

**E. T. A. Hoffmann's Opera Manifesto:
Romantic Philosophy and Musical Semantics
in Early German Romantic Opera**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham in
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Research in Music

September 2020

Word count: 24,220

Abstract

In the wide array of scholarship on music and Romanticism, in-depth studies on early German Romantic opera remain limited. Those that do exist are often characterised by the troubles surrounding its development in comparison to the international success of Italian and French opera (Meyer, 2003; Markx, 2016). Despite a flourishing of German opera in the early nineteenth century, questions remain surrounding what stimulated this sudden profusion and how the works of this period laid the foundations for later figures such as Wagner. In order to achieve a better understanding of early German Romantic opera, I have chosen to explore E. T. A. Hoffmann's literary output in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. Through four publications – *Ritter Gluck* (1809), *Don Juan* (1813), *Der Dichter und der Komponist* (1813), and *Kreiseriana* (1814) – Hoffmann explored what he believed to be a true Romantic opera, creating what I will call an opera manifesto. This thesis explores how the ideas Hoffmann presented in his manifesto underpin and unite milestones in early German Romantic opera. Grounded in contemporary Romantic philosophy, his ideas contributed to the formation of a national style. Specifically, I will show how his radical aesthetics encouraged composers to use the orchestra as an agent to express the drama, as well as to convey the Romantic quest for the Absolute. To demonstrate how Hoffmann's ideas were realised, I will consider musical semantics in Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821), Marschner's *Der Vampyr* (1828), and Wagner's *Die Feen* (1834). I will explore how these three composers used a range of signifiers, including musical topics and symbols, key associations, and diegetic music, to denote different aspects of the drama through the voice of the orchestra. This thesis also demonstrates how Hoffmann's literary output laid important foundations for Wagner's own aesthetics of opera, thereby showing how Hoffmann's influence is traceable throughout the nineteenth century.

Acknowledgements

There are many people whose support over the past year has enabled me to complete this thesis. A special thanks is due to my supervisor, Nicholas Baragwanath, for his continued encouragement and insight. With his guidance I have developed confidence as both a writer and an academic and many of his words will remain with me throughout my career. I must also thank Harriet Boyd-Bennett for her support in the early stages of this thesis. I am also grateful for the financial support I have received from the Midlands4Cities Masters Studentship. Words cannot express my thanks for the love and support from my parents, sister, and grandparents. Without you and the love for music you instilled within me, I would never have reached where I am today. Finally, I must pay a special tribute to the late Philip Weller. Like many others, his unbounded love for knowledge filled me with such excitement and still encourages me in my research today.

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Introduction

On 18 June 1821, Carl Maria von Weber's (1786-1826) *Der Freischütz* premiered at the Berlin Schauspielhaus. Weber's latest opera, a *Romantische Oper* in three acts, was received with widespread international acclaim. Within thirty years, *Der Freischütz* had been performed throughout Europe, produced in nine languages, and performed as far away as Australia and Brazil.¹ At the time of the premiere, however, opera was still synonymous with Italian opera,² the Italian composer Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) being one of the most internationally recognised figures. Having failed to match the popularity of both Italian and French opera in the eighteenth century, the international success of *Der Freischütz* can be recognised as a milestone in the history of German opera. The popularity of *Der Freischütz* proved that German-language opera could compete commercially with Italian opera and that it was to be taken seriously. As noted by Abbate and Parker, 'if debates about Italian versus French style were the defining aesthetic conundrum of eighteenth-century opera, after 1800 the story inexorably becomes one about Italians versus Germans'.³ In other words, German opera had finally emerged as a serious presence on the European opera scene.

The success of *Der Freischütz*, however, has overshadowed other important figures in early German Romantic opera, some of whom laid the foundations for Weber's achievements. In fact, there was a profusion of German-language opera in the early nineteenth century. Weber was only one of a number of composers who contributed to the maturity of German opera; other notable figures include, but are by no means limited to, Louis Spohr (1784-1859), Peter Josef von Lindpaintner (1791-1856), Johann Nepomuk Poissl (1783-1865), and Heinrich Marschner (1795-1861). Few of their operas, however, have remained in the repertoire and resources on them are limited. In addition, whilst scholarship on German Romanticism is extensive, studies have been focused away from German opera and instead towards

¹ Brown, 'Freischütz, Der'.

