

Reference, Autonomy and Nationalism in Early German Romantic Art

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In the early nineteenth century the Enlightenment's ideal of the autonomous artwork still held sway over mainstream artistic expression, and it was particularly influential in the aesthetics of nineteenth century music (Dalhaus 1989a, 6; Chua 1999). This ideal of autonomy was perhaps first formulated by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* (2005 [1790]), in which the artwork was characterized by its separation and independence from other pursuits: it is the idea that "what is essential to art is its radical separation from other kinds of truth, by virtue of its irreducibility to being judged in terms of anything but itself" (Bowie 1996). This trait, which has since been most commonly cited in discussions of "absolute" instrumental music, also applied to dramatic music of the era. Indeed, just as the texted works of the other arts (poetry, literature, drama etc.) were expected to be autonomous, so were many of those musical genres which included sung text. Further, this expectation included an ideal for nested autonomy in which the individual numbers of a work were also expected to maintain their own independence. The Number Opera from the eighteenth century, for example, with its requirement that each individual number have the ability to be "readily be detached from the whole," is a manifestation of this ideal (Tyrrell and Sadie 2001). This requirement had several direct effects on the music and its performance including the tendency for each number to begin and end in the same key as well as the frequent performance of individual numbers in concert and recital.¹

However, in the same period, German artists also began to incorporate extrinsic meaning into their works. That is, they began to incorporate meaning of a historical or symbolic nature that dealt with issues extending beyond the borders of the individual work.² Proponents of the use of extrinsic meaning looked to art to communicate solutions to the important philosophical and theological questions of the era. This, obviously, created a tension with the ideal of the autonomous work. As Andrew Bowie has described the tension,

[It rested] between the desire for a "new mythology" and the idea of the autonomy of the aesthetic work. The "new mythology" [...] would sensuously present ideas of reason in order to communicate the advances brought about by autonomous subjectivity to all levels of society. In contrast, the idea of superiority of the autonomous work of art over science and philosophy relies upon the conviction that the highest principle of philosophy is unrepresentable and must therefore be preserved from being used as a means for scientific and political ends. (Bowie 2003, 28)

The primary topic of this paper is an investigation into how early nineteenth century German artists and aestheticians reconciled this new expectation of symbolic expression with the ideal of autonomy that they inherited from the Enlightenment.

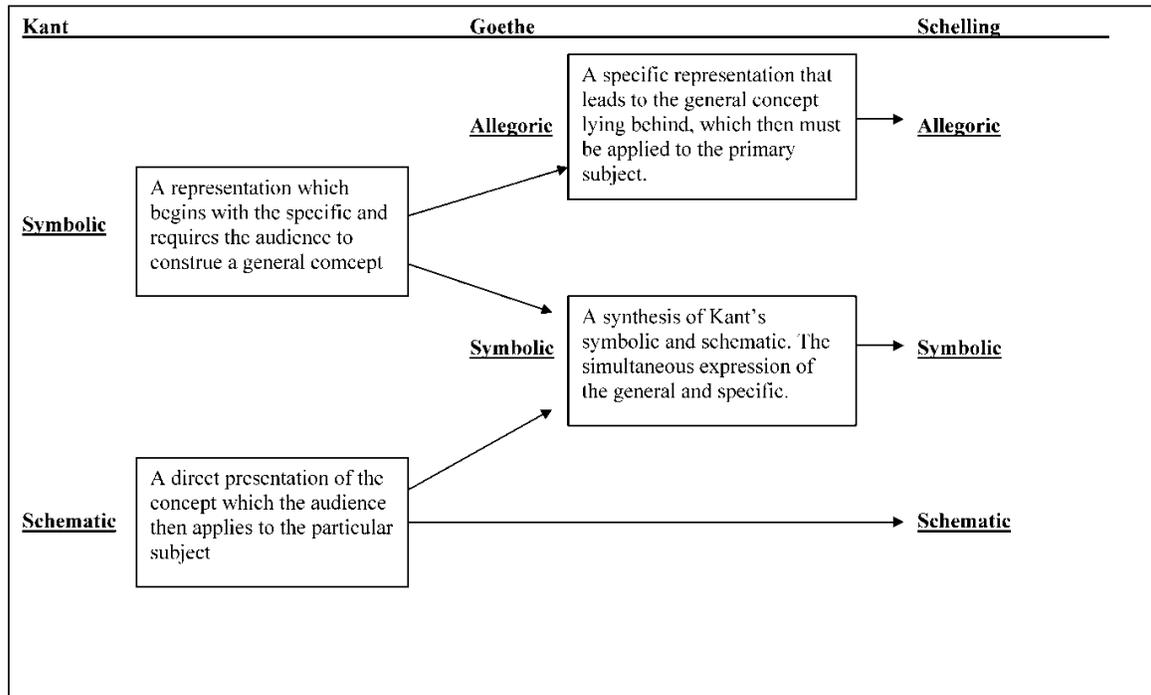
The discussion begins with the aestheticians, focusing primarily on Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, but also briefly mentioning Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Immanuel Kant, and their prescription for the use of a multivalent symbol to resolve this tension. Then the discussion turns to the analysis of works from different artistic mediums of the era, investigating how this tension between the work's autonomy and its history were handled in the works and criticism of different disciplines, including the religious imagery of the Nazarenes, the interdisciplinary expression of E.T.A. Hoffmann, and the referential motive as used in the dramatic works of Carl Maria von Weber and Richard Wagner.

