (Bern: K. G. Saur, 1997)
- Laudon, Robert T, *Sources of the Wagnerian synthesis. A Study of the Franco-German Tradition in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Opera* (Munich: Katzbichler, 1979)
- Laux, Carl, 'Carl Maria von Webers Münchner Beitrag zur deutschen Oper', in *Festschrift Hans Engel zum 70. Geburtstag* ed. by Horst Heussner (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1964), pp. 221-230
- Lewald, August: 'Das Theater zu München', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 4 (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1844-46), pp. 334-361
- Lippe, Marcus Chr., 'Zur deutschsprachigen Opernproduktion in München um 1800', in *Oper im Aufbruch: Gattungskonzepte des deutschsprachigen Musiktheaters um 1800*, ed. by Marcus Chr. Lippe (Kassel: Bosse, 2007), pp. 231-249
- Lippmann, Friedrich, 'Le revisioni dei drammi metastasiani nello sviluppo dell'opera seria dal 1770 al 1830', in *Metastasio nell'Ottocento*, ed. by Francesco Paolo Russo (Rome: Aracne, 2003), pp. 43-60
- Loewenberg, Alfred, *Annals of Opera*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1970)
- Lowenstein, Steven M., *The Berlin Jewish Community: enlightenment, family and crisis, 1770 – 1830* (New York: OUP, 1993)
- Ludwig I, King of Bavaria, *Briefwechsel zwischen Ludwig I. von Bayern und Eduard von Schenk 1823-1842*, ed. by Max Spindler (Munich: Parcus, 1930)
- Ludwig I, King of Bavaria, *Ludwig I. und Lola Montez: der Briefwechsel*, ed. by Reinhold Rauh and Bruce Seymour (Munich: Prestel, 1995)
- Mann, Golo, *Ludwig I. von Bayern* (Frankfurt:Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999)
- Marchand, Suzanne L., *Down from Olympus: archaeology and philhellenism in Germany 1750-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996)



- McCredie, Andrew, 'Leitmotive: Wagner's points of departure and their antecedents', in *Miscellanea Musicologica*, 14 (1985), pp. 1-28
- Meinhard, Walther P., *Haunkenzell: Chronik u. Heimatkunde einer Bayerwaldgemeinde* (Haunkenzell: Gemeinde Haunkenzell, 1976)
- Meyer, Stephen C., *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003)
- Meyerbeer, Giacomo, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. by Heinz Becker, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1960)
- Moisy, Sigrid von, *Von der Aufklärung zur Romantik: Geistige Strömungen in München* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1984)
- Mosel, Ignaz Franz von, 'Vaudeville, Liederspiel, Singspiel, Oper', in *AmZ(W)*, 4 (1820), pp. 681-685, 689-692, 697-701
- Mosel, Ignaz Franz von, *Versuch einer Aesthetik des dramatischen Tonsatzes* (Vienna: Strauss, 1813)
- Murr, Karl Borromäus, 'Bayerische Geschichte auf der Bühne: Das Münchner Hof- und Nationaltheater zur Zeit Max' I. Joseph', in *Münchner Theatergeschichtliches Symposium 2000*, ed. by Hans-Michael Körner and Jürgen Schläder (Munich: Utz, 2000), pp. 112-128
- Murr, Karl Borromäus, *Ludwig I.: Königtum der Widersprüche* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2012)
- Nägele, Reiner, *Peter Joseph von Lindpaintner: sein Leben, sein Werk. Ein Beitrag zur Typologie des Kapellmeisters im 19. Jahrhundert* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1993)
- Němec, Zdeněk: *Weberova Pražská Léta* (Prague: L. Mazáč, 1944)
- Nieder, Christoph, *Von der "Zauberflöte" zum "Lohengrin": das deutsche Opernlibretto in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1989)
- Nitsche, Peter, 'Vielfalt und Charakteristik: Abbé Vogler als Lehrer Meyerbeers in der Instrumentation', in *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. by Sieghart Döhring and Arnold Jacobshagen (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1998), pp. 183-200
- Pasqué, Ernst: *Musikalische Statistik des Grossherzoglichen Hoftheaters zu Darmstadt von 1810-1868* (Darmstadt: Herbert, 1868)
- Pietschmann, Klaus: 'Zwischen Tradition, Anpassung und Innovation. Italienische Opern für deutsche Höfe im frühen 19. Jahrhundert', in *Das Bild der italienischen Oper in Deutschland*, ed. by Sebastian Werr and Daniel Brandenburg (Münster: Lit, 2004), pp. 108-121