² Engländer and Huntress, 'The Struggle between German and Italian Opera at the Time of Weber', 479.

³ Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 173.

Beethoven's symphonies and Schubert's Lieder. As such, this early yet seminal period of German Romantic opera has remained somewhat overshadowed. Questions remain over how early German Romantic opera paved the way for Richard Wagner (1813-1883) and if there were any central lines of thinking among composers.

Insights into early German Romantic opera can be gained by considering the discussions in contemporary music magazines. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*AMZ*), for example, frequently discussed and drew attention to opera; its first issue notably included an article from the editor titled *Gedanken über die Oper* ('Thoughts on Opera', 1798).⁴ Magazines like the *AMZ* were a platform for opera to be debated and promoted, thereby providing an insight into contemporary attitudes. These magazines were widely read by composers and the debates within them circulated among the reading classes. Therefore, music magazines can be considered to have been a source of inspiration for composers writing opera.

One of the leading writers for the *AMZ* was Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann (1776-1822). Hoffmann's publications in the *AMZ* frequently focused on opera and his ideas would have been widely read among German composers. Through four publications – *Ritter Gluck* (1809), *Don Juan* (1813), *Der Dichter und der Komponist* (1813), and *Kreisleriana* (1814) – Hoffmann created what I will call an opera manifesto. In these writings, Hoffmann outlined his vision for the future of German opera, presenting guidelines for composers and librettists on how to create what he believed to be a true Romantic opera.

In this thesis I will show how Hoffmann's manifesto underpins milestones in early German Romantic opera. I will show how his manifesto is grounded in Romantic philosophy, especially the quest for the Absolute, and how his aesthetics encouraged composers in using the orchestra as an agent to express the drama. With reference to Hoffmann's writings, my analyses will show how composers used a range of signifiers, including musical topics and symbols, key associations, and diegetic music, to denote the drama through the voice of the orchestra. I will also demonstrate how German opera's fusion with the Romantic agenda

⁴ Markx, E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 29.

helped to forge a national style. Furthermore, I will show how Hoffmann's aesthetics informed Wagner's subsequent vision.

In order to appreciate why Hoffmann's manifesto was so important at the time, it is beneficial to understand some of the key factors that prevented German-language opera from flourishing until this point.⁵ Unlike Italian and French opera, German-language opera was not favoured by aristocratic courts, meaning its maturity in the late eighteenth century was somewhat haphazard. After the Seven Years War (1756-1763), opera in Germany was primarily performed by travelling theatre companies whose members were amateurs and not necessarily trained singers. Some of these companies settled down to establish national theatres,⁶ but Italian and French opera still dominated German theatres and were seen as 'dangerous competitors'.⁷

There were also issues associated with the German language itself, which was still maturing in the late eighteenth century.⁸ Prejudice against German-language opera was further fuelled by the fact that opera as a high-brow art form had lifted Italian language to the 'music-language of high society'.⁹ Technical and social challenges arose, therefore, from attempting to write German-language opera which, at best, was only deemed suitable for comic opera.

Furthermore, German composers until this point had tended to write Italian opera. George Frederic Handel (1685-1759) and Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783), two of the leading German composers of opera in the eighteenth century, wrote almost exclusively in Italian. Later in the century, Christoph Willibald Gluck's (1714-1787) reform operas were based on his critiques of the Italian *opera buffa* and *opera seria*. Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) had attempted to popularise German-language opera by establishing a 'National Theatre' in Vienna, which commissioned, among other works, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's (1756-1791)

⁵ In the early nineteenth century, the quest for a national style of opera went hand in hand with the desire for national unity across German lands. The Holy Roman Empire was dissolved in 1806 and after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the German Confederation was established. However, it was not until 1871 that Germany became a nation state.

⁶ Marx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 15.

⁷ Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, 3.

⁸ Garlington, 'August Wilhelm von Schlegel and the German Romantic Opera', 500.

⁹ Engländer and Huntress, 'The Struggle between German and Italian Opera at the Time of Weber', 479.

Die Entführung aus dem Serail (1782). Yet despite the success of this opera, Mozart is mostly remembered for his Italian operas, especially the Da Ponte collaborations. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), surely the most influential German composer of the early nineteenth century, made only one attempt at an opera: *Leonore* (1805). It did not, however, succeed commercially and Beethoven himself was not entirely satisfied with the work, making two major revisions, first in 1806 and then in 1814 when it was re-named *Fidelio*.