Overall, the artworks discussed in this article are also unified by their shared meta-discourse on the emerging nationalist German identity. Contrary to the modern perception of German Nationalism as inherited from late nineteenth and early twentieth century, for German artists of the early nineteenth century the German national identity was based on a cosmopolitan ability to assimilate foreign practice.³ Indeed, in several of the works discussed below, it is this cosmopolitan facet of the German identity that obtains the primary expression of the work.

The Aesthetes

In the early nineteenth century, aesthetes were concerned with the avenues of expression; the way in which meaning is presented to the audience. Kant divided artistic expression into two types, the schematic and the symbolic. In his terms, the schematic is a non-specific expression that leads to the particular subject of the representation; it is “a direct presentation of the concept.” The symbolic, alternatively, depends on analogy. It begins with a specific expression that requires the audience to construe a general concept and apply that concept to the subject of the representation (Kant 2005, § 59, 252).

Goethe focuses on Kant's symbolic and divides it into two types, the allegoric and the symbolic. For Goethe the allegoric is a representation that leads *through* the general, whereas the symbolic is *in itself* already a representation of the general (Todorov 1982, 198-221). This symbol is privileged because it effectively merges (or synthesizes) the allegory and schema into one, representing the general and the specific simultaneously. While Kant's opposition is descriptive, revealing how representations work, Goethe's is prescriptive, designating his “symbolic” as “the approach which is properly the nature of poetry,” an approach that becomes the goal of the expression (in Todorov 1982, 204; see also: Berefelt 1969).

Table 1: Aesthetic Categories of Kant, Goethe, and Schelling

As Tzvetan Todorov has pointed out, F. W. J. v. Schelling in his *Philosophy of Art* (1989 [1802]) created a triad of expression that merged Kant's opposition between the schematic and the symbolic with Goethe's famous distinction between the symbolic and the allegorical (Todorov 1982, 199). Schelling describes this triad as:

That representation in which the universal means the particular or in which the particular is intuited through the universal is *schematism*. That representation, however, in which the particular means the universal or in which the universal is intuited through the particular is *allegory*. The synthesis of these two, where neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather where both are absolutely one, is the *symbolic*. (Schelling 1989, § 39, 46)

Schelling's systematic organization of these three concepts even goes so far as to apply them to the general aspects of several arts, including music, painting, and the plastic arts, with an emphasis on whether they convey meaning through unity, multiplicity or both. For example, Schelling's three characteristics of music are rhythm, melody and harmony. Rhythm is to be understood as the element that synthesizes the dialectical properties of melody ("unity within multiplicity") and harmony ("multiplicity within unity") (Schelling 1989, 114).⁴ It is for this attribute that Schelling describes music as the symbol:

Music as the form in which the real unity becomes its own symbol, encompassing necessarily all other unities within itself, for the real unity takes itself (within art) as potency merely in order to represent itself, through itself, absolutely as form. Each unity in its own absoluteness, however, encompasses all others as well; hence, music also encompasses all others. (Schelling 1989, 109)

In this perspective, music is a specific representation that is also in itself a representation of the general – on the level of the three arts, it is the symbol.

Similarly, Schelling places painting within this triadic division of the universe: “The reason painting is allegorical inheres in its very nature itself, since it is not yet the genuinely symbolic art form; if it does not raise itself to this level, as is the case in the highest art genre, it can signify the universal only through the particular” (Schelling 1989, 148). He then subdivides the art of painting into three parts and folds them into the tripartite hierarchy by equating drawing, chiaroscuro, and color, respectively to allegory, schema, and the symbol.

Schelling also attributes the characteristics of the allegory, schema and symbol to particular genres of painting. “Landscapes,” for example, “are merely schematic, for here it is not the truly formed and limited element that is portrayed, and not the unlimited by means of it, but rather vice versa: the limited element here is alluded to by the unlimited and formless” (Schelling 1989, 159).

However, the historical painting is primarily, indeed if it is without error, completely allegorical: “Allegory is either used as an addition to an otherwise historical painting, or the entire conception and composition is itself allegorical. The first is always in error unless the allegorical beings themselves that are mixed in can possess *historical* significance in the painting” (Schelling 1989, 159). The error that Schelling is alluding to is actually an application of the Enlightenment’s requirement that an artwork be autonomous and unified towards a singular expression. He continues: “The painting is to fulfill only the inner requirements of being true, beautiful, expressive, and *universally* significant such that in any case it can do without that accidental attractiveness resulting from the knowledge of the particular empirical event portrayed. It is equally erroneous for the art to flatter either learnedness or the lack of it” (Schelling 1989, 157).

Finally, for Schelling, “the most perfect symbolic representation is offered by the enduring and independent poetic figures of a specific *mythology*” (Schelling 1989, 151). As an example he includes several Saints whose specific legends represent the allegorical half of the synthesis, but the fact that over time these legends came to represent a general ideal leads to their ascendancy to the symbolic:

Thus, the picture of Saint Cecelia, the patron saint of music, is not an allegorical but rather a symbolic picture, since it possesses an existence independent of the meaning without losing that meaning [. . .] The symbolic image presupposes that an idea precedes it, an idea that becomes symbolic by becoming historico-objectively and

independently visible. Just as the *idea* becomes symbolic by acquiring historical significance, so in a reverse fashion does the historical element become symbolic only by being combined with the idea and becoming the expression of the idea...According to our explanation, the historical is itself merely one particular mode of the symbolic. (Schelling 1989, 151)

Under these terms then, the extrinsic meaning expressed in the artwork should neither contradict nor remain disjunctive, but instead the meaning should complement a reading of the elements of the artwork itself; in Schelling's terms the expression should be both "historico-objectively and independently visible."