- Poissl, Johann Nepomuk von, *Briefe (1807-1855). Ein Blick auf die Münchener Musik- und Theatergeschichte*, ed. by Volkmar von Pechstaedt (Göttingen: Hainholz, 2006)
- Poissl, Johann Nepomuk von, 'Erklärung', in *Münchner Theater-Journal*, 3 (1816), pp. 446-458, 503-507
- Poissl, Johann Nepomuk von, 'Meine Ansichten über den allmählichen Verfall der Musik', in *Jahrbücher des deutschen National-Vereins für Musik und Wissenschaft*, 3 (1841), pp. 113-115, 121-123, 129-132, 137-139
- Poissl, Johann Nepomuk von, 'Musikalische Berichte aus München', in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den österreichischen Kaiserstaat*, 4 (1820), pp. 197-199, 285-286, 295-296, 307-312, 364-367, 374-376, 382-384, 398-400, 407-408, 473-477, 579-584, 611-613, 741-743; 5 (1821), pp. 425-427, 436-439, 441-443
- Racine, Jean, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Georges Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1999)
- Petrovska, Marija, *Merope: the dramatic impact of a myth* (New York: Lang, 1984)
- Reipschläger, Erich, *Schubaur, Danzi und Poissl als Opernkomponisten. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der deutschen Oper auf Münchener Boden* (Berlin: Wegner, 1911)
- Riezler, Sigmund, *Geschichte Baierns*, 9 vols (Gotha: Perthes, 1878-)
- Ruhnke, Martin: 'Das Einlage-Lied in der Oper in der Zeit von 1800 bis 1840' in *Die "Couleur locale" in der Oper des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Heinz Becker (Regensburg: Bosse, 1976), pp. 75-97
- Sandberger, Adolf, 'Einige ungedruckte Musikerbriefe' in *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters*, 46 (1939), pp. 50-57
- Schaden, Adolph von, *Artistisches München im Jahre 1835* (Munich: Bayer, 1836)
- Schäffer, Carl and Carl Hauptmann, *Die Königlichen Theater in Berlin: Statistischer Rückblick* (Berlin: Comtoir, 1886)
- Schafhäutl, Karl Emil von, *Abt Georg Joseph Vogler. Sein Leben, Charakter und musikalisches System* (Augsburg: Huttler, 1888; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1979)
- Schenk, Eduard von, *Schauspiele: Zweiter Theil* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1833)
- Schiedermair, Ludwig, *Die deutsche Oper: Grundzüge ihres Werdens und Wesens*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Dümmler, 1940)
- Schiedermair, Ludwig, *Deutsche Oper in München* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1992)

- Schilling, Gustav and others, eds. *Encyclopädie der gesamten musikalischen Wissenschaften*, rev. edn. (Stuttgart: Köhler, 1841)
- Schletterer, Hans Michael, 'Poißl', in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Vol. 26 (Leipzig: 1888), pp. 376-380
- Schmidt, Marlene, *Zur Theorie des musikalischen Charakters* (Munich: Katzbichler, 1981)
- Schmitt, Anke, *Der Exotismus in der deutschen Oper zwischen Mozart und Spohr* (Hamburg: Wagner, 1988)
- Schneider, Hans, *Makarius Falter (1762-1843) und sein Münchner Musikverlag (1796-1888)*, Vol. 1 (Tutzing: Schneider, 1993)
- Schrott, Ludwig, 'Aus dem Ringen um die deutsche Oper. Ein Lebens- und Schaffensbild Johann Nepomuk von Poissls', in *Die Musik*, 32 (1939-40), pp. 299-303
- Schrott, Ludwig: *Biedermeier in München. Dokumente einer schöpferischen Zeit* (München, Süddeutscher Verlag 1963)
- Schubart, C. F. D. , *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Vienna: Degen, 1806; facs. repr. ed. Fritz and Margrit Kaiser, Hildesheim: Olms 1990)
- Schultz, Klaus (ed.), *Münchner Theaterzettel 1807-1982* (Munich: Sauer, 1982)
- Serauky, Walter, 'Süd- und Norddeutschland in Webers Musikanschauung', in *Carl Maria von Weber: eine Gedenkschrift*, ed. by Günter Hausswald (Dresden: Dresdner Verlag, 1951), pp. 39-51
- Smith, Patrick J, *The Tenth Muse: A historical study of the opera libretto* (London: Gollancz, 1971)
- Spindler, Max (ed.), *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, 6 vols (Munich: Beck, 1968-74, rev. ed. 1979)
- Spindler, Max, 'Kronprinz Ludwig von Bayern und Napoleon I.' in *Erbe und Verpflichtung: Aufsätze und Vorträge zur bayerischen Geschichte* ed. by Andreas Kraus (München: Beck, 1966), pp.212-251
- Spohr, Louis, *Louis Spohr's Autobiography: Translated from the German*, transl. unknown (London: Longman, Green et al., 1865)
- Steblin, Rita, *A History of Key Characteristics in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1981, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1996)
- Toscani, Claudio, "'Dem Italiener ist Melodie Eins und Alles". Italienische Oper in der Leipziger "Allgemeinen musikalischen Zeitung"', in *Das Bild der italienischen*

- Oper in Deutschland*, ed. by Sebastian Werr and Daniel Brandenburg (Münster: Lit, 2004), pp. 137-158
- Tusa, Michael C., *Euryanthe and Carl Maria von Weber's dramaturgy of German opera* (Oxford: OUP, 1991)
- Ulrich, Claudia, *Das königliche Hof- und Nationaltheater unter Max I. Joseph von Bayern. Vorgeschichte, Entwicklung und Wirkung eines öffentlichen Theaters* (Munich: Beck, 2000)
- Veit, Joachim, *Der junge Carl Maria von Weber. Untersuchungen zum Einfluss Franz Danzis und Abbé Georg Joseph Voglers* (Mainz: Schott, 1990)
- Velazco, Jorge, 'El Baron Poissl, factor de la transición del romanticismo alemán', in *Heterofonia*, 16/3 (1983), pp. 62-69
- Vierneisel, Klaus, 'Ludwigs I. Verlangen nach dem "Reinen griechischen Stil"', in *Bayerns Philhellenismus*, ed. by Gerhard Grimm and Theodor Nikolaou (Munich: Institut für Orthodoxe Theologie der Universität München, 1993), pp. 113-139
- Waidelich, T.G. '"Weder Italienisch noch Französisch, sondern rein Deutsch": Johann Nepomuk von Poißls Athalia als Oper "ohngefahr im Genre der Gluck'schen"', in *Weber-Studien 3: Gerhard Allroggen zum 60. Geburtstag* (Mainz: Schott, 1996), pp. 318-346
- Warrack, John, *Carl Maria von Weber*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1976)
- Warrack, John, 'Französische Elemente in Webers Opern', in *Die Dresdner Oper im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Michael Heinemann and Hans John (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1995), pp. 119-124
- Warrack, John, *German Opera from the beginnings to Wagner* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001)
- Warrack, John, 'German Operatic Ambitions at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century', in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 104 (1977-78), pp. 79-88
- Weber, Carl Maria von, *Mein vielgeliebter Muks: Hundert Briefe Carl Maria von Webers an Caroline Brandt aus den Jahren 1814-1817*, ed. by Eveline Bartlitz (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1986)
- Weber, Carl Maria von, *Sämtliche Schriften von C.M. von Weber*, ed. by Georg Kaiser (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1921)
- Weber, Carl Maria von, *Writings on Music*, ed. by John Warrack, trans. by Martin Cooper (Cambridge: CUP, 1981)