With the difficulties of establishing a national style, the limited output of German-language opera from native composers, and the overwhelming success of foreign styles both in and out of German lands, early nineteenth-century German opera has tended to be lost among competing narratives. Scholarship has typically focused on the problems and struggles surrounding German opera of this period. For example, in their book *A History of Opera: The Last 400 Years* (2012), Abbate and Parker title their chapter on early German Romantic opera as ‘The German Problem’. Similarly, Kooten draws upon what he terms *The German Opera Problem* in “*Was deutsch und echt...*”: *Richard Wagner and the Articulation of a German Opera, 1798-1876* (2019);¹⁰ as he puts it, ‘German opera falls through the cracks’.¹¹ In the last two decades, however, there has been an increase of revisionist scholarship that attempts to understand the history of German opera removed from the standard trajectory towards Wagner. Meyer, for example, in *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (2003), presents Weber’s operas primarily in relation to the wider cultural and social changes in Germany.

Markx’s *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera* (2016), one of the most recent revisionist studies, has informed much of the research for this thesis. Markx primarily focuses on Hoffmann’s cosmopolitan appreciation of opera. I argue in this thesis, however, that although Hoffmann’s outlook was indeed cosmopolitan, his manifesto was overtly nationalist. In his attempt to establish a national style of opera, Hoffmann turned to German Romantic philosophy. As Warrack notes, ‘without this rich fertilisation... the maturing of German opera would have been still longer delayed’.¹² Romanticism in the early

¹⁰ Kooten, “*Was deutsch und echt...*”, 5, fn. 12.

¹¹ Kooten, “*Was deutsch und echt...*”, 4-5.

¹² Warrack, *German Opera*, 265.

nineteenth century was tied up closely with German nationalism as it encouraged national expression against the oppression of the Napoleonic Empire. This thesis will demonstrate how Hoffmann's radical manifesto was intrinsically linked to Romantic philosophy and that its fusion with the Romantic agenda helped to create a national style. In *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Aesthetics* (2006), Chantler explores Hoffmann's opera aesthetics in the context of Romantic philosophy. My thesis draws upon her interpretation of Hoffmann's aesthetics to help inform my own understanding. However, whilst Chantler focuses on Hoffmann's own musical works, this thesis will consider how his ideas were implemented by other composers.

To understand the implications of Hoffmann's manifesto, therefore, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the Romantic theory of art. Philosophy had become central to intellectual life in Germany after the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814).¹³ One of Kant's most notable achievements was his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). In this, he explored the concept of transcendental idealism, which concerned the relationship between the subject and the object, i.e. us and the observable world around us. According to Kant, we only perceive the world through the filter of our senses and not as it really is – we cannot sense what Kant referred to as the noumenon, the 'thing-in-itself'. However, whilst Kant had understood the subject and object as being exclusive parts of reality, there was a growing belief that their distinction was not exclusive. Instead, it was soon believed that the natural world is 'part of ourselves as subjects in ways we cannot explain, and perhaps could not ever fully explain'.¹⁴ In other words, it was believed that the subject and the object were part of one united reality. This sense of a whole reality was commonly referred to by the Romantics as the Absolute. As Novalis famously stated, 'Only the All is absolute'.¹⁵

The Romantic philosophers believed that art had the ability to unify, or rather allow us to perceive some sense of unity between, the subject and the object, i.e. the unconditioned

¹³ Scruton, *The Ring of Truth*, 19.

¹⁴ Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 55.

¹⁵ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 462, 147; a more detailed explanation of the Romantics' understanding of the Absolute will be given in chapter one.

and conditioned parts of reality.¹⁶ They believed, therefore, that art could be used to reveal a glimpse of the unconditioned and ineffable Absolute. Instrumental music, in particular, was recognised for its ability to express what cannot be put into words. In fact, there was a general consensus that ‘music might be able to say more about philosophy than philosophy about music’.¹⁷ Music’s ability to express emotions that are not restricted by the limitations of language was highly valued by the Romantics. Similarly, Hoffmann had recognised and praised the Romantic quality of Beethoven’s music, remarking that the fifth symphony takes the listener to the ‘wonderful spirit-realm of the infinite’.¹⁸ However, the Romantics’ praise of instrumental music meant that opera, which depended on language, was not looked on so highly.