Schelling's ideas were relatively widespread throughout Europe in the early nineteenth century. First presented as a series of lectures given by the philosopher in Jena and Würzburg in 1802, the lectures were circulated throughout Europe in the notes of many of his former students, and ultimately entered into the period's mainstream aesthetic conceptions of art (Schelling 1989, x-xiii). Even though different artists expressed this idea in different ways, Carl Maria von Weber described it as a Janus-like image while E. T. A. Hoffmann described it as "caricature in the higher sense of the term," as we shall see, they shared the goal of an expression that was "historic-objectively and independently visible" (Hoffmann 1946, 296).

The Nazarenes

In 1810 a group of artists known as the Nazarenes traveled to Italy to master and revive the Italian style of painting which was then seen as the only viable future for German art (Andrews 1964). The group's leader, Franz Pforr, was likened to Albrecht Dürer as "passionate, direct, and full of character," and took to calling himself Albrecht. Another member, the group's "priest" Friedrich Overbeck, was likened to Raphael "on account of his piety and tranquil idealism" (Vaughan 1980, 172). Overall, the Nazarene's program emphasized "the strengthening of a nation through a Christian and moral art that was to be schooled by the example of the Middle Ages" (Hartley 1994, 289). In October of 1811, Pforr and Overbeck exchanged sketches that expressed this Romantic ideal by addressing the relationship between modern German art and the traditions of Renaissance Italy.

The finished paintings were both to be titled *Sulamith und Maria*, but Overbeck overtly retitled his *Italia und Germania* in 1828. Read autonomously, and without concern for extrinsic meaning, both paintings depict Germany's return to the Italian school of the Middle Ages as important for the future of German Art, but the relationship between the two cultures, as expressed by each artist, is quite different.

Plate One: Franz Pforr, *Sulamith und Maria* (1811).⁵

Pforr's work, given on Plate One above, separates the two women, treating them as independent subjects, complementary but separate. Sulamith (on the left) is focusing on providing for her child as Overbeck looks on. She is in a bucolic garden with a lamb at her feet and birds hovering nearby, all of which emphasize her primitive Mediterranean setting. Maria, (on the right) is still in her youth, reading and brushing her hair. The open book on the windowsill reveals her interest in education while the dark background and closed window is reminiscent of the colder, German climate. The two women are treated in parallel, but the frame of the diptych emphasizes their separate development.

Plate Two: Friedrich Overbeck, *Italia und Germania* (1828).⁶



Overbeck's work, given in Plate Two, was only sketched in 1811. It places the sisters in a familial setting and Maria is comforting a forlorn Sulamith. Instead of placing the sisters in a parallel (but clearly separate) depiction, Overbeck has them facing each other. In 1828, when he completed it, Overbeck added to the background the architectural contrasts of the sister's respective regions.

While both artists clearly see the way forward for German art was through the study of the "primitive, Italian style," the function of their nationalism is distinctly different. Pforr's Maria has no interest in Sulamith, and there is no indicated role for her in Sulamith's (Italy's) life. Overbeck's Maria however, reveals a cosmopolitan function. Her comforting of the forlorn Sulamith is an expression of Overbeck's ideal for German art's role as the rejuvenator of Italian art.

This analysis of the Nazarene's work has been conducted without regard for each painting's symbolic content and historical evidence. If the paintings are to rise to the level of Schelling's symbol, the historical evidence (any expression that results from pre-existent or extrinsic meaning) is "merely one mode of the symbolic." Thus, "if without error," the historical evidence will support the reading conducted solely from the paintings themselves.

Turning merely to the background provided by the original title of both paintings, the meaning is accentuated but not changed. The names Sulamith and Maria were based on two biblical characters that Pforr had included in a short fable that he presented to Overbeck entitled *Das Buch Sulamith Und Maria* (Pforr 1927). In the book, the two characters eventually marry two painters who are literary representations of Pforr and Overbeck. Maria, the betrothed of Pforr, is an incarnation of the Madonna. Sulamith, Overbeck's betrothed, is an Old Testament character who is described in the "Song of Solomon" as "My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the darling of her mother."⁷ Clearly, these are depictions of the ideal woman from different religious traditions, and by placing them side by side, the artists are able to employ the binary and polemical relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

The comparison of these two ideal women is only one way in which the two traditions as may be compared. Particularly with Pforr's work, an investigation of the historical meanings of the secondary objects in his work will reveal the depths of his metaphor. Maria, the idealization of German Art, is placed in an Annunciation scene, in fact, a pre-annunciation scene. She is in an interior setting, with a book, and by a window, all of which were common symbols in Renaissance Annunciations, whether painted in the North or South.⁸ The white cloth on Maria's table seems to accentuate the absence of the symbolic white lilies that would normally appear in an annunciation, indicating that the depiction is perhaps just moments before the Annunciation. Further, lilies actually do appear, but planted on Sulamith's side of the Diptych. As such, with the understanding that Maria is a personification of German Art, the fact that she is awaiting the Annunciation is a powerful metaphor for Pforr's belief that German Art is awaiting its own revival.

Similarly, on Sulamith's side, the appearance of a child in his mother's arms immediately seems to reference a Madonna and Child, with the planted lilies indicating that her (Italy's) Annunciation has already happened. All the while the lamb looks on – a symbol of sacrifice and rebirth. Pforr places the Christ child in an Old Testament character's arms, and perhaps even more alarmingly, he has her feeding the child an apple (with a worm) – the standard symbol for the forbidden fruit. Underlying this metaphor is an assumption that would become common in the nineteenth century – German artists should study Medieval Italian art, and that Italian Art of the nineteenth century was stagnant in that each generation of Italian artists are raised from the same corrupting fruit.