- Weber, Max Maria von: *Carl Maria von Weber. Ein Lebensbild*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Keil, 1864)
- Wendt, Amadeus, *Rossini's Leben und Treiben, vornehmlich nach den Nachrichten des Herrn v. Stendhal geschildert und mit Urtheilen der Zeitgenossen über seinen musikalischen Charakter begleitet* (Leipzig: Voss, 1824; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 2003)
- Whistling, C.F. (ed.), *Handbuch der musikalischen Literatur* (Leipzig: Whistling, 1828)
- Wörner, Karl, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte des Leitmotivs in der Oper', in *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, 14 (1932), pp. 151-172
- Wünsche, Raimund, "'Lieber hellenischer Bürger als Erbe des Throns". König Ludwig I. und Griechenland', in *Das neue Hellas. Griechen und Bayern zur Zeit Ludwigs I.*, ed. by Reinhold Baumstark (Munich: Hirmer, 1999), pp. 1 – 20
- Zamoyski, Adam, *1812: Napoleon's Fatal March on Moscow* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005)
- Zamoyski, Adam: *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna* (London: Harper Press, 2007)
- Zenger, Max, *Geschichte der Münchener Oper*, ed. by Theodor Kroyer (Munich: Weizinger, 1923)
- Ziegler, Frank, 'JV180 – Puzzle-Teile zu einem musikalischen Freundschaftsdienst und Anmerkungen zu weiteren dichterisch-musikalischen Eintagsfliegen' in *Weberiana. Mitteilungen der Internationalen Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesellschaft*, 17 (2007), pp. 67-90
- Zimmermann, Reiner, *Giacomo Meyerbeer, eine Biografie nach Dokumenten* (Berlin: Parthas, 1998)

**The operas of J. N. von Poissl (1783-1865)**

**Aesthetics and Ideology**

Supplementary Volume: longer music examples

Martin John Pickard

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds  
School of Music

May 2012

## Table of Contents (Supplementary Volume)

<b>Example 1: <i>Ottaviano in Sicilia</i>, Duetto No. 3 (complete).....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Example 2: <i>Merope</i>, the death of Polifonte (extract from final scene) .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Example 3: <i>Athalia</i>, Scene and Aria No. 6 (complete) .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Example 4: <i>Athalia</i>, extract from Act I Scene 3 (1815 version) .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Example 5: <i>Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia</i>, recitative after No. 4.....</b>	<b>34</b>

**Example 1: *Ottaviano in Sicilia*, Duetto No. 3 (complete)**

CINNA

Ingrata, all'amor mio  
quale rendesti, oh Dio,  
cruda fatal mercè!

SCRIBONIA

Ah, non chiamarmi ingrata!  
Misera e sventurata  
io sono al par di te.

CINNA

Tu, infida!

SCRIBONIA

Senti almeno!

CINNA

Nò, mi trafiggi il seno.

SCRIBONIA

Ma ascolta prima.

CINNA

Oh, Dei!

BOTH

Crescono i mali miei  
e nel mio duol profondo  
nò, più nel ciel, nel mondo  
non v'ha pietà per me.

CINNA

Ungrateful woman, you have repaid my love  
(oh God!) with such a cruel and deadly  
reward!

SCRIBONIA

Ah, do not call me ungrateful! I am as  
miserable and unfortunate as you.

CINNA

You, an unfaithful woman!

SCRIBONIA

At least hear me!

CINNA

No, you are piercing my heart.

SCRIBONIA

But first listen.

CINNA

Oh Gods!

BOTH

My sufferings increase and in my profound  
pain there is no mercy, in heaven or on earth.



Allegro maestoso quasi Andante

Scribonia

Cinna

In - gra - ta, al a - mor mio, qua - le ren - des - ti, oh,

Scr.

Ah! non chia - mar - mi in -

Cin.

Di - o! cru - da fa - tal mer - cè.

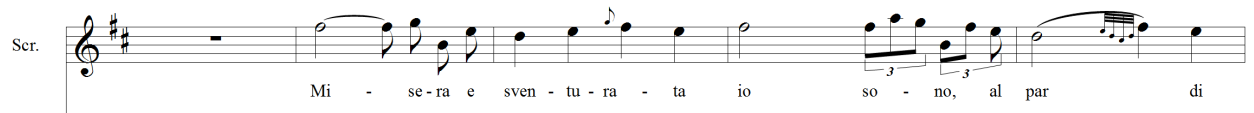
Scr.