One exception was August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845), who briefly discussed opera in his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*.¹⁹ Schlegel believed that opera should not aim to be realistic, believing that ‘elements of fantasy... constitute the true sphere for the opera’.²⁰ This idea was somewhat radical as it attempted to shift German-language opera from comic to serious settings. Like Schlegel, Hoffmann also suggested that a supernatural setting was necessary for a successful Romantic opera. Following the Romantics, Hoffmann also believed that a truly Romantic opera would allow for the revelation of a spiritual world, akin to the Romantic Absolute. Hoffmann’s manifesto, therefore, can be seen as an attempt to bring opera into the Romantic agenda.

The principle research aim of this thesis is to investigate how Hoffmann’s aesthetics underpin milestones in early German Romantic opera. To fulfil this aim, there are three research questions to address:

1. How did Romantic philosophy provide a framework that would contribute to establishing a national style of opera?

¹⁶ Bowie, ‘German Idealism and the Arts’, 344.

¹⁷ Bowie, ‘Music and the rise of aesthetics’, 29.

¹⁸ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 239.

¹⁹ See Lecture IV.

²⁰ Garlington, ‘August Wilhelm von Schlegel and the German Romantic Opera’, 505.

2. How are musical semantics in *Der Freischütz*, *Der Vampyr*, and *Die Feen*, rooted in Hoffmann's aesthetics?
3. How are Wagner's aesthetics of opera rooted in Hoffmann's aesthetics?

In chapter one I will explore how Hoffmann's manifesto is rooted in German Romantic philosophy. I will discuss the main ideas Hoffmann put forward, show how he encouraged composers to use the orchestra as a dramatic voice, and how he implemented his aesthetics in his own opera *Undine* (1816). In chapter two I will show how Hoffmann's aesthetics were realised in early German Romantic opera, using examples from Weber's *Der Freischütz* and Marschner's *Der Vampyr* (1828). Finally, in chapter three I will show how Wagner's own vision of opera was informed by Hoffmann's earlier manifesto. I will then show how Wagner's *Die Feen* (1834) both embraced Hoffmann's aesthetics and foreshadowed Wagner's later ideas.

My case studies – *Der Freischütz*, *Der Vampyr*, and *Die Feen* – have been chosen as they are all milestones in the history of German Romantic opera. The international success of *Der Freischütz*, for example, was important in relation to German opera being taken seriously. Weber also had personal connections with Hoffmann and thus was in a suitable position to implement Hoffmann's ideas. Marschner holds an important position in the history of German opera as he expanded many of Weber's ideas, particularly the scene complex. As a young musician, Wagner was also exposed to Marschner's operas. *Der Vampyr*, in particular, though modelled on *Der Freischütz*, embraced some of Hoffmann's most important ideas – the supernatural and the sublime – somewhat more than Weber's work. I chose Wagner's *Die Feen* as my last case study. With *Undine*, *Die Feen* frames this early period of German Romantic opera, which constitutes the focus of this thesis. *Die Feen* is also notable as one of the last examples of an opera from this period inspired by the mid-eighteenth-century Venetian dramatist Carlo Gozzi. It is also the work from which Wagner would begin to experiment more radically with his approach to opera. These case studies offer only a representative overview of Hoffmann's influence. As I acknowledge in chapter two, his ideas can be found in the operas of Spohr, Poissl, Lindpaintner, and others. For the purpose of this thesis,

however, these works will not be addressed in detail. It is also worth noting that this thesis is not a comparative study between German opera and other national styles. Rather, it is a linear study of German opera.

This thesis is situated primarily in the field of musicology, but it will also draw on philosophy to inform my analyses and understanding of Hoffmann's manifesto. This interdisciplinary approach means I am able to interpret Hoffmann's radical ideas in relation to philosophy and show how early German Romantic opera embraces the Romantic quest for the Absolute. Other notable examples of this interdisciplinary approach include Bonds' *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (2006) and more recently Feuerzeig's *Schubert's Lieder and the Philosophy of Early German Romanticism* (2014). My thesis will extend this approach to German Romantic opera, using Hoffmann as the connection between opera and philosophy. Consequently, this thesis will demonstrate how philosophy influenced stylistic developments in German Romantic opera.

More generally, this thesis will provide a new account of the history of German Romantic opera. It will examine how German composers embraced Hoffmann's compositional theory, particularly with regard to musical semantics, and how his manifesto contributed to the formation of a national style.