Ultimately, as our analysis of these paintings has shown, both painting fulfill Schelling's requirement that they be "true, beautiful, expressive, and universally significant such that in any case [they] can do without that accidental attractiveness resulting from the knowledge of the

particular empirical event portrayed” (Schelling 1989, 157). Or, put another way, the autonomy of each painting is maintained despite the incorporation of extrinsic meaning.

E.T.A. Hoffmann

In 1816, five years after Overbeck and Pforr exchanged their sketches, E. T. A. Hoffmann published his fictional story *Die Fermate*, which also uses two symbolic women to communicate a conception of the relationship between German and Italian art (Hoffmann 1946, 295-318). The story is told by the main (semi-autobiographical) character, a German named Theodore, to his friend Eduard after seeing Johann Erdmann Hummel’s *Gathering at an Italian Inn*, at a Berlin exhibition in 1814 (McGlathery 1997, 69; see Plate Three below). In the story, Theodore explains to his friend that the painting depicts one of his own personal experiences and begins the narrative that will lead to the situation depicted in the painting.

Plate Three: Johann Erdmann Hummel, *Die Gesellschaft in einer italienischen Lokanda* (1814).⁹



In the narrative, Theodore relates that in his youth, while he was studying composition by learning “obscure and unmelodious toccatas and fugues” in the old German style, two Italian singers named Teresina and Lauretta came to town (Hoffmann 1946, 297). From the beginning, the two singers are presented as “caricature[s] in the higher sense of the term” (Hoffmann 1946,

296). They are symbols for specific operatic genres – Teresina represents the *Romanza*, and Laretta the *Arioso* (Hoffmann 1946, 178). As the story progresses, Hoffmann provides descriptions that reveal more specific characteristics of Laretta (and the *Arioso* style). In these descriptions Hoffmann locates his conception of the Italian style as a vocally dominated style and criticized it for lacking any “expressive harmony.”

As an example of the style Hoffmann is criticizing, we turn to his *Italian Canzonettas* (1812), one of which Laretta actually sings in the story. As the character Theodore states: “Laretta began to sing very softly; but soon she held a note to *fortissimo*, and then quickly broke into a crisp and complicated run through an octave and a half. I can still remember the words with which her song began: ‘sento l’amica speme’” (Hoffmann 1946, 179). The aria in question is the third of Hoffmann’s *Tre canzonette italiane* A.V. 64 (1812). It is in ternary form, written for keyboard, men’s chorus and soprano. The melodic figuration of the soprano line in the A section’s return provides an excellent example of Hoffmann’s characterization.

Example One: E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Tre canzonette italiane* III. “Sento L’Amica Speme.” mm.52-54, 57-59 and 63-65.

a tempo

co - stan - te o - gnor - sa - rà

co - stan - - - - te o - gnor - sa - rà

cadenza ad libitum

co - stan - - - - - - - - - - te sa - rà.

As illustrated in Example One, taken from the return of the A section, Hoffmann first returns to the theme in its original form at “costatnte ognor sará” in order to signal the recapitulation. He then increasingly ornaments the phrase until its final treatment at the fermata. There is very little subtlety in the settings; their purpose is to emphasize the “primitive” characteristic of their Italian, vocal-centered expression. As a performing singer, Laretta has become a specific representation of the Italian style, but as a caricature, she also represents the style from a general perspective.

In the story, Theodore first swoons over Laretta and her sister’s passionate style, and runs off with them to compose arias that complement their ornamented singing. One day, while conducting a particularly ornamented cadenza, he interrupts the fermata by cadencing early. The accident incurs the women’s wrath and leads to his separation from them. Years later, Theodore happens upon the two singers in the exact same situation arguing with a conductor who had

mistakenly interrupted their fermata – this is the situation depicted in Hummel’s painting (Theodore is on horseback in the background). The sister’s singing no longer has the effect that it originally did on Theodore, although their voices “had not appreciably lost anything in power or range.” The story ends:

Happy is the composer who never again, as long as he lives, sets eyes upon the woman who by some mysterious power kindled the flame of music within him! Even though the young artist’s heart may be rent by anguish and despair when he must part from his lovely enchantress, nevertheless it is precisely so that she will continue to exist for him [. . .] For what is she, now, but the Highest Ideal, which, working its way from within outward, is at last reflected in external form? (Hoffmann 1946, 317)

The moral of the story is that Theodore, by internalizing the Italian style, has merged it into the “Highest Ideal,” which is no longer reflected in the performance. In his youth, Theodore was the embodiment of the older German style and the two sisters embodied the clichéd Italian style. It is only through his internalization and mastery of their style then his separation from it that Theodore can reach the “Highest Ideal”– German Romanticism. For Hoffmann, the fermata as both a pause and a display element (i.e., *cadenza*), as well as the painting, itself a pause in time, symbolizes the stagnation of the Italian style.

Hoffmann’s “caricature,” and the Nazarene’s characters Sulamith and Maria, are very similar to Schelling’s symbolic in that they both simultaneously represent specific characters and general concepts. The method by which Hoffmann and the Nazarenes created their symbols, anthropomorphized as an ideal woman, was a very common trope of the period. In nationalist paintings and political comics it was common to find national movements anthropomorphized as ideal women (Zamoyski 2000). However, as we shall see, the symbolic expression need not take human form; it could take the abstract shape of a musical motive.