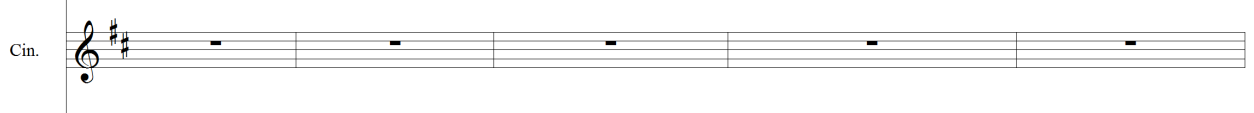
gra - ta; ah! non chia - ma - re, non chia - mar - mi in - gra - ta

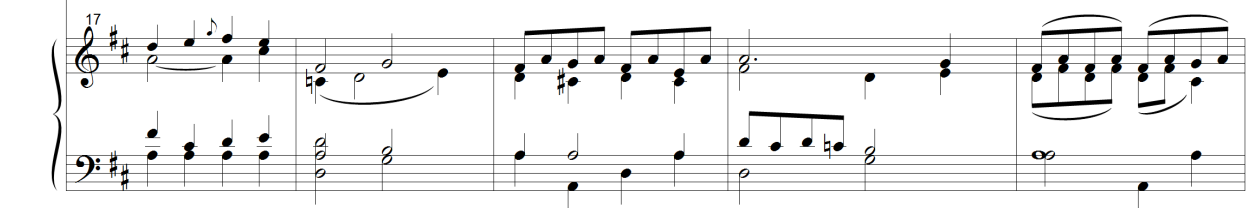
Cin.


11


The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of three systems. The first system features Scribonia's vocal line (Scribonia) and Cinna's vocal line (Cinna) with piano accompaniment. The second system continues Cinna's vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system features Scribonia's vocal line and piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings like *f* and *p*. Trills are indicated with 'tr' above notes. The piano part includes chords and arpeggiated figures.


Ser.  Mi - se-ra e sven - tu - ra - ta io so - no, al par di

Cin. 



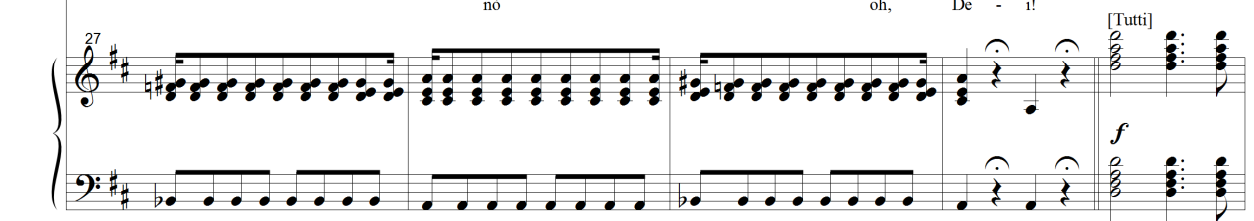
Ser.  te. sen - ti al - me-no!

Cin.  Tu, - in - fi - da! nò, - nò, mi traf - fig - gi il se-no.





Ser.  ma as-col-ta pri - ma - as-col-ta pri - ma.

Cin.  nò oh, De - i!




Allegro assai

Ser.  Cres - co - no i ma - li mie - i

Cin.  Cres - co - no i ma - li mie - i

32 [Woodwind, Horns] *pp* [Strings] *p* [Tutti] *f* [Woodwind, Horns] *pp*



Ser.  e nel mi du ol pro - fon - do. Nò, più nel ciel, nel mon - do

Cin.  e nel mi du ol pro - fon - do. Nò, più nel

39 [Strings] *p* [etc.]



Ser.  non v'ha pie - tà per me. nò,

Cin.  ciel, nel mon - do non v'ha pie - tà per me

45



Ser. non v'ha pie - tà per me Cres-co - no i ma - li mie - i e

Cin. non v'ha pie - tà per me Cres-co - no i ma - li mie - i e

51

Ser. nel mio duol pro - fon - do nò, più nel ciel, nel mon - do non v'ha pie - tà per

Cin. nel mio duol pro - fon - do nò, più nel ciel, nel mon - do non v'ha pie - tà per

56

Ser. me. non v'ha pie - tà. non v'ha -

Cin. me. non v'ha pie - tà. non v'ha -

61

Ser.  pie - tà per me,

Cin.  pie - tà per me,

67 

Ser.  non v'ha pie - tà, non v'ha -

Cin.  non v'ha pie - tà, non v'ha -

72  *fz* *p*

Ser.  pie - tà per me, non v'ha pie -

Cin.  pie - tà per me, non v'ha pie -

78 

Scr. *tr*  
 tà, pie - tà per me, non v'ha pie - tà, non v'ha pie - tà - per

Cin. *tr*  
 tà, pie - tà per me, non v'ha pie - tà, non v'ha pie - tà - per

83 *cresc.*

Scr. me, non v'ha pie - tà, pie - tà per

Cin. me, non v'ha pie - tà, pie - tà per

89 *f*

Scr. me.

Cin. me.

93 *tr* *tr*

[Horns:]

**End of Example 1**

**Example 2: *Merope*, the death of Polifonte (extract from final scene)**

POLIFONTE  
All'armi, o fidi miei!

TIMANTE  
Perfido! Mori!

POLIFONTE  
Ahi, che tradimento! Soldati! Io moro!

TIMANTE  
Ho compiuto il mio dover!

MEROPE  
Ah, figlio! Vieni a questo sen!

POLIFONTE  
To arms, my trusty followers!

TIMANTE  
Die, perfidious man!

POLIFONTE  
Ah, what treachery! Soldiers! I am dying!

TIMANTE  
I have done my duty.

MEROPE  
Ah my son, come to my bosom.





Fls.

Obs.

Bns.

Hns. (D)

Tbnes.

POLIFONTE

Ahi! Che tra-di - men - to! Sol - da - ti! Io mo -

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc., Cb.

*p*

*p*

*p*

*p*

Detailed description: This page of a musical score, numbered 12, features a vocal soloist and a full orchestra. The woodwind section includes Flute (Fls.), Oboe (Obs.), Bassoon (Bns.), Horn in D (Hns. (D)), and Trombone (Tbnes.). The string section consists of Violin 1 (Vn. 1), Violin 2 (Vn. 2), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello/Double Bass (Vc., Cb.). The vocal soloist part begins with the word 'POLIFONTE' and the lyrics 'Ahi! Che tra-di - men - to! Sol - da - ti! Io mo -'. The instrumental parts for the strings and woodwinds are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a 6/8 time signature.