Chapter One

E. T. A. Hoffmann's Aesthetics of Opera

In the early nineteenth century, E. T. A. Hoffmann held a prominent position among different artistic circles. As a result, he is a marked and inescapable figure in discourses of German history of that period. Today, Hoffmann's legacy is found across different disciplines including literature studies, musicology, and philosophy. What brings these studies together, however, is his inspiration from the Romantics.

The Romantic movement was a literary movement that originated in Jena and flourished in German lands during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of its most important representatives were Novalis (1772-1801), Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845), and Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853). Their ambition to 'romanticise' the arts and the sciences was immense in so far as they sought to 'romanticise the world itself'.¹ As a man of multiple artistic talents, Hoffmann was in a prime position to disseminate their ideas.

Inspired by the Romantic agenda, Hoffmann created an opera manifesto that provided a framework for composers to follow. On following his guidance, opera could supposedly align with the Romantic agenda, especially the quest for the Absolute. In this chapter I will explore how Romantic philosophy informed the creation of Hoffmann's manifesto. I will then explain some of his main ideas, including how he encouraged composers to use the voice of the orchestra to denote the drama, before showing how his aesthetics helped conceive a national style. Finally, I will show how Hoffmann implemented his aesthetics into his opera *Undine* (1816).

E. T. A. Hoffmann

Hoffmann developed a passion for music from an early age. But like many aspiring artists, he was unable to devote his entire life to music and had to rely on other means to ensure

¹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 8.

financial stability.² Even though Hoffmann's musical training was limited, it was enough for him to realise his ambitions in the form of two mature operas and a number of instrumental works. His formal studies were instead devoted to becoming a lawyer in the footsteps of his father, Christoph Ludwig Hoffmann (1736-97). Hoffmann studied in the Law faculty at Königsberg University from March 1792 to July 1795. But despite the demands of his studies, he still put time aside to pursue his passion for music, as well as painting.

In his youth, Hoffmann took up piano studies with Carl Gottlieb Richter (1728-1809). He also studied thoroughbass and counterpoint, first with the organist Christian Wilhelm Podbeilski (1740-92), then with the choirmaster Christian Otto Gladau (1770-1853). After further studies with J. F. Reichardt (1752-1814) and upon his relocation to Berlin in the summer of 1798, Hoffmann completed *Die Maske* (1799), his first opera, a *Singspiel* to which he had set his own libretto.

Despite Hoffmann's talent and early achievements, any attempts at establishing a serious music career were short lived. After a political scandal in 1802 involving suspicions that Hoffmann had been drawing caricatures of the Posen authorities, there was a two-year ban on public performances of his music. In March 1804, he moved to Warsaw where for a short time he was able freely to embrace his love for music as conductor of the Ressource music society orchestra. This seemingly idyllic period, however, was short-lived. The invasion of Napoleon's armies in 1806 meant the Ressource did not last and the vibrant musical life he had enjoyed there quickly faded away.

However, Hoffmann did not let these setbacks stifle his innate passion for music, seeking new avenues to channel his musical energies. His breakthrough eventually came in 1809 after sending his short story *Ritter Gluck* to the leading music magazine of the day, the *AMZ*. This decision would ultimately set his successful career as a writer into motion.

² This biography draws information from Allroggen's 'Hoffmann, E. T. A.', section 1, in *Grove Music Online*.

Hoffmann's literary output and Romantic authority

Ritter Gluck was published in the *AMZ* in February 1809 and under editor Johann Friedrich Rochlitz (1769-1842) Hoffmann was established as a regular writer for the magazine. Despite its purely fictional setting on first glance, this work is in fact an imaginative piece of music criticism. Hoffmann had used fiction to elevate the status of Gluck, setting him 'in a higher sphere than run-of-the-mill life'.³ *Ritter Gluck* established two trends that would become commonplace in Hoffmann's writings: the use of fiction as a way of disseminating his ideas, and specific attention to the nature of opera.

These are the prevailing hallmarks of Hoffmann's other famous writings published in the *AMZ* – *Don Juan*, *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, and *Kreisleriana* – which, together with *Ritter Gluck*, form the basis of his opera manifesto. *Kreisleriana* is his most substantial work, presented as a collection of essays centred upon the fictional character Johannes Kreisler and is recognised as Hoffmann's 'contribution to Romantic philosophy'.⁴ Additionally, he also built a portfolio of traditional operatic reviews, including Joseph Weigl's *Das Waisenhaus* (1810), Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1810), Ferdinando Paer's *Sofonisba* (1810-1811), and Adalbert Gyrowetz's *Der Augenarzt* (1812).