Carl Maria von Weber

In one of his autobiographical sketches, Weber described the aesthetic challenge of opera:

In most cases individual numbers decide the fate of an opera. It is only rarely that such attractive individual features, which strike the listener immediately, disappear in the final impression of the work as a whole, as should ideally occur. For ideally the listener should fall in love with the whole work and only later pick out the details of which it is composed.

The very nature and inner constitution of opera – as a whole containing other wholes – has this essential drawback which only a few heroes of the art have managed to surmount. Every musical number has its own proper architecture which makes it an

independent and organic unity; yet this should be absorbed in any study of the work as a whole. Ensembles, in particular, can and should show a number of different aspects simultaneously, a Janus-like image, whose different faces are visible at a single glance. (Weber 1981, 336)

It is important to note that, for Weber, the autonomous number and its relationship to the broader organization is the defining characteristic of opera, “a whole containing other wholes.” Thus the challenge of this genre is to create a unified relationship amongst the numbers without undermining the autonomy of each. Like Schelling’s symbol and Hoffmann’s caricature, the different faces of Weber’s Janus mediate between the autonomy of the work (the number) and extrinsic meaning that connects it to the opera as a whole. An excellent example of this relationship can be located in Weber’s last opera *Oberon* (1826).

As a document of German nationalism, at first glance the plot of *Oberon* might appear to be an odd choice. The story, adapted from Christoph Martin Wieland’s epic poem *Oberon: ein Gedicht in zwölf Gesängen* (1780), overtly combines elements of several pre-existing narratives into one plot, including Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Merchant’s Tale*, and the medieval French Romance *Huon de Bordeaux*. Yet, as Claire Baldwin has noted, for many German readers and critics, Wieland was the German answer to the literary movements abroad precisely because of his cosmopolitan narrative borrowing:

For his [Wieland’s] contemporaries, anxiously concerned with promulgating a bona fide ‘original German novel’ equal to the fictions already well established and flourishing in England and France, the young Wieland represented an author capable of achieving international stature by incorporating elements of other European novel styles in texts with their own unique signature. (Baldwin 2002, 4)

Wieland also encountered strong resistance from authors of the contemporary storm and stress school in Germany who tended to espouse an insularist conception of Germany. One such author, Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737-1823) attacked Wieland precisely for his cosmopolitan use of different styles: “Who did Wieland not try to be? Now Shaftesbury, now Milton, then Young, Rowe, Richardson: now Crébillon, then Hamilton, at other times Fielding, Cervantes, Helvetius, York, and in passing even something of Rousseau, Montaigne, [and] Voltaire” (quoted in Hinderer 2004, 382). In response to these criticisms, Wieland would direct “rather blunt” essays at his critics, denouncing the “excessive German nationalism that had taken hold since Klopstock and the Storm and Stress period” (quoted in Hinderer 2004, 382). One such essay, published in his journal *Teutscher Merkur* ridiculed those who maintained an insularist perception of Germany for “wandering about, lost in the woods of the old Germans, affecting in bardic songs a national character that has long since ceased to be ours” (in Hinderer 2004, 382). Even Goethe is said to have read the entire epic in one sitting, and is known to have commented: “As long as poetry remains poetry, gold remains gold, and crystal remains crystal, *Oberon* will

be loved and admired as a masterpiece of poetic art” (quoted in McCarthy 1979, 127). By 1824, when Weber chose *Oberon* as a subject for his next opera, he was making a statement concerning his own cosmopolitan German identity, and the resultant work contains expressions of both Weber’s cosmopolitan approach and his ideal of the symbol.

There are several methods by which musical material can reveal different aspects simultaneously and perhaps the most efficient place for characterization is, as Weber notes, during an ensemble when musical style alone can show different aspects simultaneously. For example, in the second act of Weber’s *Oberon*, the socio-economic class of the two leading characters (Sir Huon and Lady Reiza) is musically set apart from that of their servants by the style of their vocal lines.

Example Two: Carl Maria von Weber, *Oberon* Act II No. 11 “On Board Then!” mm. 68-70.

Specifically, the running sixteenth notes of the aristocratic Sir Huon and his Lady Reiza are set against the held lines of their servants Sherasmin and Fatima. Of course, this contrast is employing a convention that was inherited from eighteenth century Italian opera buffa in which the comic characters with common sense and simple vocal lines would provide a musical and dramatic foil to the actions, foibles, and more virtuosic lines of their aristocratic masters. This is perhaps the most obvious example of Weber adopting the Italian style to his needs, as the character Theodore had in Hoffmann’s short story.

However, Weber’s employment of the French *opéra comique*’s reminiscence motive for the motivic reference and formal organization of *Oberon* was a much more innovative aspect of his operatic style.¹⁰ Indeed, it is in the motivic organization that Weber mediates between the individual number and larger form, creating individual themes whose meanings are altered depending on the context from which they are viewed. From the perspective of the individual number, they serve as conventional formal markers, articulating the organization of the number. However, from a broader perspective the very same theme contributes to the broader dramatic meaning.

For example, the brief 19th number from Weber’s *Oberon*, “Mourn Thou Poor Heart” is a simple ternary form “Cavatine” with the A and A’ sections set in f minor and the contrasting B

section in the flat submediant D-flat major. (The text and harmonic outline is given in Table Two, the entire number is given below)

Table Two: Carl Maria von Weber, *Oberon* Act III, No. 19, “Mourn Thou Poor Heart.”