12 [2a 2] **Allegro molto**

Bns. *f* *p*

Tbnes. *f* *p*

ro! Ho com - pi-to il mio do-

Vn. 1 *mf*

Vn. 2 *mf*

Vla. *f* *p* *mf*

Vc., Cb. *p* *mf*

[1]

18

Fls. [mf]

Obs. [mf]

Bns. [mf]

ver! Ah, fig - lio! Vie - ni a ques - to sen!

MEROPE

**End of Example 2**

### Example 3: *Athalia*, Scene and Aria No. 6 (complete)

Text and stage directions from the 1828 libretto:

ATHALIA

*(Während des Ritornells sich besinnend)*

Nein die Verwirrung muß sich wenden,

Der meine Seele fast erliegt.

Mit Blut hab' ich die Weissagung besiegt,

Und blutig soll mir jeder Gegner enden! –

Was gilt's, ob solch ein Knabe lebt,

Der einer Pflanze gleich, am Boden

Des mir verhaßten Temples klebt?

Ich rei ihn aus und werf ihn zu den Todten.

*(Plötzlich erstarrend, und die Augen wie auf eine Vision heftend)*

Weh' mir! Die Todten ruhen nicht!

Ha! wie des Kindes Auge bricht!

*(Die Augen nach einer andern Seite wendend)*

Auch da ein sterbend Angesicht!...

*(Den Blick wendend)*

Ach! wie der Blick mein Herz durchsticht!...

*(Nach einer andern Seite blickend)*

Der Säugling unter den Leichen...

Er fiel von meines Dolches Streichen...

Die Enkel sind's...des eignen Blutes Erben

Verschont ich nicht...

*(Mit der Geberde der Verzweiflung)*

ich ließ sie grausam sterben!

CHOR

Es wachet im Busen

Ein strenges Gericht.

Selbst auf dem Throne

Schlummert es nicht!

ATHALIA

*(Hat durch einen Uebergang aus obiger*

*Geberde, sich das Gesicht verhüllt, - wie aus einem Traum zu sich kommend)*

Wo war ich? Schrecklich Bild aus meinem Leben!

Wirst Du mir nimmer, nimmer Ruhe geben? –

O rächendes Gewissen!

Du hast mir das gethan;

Du fällst mit Schlangenbissen

Mein inn'res Leben an!

Kann dich mein Tod versöhnen,

ATHALIA

*(Deep in thought during the introduction)*

No, this confusion must be averted which almost overwhelms my soul.

Through blood I have defeated the prophecy, and all my enemies shall be bloodily destroyed!

What does it matter if a boy lives and clings like a plant to the ground of that Temple which I so detest? I shall tear him out and throw him to the dead.

*(Suddenly petrified, staring as if at an apparition)*

Alas! The dead do not rest!

Ha! How the child's eye fades!

*(Looking in another direction)*

There too a dying face!...

*(Averting her eyes)*

Oh, how that look pierces my heart!...

*(Looking in another direction)*

The baby among the corpses...

It fell at my dagger's blows...

My grandchildren... I did not even spare the heirs of my own blood,

*(With a gesture of despair)*

but had them cruelly killed.

CHORUS

Within man's bosom a severe judge keeps watch.

Even on the throne he does not sleep.

ATHALIA

*(Moves from the above gesture to one in which she covers her face – as if waking from a dream)*

Where was I? Dreadful image from my past life! Will you never, ever grant me peace?

Oh vengeful conscience, you have done this to me.

You attack my innermost being with your serpent bites!

If you can be appeased by my death, and if my

Und endet dann mein Schmerz,  
Senk' ich mein Werk zu krönen,  
Den Stahl ins eig'ne Herz!

Und wie? Das wäre meiner Werke Krone?  
Um so zu sterben, hätte ich gelebt?  
Dem Volke, das vor meinem Blick erbebt,  
Gäb ich mich sterbend hin zu frechem Hohne?...  
Geräch[e]t hab' ich Vater, Mutter, Brüder,  
Selbst die nicht schonend, die mein Blut gear.  
Recht that ich! Königin fühl' ich mich wieder  
Und fest zu stehen trotz ich der Gefahr! –  
Mein Haus zu stürzen, strebt ein feindlich Wesen,  
Und furchtbar ist's dem Schrecklichen geglückt;  
Euch [sic]<sup>1</sup> Davids Stamm, den er sich auserlesen,  
Ist auch bis auf den letzten Zweig erdrückt;  
Noch lebt ein Feind im Tempel mir verborgen,  
Mir hat ihn Baal im Warnungstraum gezeigt.  
Den Feind durchbohrt – des Herzens Argwohn  
schweigt.  
Gestürzt den Tempel – hin sind meine Sorgen.

Rasch wie des Feuers Gluthen  
Will ich zum Ziele geh'n.  
Es beben, fallen, bluten,  
Die mir im Wege steh'n!  
Der Knabe in des Tempels Hallen,  
Der Tempel und sein Gott soll fallen!  
Frohlockend über die Ruinen,  
Seh' ich zerschmettert, die ihm dienen!  
Nicht länger will ich schonen  
Den Götzen, der mir droht,  
Denn Fesseln oder Kronen,  
Sieg gilt es oder Tod!  
(*Geht ab*)

CHOR (*mit der Arie*)  
Wie trotzend dem Geschicke  
Nichts ihre Seele rührt!  
Wer sagt ob das zum Glücke,  
Ob das zum Falle führt?  
(*Chor ab*)

pain would then be ended, I will crown my  
life's work by sinking a dagger into my own  
heart!