Hoffmann's manifesto outlined a series of conditions he believed were essential to the true nature and purpose of Romantic opera. It presents guidelines as to how the process of composition should unfold, both from the perspective of the composer and from the librettist, which he discussed most explicitly in *Der Dichter und der Komponist*. His guidance for composers, however, is not necessarily from a technical musical perspective. Instead, his aesthetics are rooted in Romantic philosophy and focus on the transcendent power of opera. As an amateur who had received limited musical training, this grounding was important as it gave Hoffmann the authority to make such bold claims, and as Chantler argues, Hoffmann's grounding in the literary theory of early German Romantic philosophy gave him 'an aesthetic basis for his critical appraisal of the operas of his predecessors and contemporaries'.⁵ His

³ Warrack, *German Opera*, 272.

⁴ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 6.

⁵ Chantler, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Aesthetics*, 127.

amateurish ambition and anti-artisan approach, however, reflected a broader shift in the social position of early nineteenth-century musicians, a shift that gave the bourgeoisie greater influence over the arts.

In the eighteenth century, most composers were employed by the aristocracy or the church and had to adhere to the demands of their employers. Writing music was seen as a craft, whereby composers would train rigorously and, on the whole, follow standardised frameworks upon which they would then apply their individual creativity. But with the decline of aristocratic powers and church authority in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there was a dramatic increase in the number of self-employed composers, who were seen as celebrities of the day and often viewed in a higher state than the average human being.⁶ This opened up opportunities for greater artistic freedom and expression. Music was no longer a high-brow art form reserved for the rich and powerful, but a widely accessible activity for the bourgeoisie. This dramatic shift in the social position of music was fuelled by an increase of public theatres, improvements in printing, and the dissemination of sheet music meaning the bourgeoisie could now easily play music in their own homes. With the prominence of magazines such as the *AMZ*, discussions about music became an integrated part of society. The bourgeoisie were able to engage with these discussions and express their own opinion. As a result, the bourgeois voice rapidly became one of the critical voices in dictating the careers of composers and the success of individual pieces.

Hoffmann fits nicely into this picture. He was passionate about music, but not especially qualified, and fully embraced the new opportunities to voice his opinion. Critically, the philosophical grounding of his work established it as both artistic and academic, i.e. his work was in and of itself a piece of art, but it could also be viewed as part of the Romantic agenda. The combination of philosophical concepts and fiction in Hoffmann's writings would have suggested that only the intellectual elite could decipher the true meaning of his words. In the eyes of the Romantics, therefore, Hoffmann's work would have been in a league above his contemporaries as it explored both the nature of opera and its position within society.

⁶ Schafer, E. T. A. *Hoffmann and Music*, 112.

Hoffmann's intellectual inspiration from the Romantics played a seminal role in the creation of his manifesto. Consequently, his compositional theory went beyond simply how to write an opera. It became part of the Romantics' mission to romanticise all the arts, explaining how opera could be used as a means of accessing what they referred to as the Absolute.

The Romantic quest for the Absolute

In the wake of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and his theory of transcendental idealism, new ideas within metaphysics emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Romantic philosophers became increasingly interested in an incomprehensible sense of reality they referred to as the Absolute. As defined by Gorodeisky, 'most broadly, by the "Absolute", the romantics refer to the unconditioned totality of all conditions. Whilst it is conditioned by nothing, it conditions all the finite physical and mental manifestations of the world'.⁷ Novalis believed that 'the universe is the absolute subject, or the totality of all predicates'.⁸ In other words, the Absolute is infinite, yet it has a powerful influence over finite beings which are manifestations of the Absolute in themselves.⁹

The Absolute was a central concept of German Romanticism, which flourished from German Idealism. Critical to understanding the Romantics' view of the Absolute is that whilst they did not deny its existence, they realised that it could never be fully accessed: 'Everywhere we *seek* the unconditioned and only ever *find* [conditioned] things'.¹⁰ However, the Romantics did believe it could be sensed, although opinions differed as to how this was possible. For example, Novalis believed it could be accessed simply through feeling, as it 'precedes any conceptualization, judgement, or understanding'.¹¹ F. Schlegel, however, believed the Absolute could be sensed through the aesthetic experience of observing natural phenomena:¹² 'The

⁷ Gorodeisky, '19th Century Romantic Aesthetics', section 3.1.