	Cavatina. Reiza	Harmony-F minor
A (mm.1-36)	Mourn thou poor heart for the joys that are dead,	i – V
	flow ye sad tears for the hopes that are fled,	i – V – i
	Sorrow is now the sole treasure I prize;	v
	as Paris on perfume, I feed on its sighs	v – i
	and bitter to some as its fountain may be	o7 – V7/iv – iv – o7
	“tis sweet as the waters of gelum to me!	i – bii6 – V7 – i
B (37-52)	Ye that are basking in pleasure’s gay beam.	VI – V7/VI – VI
	ye that are sailing on hope’s golden stream	VI – V7/VI – VI
	a cloud may come o’ver ye – a wave sweep the deck	vi – V/nVI – nVI – iv
	and picture a future of darkness and wreck	o7 – V
A” (53-75)	but the scourge of the desert o’ver my heart hath past	i – II7 – V – i
	and the tree that is blighted, fears no second blast!	i – V7/IV – iv – o7
		i – V – i

The primary formal markers are the introductory gesture which prepares the dominant area and a ritornello (a dotted three note ascent of a third) that marks the beginning of the B section at measure 33 and returns at the end in measure 72.

The close of both A sections in tonic minor is unrelentingly plaintive. Even the contrasting middle section fails to break up the dreariness in the way it climaxes to diminished harmony at measures 49 and 50. Taken out of the opera’s context, although it is simple, the piece is a beautiful expression of a woman who has lost hope. However, if the analytical view is broadened to incorporate the extrinsic meaning and locate the number within the broader opera, the interpretation reveals a separate but not contradictory meaning, “a Janus-like image, whose different faces are visible at a single glance” (Weber 1981, 336).

No. 19 'Mourn Thou Poor Heart' (*Oberon*)

Carl Maria von Weber

Andantino

Reiza

Mourn — thou poor — heart for the

joys that are dead, flow — ye sad — tears for the hopes that are fled, Sor — row is now the sole

trea — sure I prize; as Par — is on per — fume I feed — on its sighs and

bit — ter to some as its foun — tain may be 'tis — sweet as the wa — ters — of —

Ge — lum to me! ye that are — ba — sking in plea — sure's gay³ — beam,

Clar.

Viol.

Strings *pp*

Bassoon

quart.

pp

9

17

24

31

bassoon

Cello

viol.

clar.

viol. *fp*

strings *pp*

dolce

clar.

cello.

dolce

strings

41

ye that - are sail - ing on hope's gold - en stream, a cloud may come o'er ye, a wave sweep the

48

deck and pic - ture a fu - ture of dark - ness and wreck! But the scourge of the

48

ff *p* *pp* viol. strings

56

de - sert o'er my heart hath past, and the tree that is blight - ed fears no sec - ond blast, viol. and the

56

cello bassoon viola clar. *f* *fp*

64

tree that is blight - ed fears no sec - ond blast fears no sec - ond

64

pp *pp* bassoon

69

blast, fears no sec - ond blast!

69

pp

Indeed, the musical historical context does support this reading, revealing that the number is built into a network of referential motives and harmony. First, (and most obviously) the ritornello figure in measure 33, its inversion in measure 35, and at the end (mm. 72-73) are direct references to the opera's opening horn theme.

Example Three: Carl Maria von Weber, *Oberon* Overture, mm.1-2

Taking the basic identity of the first three notes, spanning a third in a long—short – longer rhythmic pattern, one will notice the vocal line is nearly saturated with latent references to this horn theme (see the approach to the downbeat of measures 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, and so on).¹¹ In the opera, Oberon's magic horn (as announced by its accompanying theme) is the source of Reiza's repeated rescues, and perhaps here Weber is expressing her latent wish for the magic horn to save her now (in this scene she is being held in the court of the evil Emir Almasor and the magic horn is lost). From a harmonic standpoint, the opening of the number also refers to the horn theme with a shared harmonic progression that passes from the tonic to the minor subdominant (in second inversion) and then a diminished seventh harmony before it arrives at a dominant seventh to open the piece.¹²

The climax of the B section, similarly, can be understood as a direct reference to a storm scene that had shipwrecked Reiza earlier in the opera. Specifically, in this previous scene, the power of the storm was depicted with an intensely chromatic diminished seventh harmony, in contrast to the diatonicism of the calm beach. Even here the three note motive is referenced in the bass (double dotted quarter note followed by a sixteenth note) in mm. 45-47. Finally, the instrumentation, with the clarinet and bassoon in the outer voices, parallels the instrumentation of the horn theme as it first appeared in Reiza's act one vision.

However, it is not the sheer number of thematic references that make the number great – particularly by Weber's standards. It is their subtlety, and the way the references are constructed so that instead of interrupting the musical development and form, they help to articulate it. These themes are multivalent. They help to articulate the formal organization of the music, even as they refer to earlier dramatic events.

Richard Wagner

The cosmopolitan perspective and aesthetic ideal under discussion also found expression in the early works of Richard Wagner. Indeed, from a very early age Wagner was influenced by the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann. As Linda Siegal describes it, Wagner's "idolatry of Hoffmann

began in his youth with a thorough introduction to the author's tales by his uncle, Adolph, who knew Hoffmann quite intimately and greatly admired his music and literary achievements" (Siegel 1965, 597). In his autobiography Wagner describes Hoffmann as a "romantic visionary," whose influence extended "even to the point of infatuation, and gave me [Wagner] very peculiar ideas of the world" (Wagner 1911, 20). Of these "peculiar ideas of the world," Hoffmann's expression of a German identity built on the synthesis of foreign practice is most evident in Wagner's early writings and music.