And yet – would that be the crowning of my  
life's work? Would I have lived in order to die  
in that way? Would I, dying, let myself be  
mocked by that nation which now trembles  
before me? I have avenged my father, my  
mother, my brothers. I did not even spare those  
born of my own blood. I was right to do so! I  
feel like a queen again, and will stand  
resolutely, defying danger! A hostile deity is  
trying to topple my house, and he has  
succeeded most terribly. But his chosen tribe of  
David has been annihilated down to the last  
branch. One enemy still remains hidden from  
me in the Temple. Baal showed him to me in  
that warning dream. But once that enemy has  
been stabbed, my suspicions will be silenced.  
Once the Temple has been destroyed my fears  
will be over.

As fast as a raging fire I shall reach my goal.

Let all those who stand in my way tremble, fall  
and bleed!  
The boy in the Temple, yes the Temple itself  
shall fall along with its God!  
Rejoicing over the ruins, I shall see those who  
serve him smashed to pieces!  
No longer shall I spare the idol who threatens  
me.  
Yes, it shall be either fetters or a crown, either  
victory or death!  
(*Exit*)

CHORUS (*with the Aria*)  
When she defies destiny nothing can affect her  
spirit!  
Who knows whether this will lead to good  
fortune or to her downfall?  
(*Exit Chorus*)

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Doch' in other sources.

**Recitativo**  
**Allegro**

Ath. 1 ATHALIA  
Nein! Die Ver-

Orch. 1 *fz* *fz* *mf*

Ath. 5  
wir-rung muss sich wen-den, der mei-ne See-le fast er-liegt. Mit

Orch. 5 *fz* *fz*

Ath. 9  
Blut hab' ich die Weis-sa-gung be-siegt, und blu-tig soll mir je-der Geg-ner en-den! Was

Orch. 9 *f*

Ath. 13  
gilt's, ob solch ein Kna-be lebt, der ei-ner Pfla-nze gleich am Bo-den des mir ver-has-sten Tem-pels klebt? Ich reiss ihn

Orch. 13 *f*

17 (Die Augen starr wie nach einer Vision heftend)

Ath. aus, und werf' ihn zu den To-ten!

Orch. *mf* *f*

22 Weh mir! Die To-ten ru-hen

Orch.

25 *più lento*

Ath. nicht! Ha, wie des Kin-des Au-ge bricht!

Orch. *p*

30 **Allegro**  
(Nach einer anderen Stelle sehend)

Ath. Auch da ein ster-bend An-ge-sicht!

Orch. *f* *p cresc.*

34

Ath. Ach! Wie der Blick mein Herz durch - sticht!

Orch.

*cresc.*

*f*

37

Ath. Der Säug - ling un - ter die - sen Lei - chen... er fiel von mei - nes Dol - ches

Orch.

41

Ath. Strei - chen! Die

Orch.

**rallentando** (Vollkommen erschöpft)

*p*

45 (verzweifeld)

Ath. En - kel sind's, des eig-nen Blu-tes Er-ben ver - schont' ich nicht. Ich liess sie grausam ster-ben!

S A CHORUS (in the background)

Ch. Es

T B

Orch. *p* *f*

50 **Andante quasi poco adagio**

S A wa - chet im Bu - sen ein stren - ges Ge - richt. Selbst auf dem Thro - ne Schlummert es nicht.

Ch. T B

Orch. *p*

58 **Recitativo** **Allegro** (Wie aus einem Traum erwachend) **Colla parte**

Ath. Wo war ich? Schreck-lich Bild \_\_\_\_\_ aus mei-nem

Orch. *f* *p*



62 Adagio

Ath. *Le-ben, wirst du mir nim-mer, nim-mer Ru-he ge-ben? O räch-en-des Ge-wis-sen!*

Orch. *p*

68

Ath. *Du hast mir das ge-than, du fällst mit Schlan-gen-bis-sen mein inn-res Le-ben an! Kann*

Orch. *p*

74

Ath. *dich mein Tod ver-söh-nen; und en-det dann mein Schmerz, senk*

Orch. *p*

78

Ath. *ich, mein Werk zu krö-nen, den Stahl in's eig'-ne Herz; senk*

Orch. *p*

82

Ath. *ich mein Werk zu krö - nen, den Stahl in's eig' - ne Herz.*

Orch. *fz* *p*

86

Ath. *Recitative Allegro*

Orch. *cresc.* *f* *Und*

91

Ath. *wie? das wä-re mei-ner Wer-ke Kro-ne? Um so zu ster-ben hät-te ich ge - lebt? Dem Vol-ke, das vor*

Orch. *mf* *mf* *cresc.*

95

Ath. *mei-nem Blick er-bebt, Gäb ich mich ster - bend preis zu fre-chem Hoh-ne?*

Orch. *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

100 ATHALIA

Ath. Ge - rä-chet hab ich Va-ter, Mut-ter, Brü-der, selbst die nicht scho-nend, die mein Blut ge-

Orch. *mf* *p*

104

Ath. bar. Recht that ich! Kö-ni-gin fühl ich mich wie-der, und fest zu ste-hen, trotz ich der Ge-

Orch. *mf*

109

Ath. fahr! Mein Haus zu stür - zen

Orch. *p* *f* *p* *f*

Colla parte

114

Ath. strebt ein feind-lich We-sen, und fürcht-bar ist's dem Schreck - li-chen ge - glückt. Doch Da - vids Stamm, den

Orch. *p* *mf* *p*

118

Ath. er sich aus - er - le - sen, ist auch bis auf den letz - ten Zweig er - drückt.

Orch. *cresc.* *mf* *f*

123

Ath. Noch lebt ein Feind im Tem-pel mir ver - bor-gen. Mir hat ihn Baal im War-nungs-traum ge-

Orch.