⁸ Novalis, *Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 633, 113.

⁹ The Absolute was also understood as *das Unendliche* (the infinite) and *das Unbedingte* (the unconditioned), Stone, 'The Romantic Absolute', 502.

¹⁰ Novalis, *Schriften*, vol. 2, no. 1, 412.

¹¹ Stone, 'The Romantic Absolute', 498.

¹² Stone, 'The Romantic Absolute', 498.

universal animation of the living is infinite... for every point of space, every moment of time (of which there are infinitely many) is filled'.¹³

F. Schlegel, like others, also believed that a revelation of the Absolute could be achieved through art. He argued that 'art steps onto the scene very nicely, in order to place, through sense and presentation and clarity, the objects of revelation before the eyes'.¹⁴ A. W. von Schlegel, Friedrich's older brother, argued that in the creation of a piece of art, the artist relies on both their consciousness and subconsciousness.¹⁵ Therefore, the Romantics believed that through the influence of the unconditioned part of the mind, what would today be called the subconscious, an artist could convey through their work a glimpse of the unconditioned Absolute.¹⁶

Hoffmann was inspired by the leading figures of German Romanticism including Jean Paul (1763-1825), Tieck, Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810) and Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert (1780-1860).¹⁷ We also know that Hoffmann had personal relations with Romantic writers, including Tieck, F. Schlegel, and Novalis, and would have been exposed to their thinking.¹⁸ When discussing instrumental music in his manifesto, Hoffmann refers to a world that resembles the Absolute. He states that music awakens a 'higher, intenser purpose', 'music reveals to man an unknown realm... a world in which he leaves behind all precise feelings in order to embrace an inexpressible longing'.¹⁹ Hoffmann's conception that music reveals this unknown realm is comparable to the Schlegel brothers' belief that the Absolute can be sensed through aesthetic experience. Hoffmann extensively praises the Romantic quality of Beethoven's music, frequently alluding to the Absolute in his famous essay, *Beethovens Instrumental-Musik*: 'Beethoven's instrumental music unveils before us the realm of the mighty and the immeasurable'; '[it] sets in motion the machinery of awe, of fear, of terror, of pain,

¹³ F. Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 1, 38-39.

¹⁴ F. Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 13, 174.

¹⁵ As Hay notes, Schlegel believed that 'art is a result of both conscious and unconscious forces', Hay, 'August Wilhelm von Schlegel', section 3.3.

¹⁶ As Beiser notes, the artist's 'activity is continuous with, and an integral part of, nature as a whole', Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 76.

¹⁷ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 6.

¹⁸ Marx, E. T. A. *Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 63.

¹⁹ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 96.

and awakens that infinite yearning which is the essence of romanticism'.²⁰ In his famous review of the fifth symphony in 1810, Hoffmann describes how Beethoven's music 'sweeps the listener into the wonderful spirit-realm of the infinite'.²¹ Hoffmann is explicit that instrumental music, not vocal music, has the ability to express 'the realm of the infinite'.²² He argues that vocal music can only depict rational concepts that can be understood and put into words. The Absolute, on the other hand, cannot be put into words and is therefore best expressed through instrumental music.

With the above in mind, I will now explore some of the key concepts in Hoffmann's manifesto, demonstrating how his instructions allude to the ability of opera to convey the Absolute. I will mostly draw upon examples from *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, in which he discusses whether the music and the libretto should be the result of one person's creativity.²³ As I will explain, Hoffmann's guidance suggests that the voice the orchestra should be used to express the drama. His instructions, however, also imply that in doing so Romantic opera can allude to the Absolute.

Hoffmann's opera manifesto and the quest for the Absolute

Hoffmann makes it explicitly clear that a composer should rely on the subconscious realm of their mind. As he explains, 'the art of composing effectively is to employ the highest possible skill to capture ideas unconsciously conceived in a state of ecstasy'.²⁴ The composer's spirit should be 'untrammelled',²⁵ free to express what they feel without restriction. Hoffmann's language is comparable to A. W. von Schlegel's theory of art, which suggests the artist is influenced by the unconscious part of their mind. Therefore, by relying on the subconscious, i.e. allowing the compositional process to be open to inspiration, Hoffmann suggests a

²⁰ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 97-98.