Particularly in his essay "On German Music" written in Paris in 1840 Wagner emphasized the German adoption of French styled music: "Small wonder, if the impressionable and impartial German did not delay to recognize the excellence of these products of his neighbours with unassumed enthusiasm [. . .] Moreover these foreign imports met a genuine need; for it is not to be denied that the grander genre of Dramatic music does not flourish in Germany of itself" (Wagner 1994b, 101). The impact that these foreign imports had on German "dramatic music" was clear, "we may take it that the Germans and the French at present have but one [dramatic music], though their works be first produced in *one* land, this is more a local than a vital difference" (Wagner 1994b, 101).

Further, in his description of Gioachino Rossini, Wagner attributes much of the composer's success to his adoption of French dramatic techniques, particularly when Rossini revised *Maometto II* (1826) and *Mosé in Egitto* (1827) for Paris. Wagner lauded Rossini for singlehandedly reinvigorating Italian opera:

[W]ith that brilliant audacity which alone could compass such a thing, he [Rossini] tore down all the remnants of the old Italian school, already withered to a meager skeleton of empty forms. His lustful-jovial song went floating round the world, and its advantages—of freshness, ease and luxury of form—were given consistence by the French. Among them the Rossinian line gained character and a worthier look, through national stability; on their own feet, and sympathizing with the nation, their masters now turned out the finest work that any folk's art-history can show. (Wagner 1994b, 101)

This cosmopolitan perspective also appears in the form and content of Wagner's operas from the period.

For example, in his *Das Liebesverbot* (1836) Wagner contrasted a convention-bound German man with his liberated Italian lover. Basing his libretto on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Wagner moved the drama to Sicily, where, in the King's absence, a minister "simply called Friedrich, to mark him for a German," is tasked with "radically reform[ing] the manners of his capital, which had become an abomination to the strait-laced minister" (Wagner 1994a, 10). Friedrich's efforts become complicated when he realizes that he has fallen in love with Isabella, the sister of a man whom he has sentenced to death for "lustful living." This complication is expressed by Wagner through the contrast of national operatic styles.

Friedrich's two movement Italian Aria from the second act, (No. 10 "So spat und noch kein Brief von Isabella?") provides an excellent example. In the aria, Friedrich's description of his love for Isabella is set in an 8 bar periodic phrase whose ending is extended with a small cadenza, given in Example .

Example Four: Richard Wagner, *Das Liebesverbot* Act II, No. 10 "So spat und noch kein Brief von Isabella?" mm. 80-82.

Friedrich:

mm. 80 doch, ge-nieß' ich doch die hei- - - ße... Lust!

The uptight German, despite himself, sings in a remarkably Italian style. The moment is not meant as mockery; it is a sincere expression of Friedrich's love and hypocrisy for the fact that he is experiencing a love that he has lawfully forbidden.

After the cadenza, in an even more stereotypically Italian dramatic moment, a letter from Isabella arrives and initiates a tempo d'mezzo. When Friedrich reads the letter and realizes that he must execute Isabella's brother Claudio, (despite her love and his promise that he wouldn't), the style of his vocal line changes to express the fact that "the law must be obeyed." In stark contrast to his previous cadenza, Friedrich's realization, which appears at the end of the tempo d'mezzo, is marked by a half cadence to a distant Gs major triad, followed by a return of the opera's primary leitmotiv – a descending leap of a sixth followed by a chromatic ascent as in measure 173. In the section break, Friedrich's voice is not ornamental, and the only aspect of his vocal line that marks the moment is its arrival onto his highest note in the section.

Example Five: Richard Wagner, *Das Liebesverbot* Act II, No. 10 “So spat und noch kein Brief von Isabella?” mm. 168-174.

Friedrich:

mm. 168 Eh'r bring' ich selbset mich dem Ge-setz als Op-fer dar, eh'r sterb' ich selbst!

The return of the leitmotiv here assists in the articulation of the end of the section, supporting the form of this individual number, even as it connects the number (through its reference to the ban on love) to the broader dramatic narrative. Notably, Wagner is still working towards Weber’s aesthetic goal of nested autonomy – opera as a “whole containing other wholes.”

The opera reaches its comic dénouement when, at Isabella’s request, Friedrich breaks his own law by wearing a mask to meet her in public. In the penultimate section of the multi-movement grand finale, his mask is taken away and his hypocrisy revealed. At this moment Wagner brings the leitmotiv to a resolution by extending the ending ascent so that it fills in the initial leap of the sixth (see Example Six).

Example Six: Richard Wagner, *Das Liebesverbot* Act II Finale “So recht, ihr wackern, jungen Leute!” mm. 265-270.

mm. 265 Ha! das ist sein Ver-bot der Lie-be, dar-

um be-straft er Clau - di - o! Frisch

The positive light by which Wagner paints Italian culture, a striking contrast from his later depictions of Italian opera, is further emphasized in his description of the grand finale:

Friedrich moodily asks to be led before the judgment-seat of the King on his return, to receive the capital sentence; Claudio, set free from prison by the jubilant mob, instructs him that death is not always the penalty for a love-offence. Fresh messengers announce the unexpected arrival of the King in the harbor; everyone decides to go in full carnival-attire to greet the beloved prince, who surely will be pleased to see how ill the sour Puritanism of the Germans becomes the heat of Sicily. (Wagner 1994a, 16)

Das Liebesverbot, Wagner's second opera, already shows a mastery of Weber's most advanced dramatic language. And for most of Wagner's early career it must be noted that by continuing with Weber's aesthetics, Wagner could be considered artistically conservative. Further, Weber's aesthetics and particularly his ideal of the symbol are clearly articulated in other major operatic works of the day, including Heinrich Marschner's *Hans Heilig* (1833), and Robert Schumann's *Genoveva* (1848).¹³