128

Ath. - zeigt. Den Feind durch-bohrt... des Her-zens Arg-wohn schweigt. Ge - stürzt den Tem-pel!

Orch. *f*

133

Ath. Hin sind mei-ne Sor-gen!


Orch. *p* Allegro molto

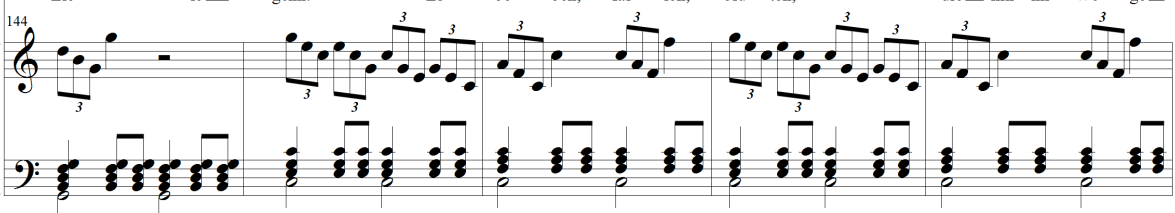
139

Ath.  Rasch wie des Feu - - - ers\_ Glu - then will ich zum

Orch. 

144

Ath.  Zie - - le\_ gehn. Es be - ben, fal - len, blu - ten, die\_ mir im We - ge\_

Orch. 

149

Ath.  stehn. Es be - ben, fal - len, blu - ten, die\_ mir im We - ge

Orch. 

154

Ath.  stehn. Es be - ben, fal - len, blu - ten,

Orch.  *cresc.*

158

Ath. doe mir im We - ge\_\_ stehn. Der Kna - be in\_\_ des Tem - pels

Orch. *mf* *f* *mf*

164

Ath. Hal - len, der Tem - pel und sein Gott soll fäl - len! Froh -

Orch. *f* *mf*

170

Ath. lock - end ü - ber den Ru - i - nen, froh - lock - end seh ich zer

Orch. *cresc.*

175

Ath. schmet - tert, die ihm die - nen.

S  
A  
Ch. Wie trot - zend dem Ge-

T  
B

Orch.

180

Ath. Nicht län - - - ger will ich

S  
A  
Ch. schick - e nichts ih - re See - le rührt! Wer

T  
B

Orch.

185

Ath. scho - nen den Göt - - - zen, — der mich droht, denn

S A Ch. sagt, ob das zum Glück - e, ob es zum Fal - le

T B

Orch.

189

Ath. Fes - seln o - - der Kro - nen, Sieg gilt es o - - der Tod! Sieg,

S A Ch. führt? Wer sagt, wer sagt, ob das zum

T B

Orch.



194

Ath. Sieg gilt es o - - - der Tod! Sieg, Sieg gilt es

S A Glück - e, ob es zum Fal - le führt? Wer sagt, ob es zum Glück - e,

Ch. T B

Orch.

199

Ath. o - - - der Tod! Sieg, Sieg gilt es,

S A ob es zum Fal - le führt? Wer sagt, ob es zum Glück - e,

Ch. T B

Orch.

204

Ath. Sieg o - - - der Tod!

S  
A  
Ch. ob es zum Fal - le führt?

T  
B

Orch.

*f*

208

Orch.

Detailed description: This musical score page contains two systems of music. The first system, starting at measure 204, features a vocal line for the Alto (Ath.) and a choral line for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The Alto part has a melodic line with lyrics 'Sieg o - - - der Tod!'. The choral parts have lyrics 'ob es zum Fal - le führt?'. The orchestra (Orch.) accompaniment includes piano (p) and forte (f) dynamics. The second system, starting at measure 208, continues the orchestral accompaniment with a more active melodic line in the upper register.

**End of Example 3**

**Example 4: *Athalia*, extract from Act I Scene 3 (1815 version)**

JOSABETH

Der ganze weite Söller schwamm in Blut,  
 Es zuckten noch der armen Knaben Leichen,  
 Den Dolch in blut'ger Hand reizt' Athalia  
 Die Meuchlerschar zu frechem Morde auf,  
 Und häufte selbst blidwüthend Mord auf Mord.  
 Wie tot lag schon, von ihrem Stahl getroffen,  
 Mein Joas unter Toten. Ach, vergebens  
 Daß Selomith, die Amme flehend rang,  
 Mit ihrer Brust den Knaben zu bedecken!  
 Ich sah ihn blutend – glaubte ihn entseelt,  
 Doch seine Leiche unbemerkt zu rauben,  
 Schien mir ein Trost; ich nahm ihn heim zu mir,  
 Mit heißen Tränen wusch ich seine Wunde,  
 Da spürt ich Lebensodem, Pulsesschlag –  
 Bald schmieget er sich liebevoll an mich –  
 Und mit Entzücken schlug in meiner Brust  
 Ein Mutterherz dem armen Kind entgegen.

[1814 recitative]

Und ich soll jetzt nicht zittern, soll nicht zagen  
 Für ihn, den letzten Zweig aus Davids Stamm?

JOSABETH

The whole wide balcony was awash with blood.  
 The poor boys' corpses were still twitching.  
 Athalia held a dagger in her bloody hand and was  
 urging her gang of assassins to kill shamelessly,  
 while she herself piled murder upon murder. My  
 Joas, wounded by her knife, lay among the dead  
 as if he were dead himself. Ah, in vain did the  
 nurse Selomith beg and struggle to cover the boy  
 with her own bosom!  
 I saw him bleed and thought that he had died. But  
 it felt like a consolation when I stole his body  
 unnoticed. I took him to my home and washed his  
 wound with my hot tears. Then I felt the breath of  
 life and a pulse. Soon he was cuddling me  
 affectionately, and in my own breast a motherly  
 heart beat with delight for the poor child.