However, the mainstream German acceptance of a cosmopolitan nationalist identity, and the acceptance of the aesthetic of the symbol, did not last far beyond the century's midpoint. Those works that were overtly conceived under these aesthetic ideals quickly fell from grace. Weber's *Oberon* is again an excellent example. *Oberon* was commissioned for performance in London, where Weber travelled against his doctor's orders in order to direct the premiere in 1826; it killed him.¹⁴ By this time, of course, Weber was already a well known symbol of the nationalist movement in Germany, and perhaps partially because of his death, his swan song quickly became quite popular in Germany.¹⁵ The opera made its continental premiere in Leipzig on Christmas Eve, 1826 where it ran for over 40 performances. In the next year and a half, the opera had opened in at least seven places, including Vienna, Cassel, Frankfort, Bremen, Dresden, Mannheim, and Weimar (Kinsky and Strunk 1933). In Berlin, where "during the winter semester of 1826 and 1827 all Berlin seemed intoxicated by *Oberon's* melodies," the opera was not

premiered until July 2, 1828 in the publisher Schlesinger's home. Of the notable participants, Felix Mendelssohn was engaged as accompanist and coach (Kinsky and Strunk 1933). In 1829 it was brought to Paris with an all German cast and revived three times in London by 1841. In this way, Weber's *Oberon* quickly became one of the central works of the German operatic repertory of the first half of the nineteenth century.

After 1850 however, the opera suffered a swiftly diminishing popularity and the few productions that were held were marked by accompanying revisions that sought to enhance the stylistic unity of the opera.¹⁶ This is certainly related to the fact that the ideal of Schelling's symbol and the nested autonomy of an opera's individual numbers were cast aside by artists of the era so that the autonomy and coherence of the entire opera could be enhanced.¹⁷ Ironically, this movement was pioneered by the "music dramas" of Richard Wagner who had replaced Schelling with a new philosopher for inspiration – Arthur Schopenhauer.¹⁸ Finally, in the twentieth century, critics tended to interpret the nested autonomy of *Oberon* as a weakness instead of a characteristic of the era's aesthetic ideals, and this once quite popular opera now barely maintains "a toe-hold in the repertory" (Brown 1992).¹⁹

Certainly the effects that the aesthetic shift at the middle of the nineteenth century had on Weber's reception and Wagner's career are only two narratives of the tumultuous changes that occurred during the long nineteenth century; the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann and the Nazarene movement faced similar challenges that are beyond the scope of this article. Each one of these artists, masters in their own way, confronted the aesthetic expectations of their day. It is our loss if we neglect those expectations in an evaluation of their work.²⁰

Notes

1. For a discussion of the performance of opera arias and duets at the Leipzig Gewandhaus for just one example see: Pieper 2008, 60-68.
2. Since the nineteenth century there has been great debate concerning the viability of the autonomous artwork. A couple of my favorite discussions include: Adorno 1984, and Langer 1942. However, this article is not concerned with debating the ideal of the autonomous work, but instead with investigating how this concept was realized in artistic works in the nineteenth century.
3. There has been a growing recognition of this fact among literary scholars and a bit among musicologists, most notably among scholars of Carl Maria von Weber. See, specifically, Tusa 2006.
4. The schematic, allegory, and symbolic representations will be covered more thoroughly below.
5. This painting located in *Museum Georg Schäfer*, Schweinfurt and used with permission. Nevertheless, the work of art depicted in this image and the reproduction thereof are in the public domain worldwide. This reproduction is part of a collection

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 7. The critical commentary to the New Revised Standard Version describes the Shulamite: “A]ctually *the Shulamite*; the word is not a proper name but an epithet that probably means ‘the perfect one’” (Attridge et al. 2006, “Song of Solomon,” note 6.13a).
 8. For example, from Germany, Albrecht Dürer, “Annunciation” from *The Life of the Virgin* see Jan van Eyck’s *Verkündigung*, and from Italy Raphael’s *Annunciation* from the Predella of *The Coronation of the Virgin*.
 9. Used with permission from the Bayerische Staatsgemaldesammlungen.
 10. For a general discussion of the reminiscence motive as used by Weber and its relationship to the *opera comique*, see: Dahlhaus 1989b,70-71.
 11. For a discussion of Weber’s latent thematic coherence see: Morgan 2010.
 12. For a comprehensive discussion of the thematic organization of this opera see, Morgan 2010.
 13. For a discussion of this influence on Schumann, see: Morgan 2010.
 14. The opera premiered at Covent Garden on April 12, 1826, and Weber died in London on June 5, 1826.
 15. Weber became an icon of the nationalist movement when he set Theodor Körner’s cycle of poems *Leyer und Schwerdt* (1814) and *Der Kampf und Sieg* cantata (1815), see: Warrack 1968, 144-171.
 16. Two of these infamous productions include Franz Wüllner’s production in Vienna in 1881, and Arthur Bodansky’s production in New York in 1918.
 17. For an interesting discussion of the effect that this shift had on the motivic organization of an opera, see: Grey 1996, 187-211.
 18. For a discussion of Wagner’s shift from an aesthetic inspired by Schelling to one inspired by Schopenhaur, see: Chafe 2007, 16-32.
 19. John Warrack, for one, describes the opera as “maimed” and “fragmented” (Warrack 2001, 312).
 20. I am very grateful to the numerous people who have dedicated their time, knowledge and expertise to assisting me in the preparation of this article. Thanks in particular are due to Eric Chafe and Lewis Lockwood for their generous insights and constructive criticism of earlier drafts of this article. An early version of this article was presented

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