[1814 recitative]

And you tell me I should not tremble, should not  
 fear for this last surviving branch of the tribe of  
 David?

**Allegro moderato**

JOSABETH

1  
 Jos. Der gan-ze wei-te Söl-ler schwamm in Blut. Es zuck-ten noch der ar-men Kna-ben

Orch. [Strings]

5  
 Jos. Lei-chen. A - tha - lia, den Dolch in blut-ger Hand, reizt' frech die Meuch-ler-schar zum Mor - de

Orch.

9  
 Jos. auf, und häuf - te selbst, blind wü-tend, Mord auf Mord. Wie tot lag schon, von ih-rem Stahl ge-

Orch.

13  
 Jos. trof-fen, mein Jo - as un - ter To-ten. Ach, ver - ge - bens, dass Se - lo-mith, die Am-me, fle-hend rang mit

Orch.

17

Jos. ih- rer Brust den Kna- ben zu be- deck-en. Ich sah ihn blu-ten, glaub-te ihm ent- seelt, doch sei-ne

Orch.

21

Jos. Lei-che un-be-merkt zu rau-ben schien mir ein Trost. Ich nahm ihn heim zu mir, mit frisch-en Thrä-nen wusch ich sei-ne

Orch.

26

Jos. Wun- de .... da spürt ich Le- bens- o- dem, Puls- es- schlag, .... bald

Orch.

*cresc.*

29

Jos. schmiegt' er sich so lie-be-voll an mich, .... und mit Ent- zük- ken schlug in mei-ner Brust ein Mut-ter-herz dem

Orch.

*mf* [+Woodwind]

33

Jos. ar-men Kind ent - ge-gen.

Orch.

33

*p* *pp* [Bassoons] [Woodwind]

40 [1814 Recitative]

Jos. Und ich soll jetzt nicht zit-tem, soll nicht za-gen? für ihn, den letz-ten

Orch.

40 *p* [Strings] *Allegro moderato*

44

Jos. Zweig aus Da-vids Stamm? Du willst mit ihm ans Licht zu tre-ten wa-gen, der

Orch.

44

**End of Example 4**

**Example 5: *Der Wettkampf zu Olimpia*, recitative after No. 4**

LICIDAS

Nicht um den Oelzweig kämpfet der Athlete.  
Ein göttlich Weib wird heut des Siegers Lohn.  
Ich sah die Herrlichste, ich liebte sie.  
Doch, ungeübt in dieser Art zu kämpfen,  
Wie dürft' ich hoffen?

LICIDAS

The athlete does not compete for an olive branch.  
Today a divine woman will be the victor's  
reward. I saw this most beautiful woman and I  
loved her. But being inexperienced in this kind of  
contest, what hope could I have?

MEGACLES

  Ich verstehe dich.  
Du willst dich dem versuchtern Freund vertrauen.

MEGACLES

I understand you. You entrust yourself to your  
more experienced friend.

LICIDAS

Ja, Megacles, und redlich dir zu lohnen...

LICIDAS

Yes Megacles, and in order to give you your  
rightful reward...

MEGACLES

Nicht eines Lohns bedarf's mich anzufeuern;  
Du willst, und dies bestimmt mich zu gehorchen.

MEGACLES

I need no reward to inspire me; if you wish it  
then I am bound to obey.

LICIDAS

O theurer Freund! Geliebte Aristeä!

LICIDAS

My dear friend! Beloved Aristeä!

MEGACLES

Ist's Aristeä, die du liebst?

MEGACLES

Is it Aristeä that you love?

LICIDAS

  Sie ist's!

LICIDAS

She is the one!

MEGACLES

Ihr Götter! Und der Preis des heut'gen Kampfes  
Ist sie?

MEGACLES

Ye Gods! And she is the prize in today's contest?

LICIDAS

  Sie selbst.

LICIDAS

She herself.

MEGACLES

  Und ich soll sie erkämpfen?

MEGACLES

And I am meant to win her?

1 MEGACLES LICIDAS

Voices

heim nis. Nicht um den Oel-zweig kämp-fet der Ath-le-te. Ein göt-tlich Weib wird heut des Sie-gers Lohn. Ich sah die

Strings

*mf* *p*

6 MEGACLES

Herr-lich-e, ich lieb-te sie. Doch un-ge-übt in die-ser Art zu kämp-fen, Wie durf't ich hof-fen? Ich ver-

Str

11 LICIDAS

ste-he dich. Du willst dich dem ver-sucht-ern Freund ver-trau-en. Ja, Me-gac-les, und red-lich dir zu

Str

15 MEGACLES

loh-nen... Nicht ein-es Lohns be-darfs mich an-zu-feu-ern; Du willst, und dies be-stimmt mich zu ge-

Str

*mf*

19 LICIDAS MEGACLES LICIDAS

hor-chen. O theu-rer Freund! ge-lieb-te A-ris-te-a! Ists A-ris-te-a, die du liebst? Sie ists!

Str

*f*



24 MEGACLES  
Ihr Göt-ter! und der Preis des heut gen Kamp-fes Ist sie?

LICIDAS MEGACLES  
Sie selbst. Und ich soll sie er - kämp-fen?

LICIDAS  
Zu dei - nes

Str. *pp*

24

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for five measures. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The first measure is for MEGACLES, and the second is for LICIDAS. The third and fourth measures are for MEGACLES, and the fifth is for LICIDAS. The lyrics are: "Ihr Göt-ter! und der Preis des heut gen Kamp-fes Ist sie? Sie selbst. Und ich soll sie er - kämp-fen? Zu dei - nes". The bottom two staves are for strings, marked *pp* and starting at measure 24. The string accompaniment consists of sustained chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand.

**End of Example 5**