²¹ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 239.

²² Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 98.

²³ This was a contemporary debate of the early nineteenth century. Franz Horn, for example, described 'true opera' as 'the most intimate fusion of poetry and melody', Horn, 'Musikalische Fragmente', *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 28 (7 April 1802), 449-57.

²⁴ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 155.

²⁵ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 156.

composer can write music that is inspired by the unconditioned Absolute. As such, the image of the Absolute can be projected through Romantic opera.

This reliance on the subconscious runs parallel with the greater artistic freedom composers received in the early nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, composition was generally determined by the taste and requirements of patrons, based on pre-existing structures and plot lines that allowed for little artistic freedom. Hoffmann believed this had thus far constrained opera so instead called for an inward and individualistic compositional process, one that was based on what the composer felt inside. Free from the demands of the court, this was now possible as composers could write what they wanted. With this anti-artisan approach to opera, Hoffmann believed that each new work should be individual, artistically free and independent of its predecessors, and created in direct response to unconditioned emotions that stir within a composer's soul.

So that the music is united spiritually with the subject matter, Hoffmann suggests the composer's immediate source of inspiration should be the libretto: 'music should spring directly and inevitably from poetry'.²⁶ In fact, he could not have addressed this more directly to the composer: 'Read the libretto, concentrate your mind on it with all your strength, enter into the dramatic situations with all resources of your imagination'.²⁷ This passage, however, suggests that the relationship between the libretto and the music should be deeper than the former simply influencing the latter. As well as engaging with the surface-level artistic qualities of the libretto, Hoffmann suggests the composer should immerse themselves in the deeper, spiritual nature of the libretto. Ultimately, they should strive to reach the spiritual realm where the libretto itself was conceived in order for the music to also radiate a glimpse of the spiritual realm. In this sense, the libretto should be used as a gateway for the composer to reach this realm. As Hoffmann states, 'it is there that poets and musicians are closely kindred members of *one* church; for the secret of words and sounds is one and the same, unveiling to both the ultimate sublimity'.²⁸ Uniting the libretto and the music spiritually, therefore, would allow the

²⁶ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 197.

²⁷ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 155.

²⁸ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 195.

two mediums to work coherently together, revealing what Hoffmann refers to as the ‘ultimate sublimity’ – a direct reference to the Absolute. Chantler argues that the revelation of the ‘ultimate sublimity’ allowed Hoffmann to advocate both opera seria and opera buffa.²⁹ In other words, she argues that Hoffmann believed that the means by which the ‘ultimate sublimity’ is revealed, i.e. through seria or buffa, is not necessarily important, reflecting Hoffmann’s call for composers to break away from tradition.

Hoffmann also stresses the importance of relying on instinct: ‘for I know from experience that the melody conjured up as though by a thunderbolt immediately on first reading the libretto is always the best, and in the composer’s mind perhaps the only valid one’.³⁰ According to Novalis, the Absolute conditions all of our being: ‘It is all, it is *over all*; In whom we live, breathe and have our being’.³¹ Therefore, embracing instinct (which we have no control over) can be understood as a reliance on the Absolute. Hoffmann’s praise of instinct also reflects his anti-artisan approach. From relying on standards and tradition, he believed artistic and spiritual unity had been lacking between the music and libretto in German-language opera. Instead, by relying on instinct and the artists’ intuition, he believed there would be spiritual coherence between the two mediums.

Taking the above points into account, Hoffmann’s guidance suggests that the orchestra should have a dramatic role in Romantic opera. For example, his emphasis on the spiritual unity between music and subject matter implies that the orchestra is able to express the drama on its own accord. Infused with the spirit of the subject matter, the orchestra would no longer be confined to an accompaniment but would assume its own voice. Abbate extensively explores the ‘voice’ of the orchestra in her book *Unsung Voices* (1991). She defines it as ‘a sense of certain isolated and rare gestures in music, whether vocal or nonvocal, that may be perceived as modes of subjects’ enunciations’.³² In other words, she suggests that the orchestra acts as an agent that expresses non-musical ideas, which is what Hoffmann appears

²⁹ Chantler, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Aesthetics*, 129.

³⁰ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 193.

³¹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 462, 147.

³² Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, ix.

to suggest. As Bonds unpacks in his book *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (2006), early nineteenth-century instrumental music was widely recognised as bearing the power to express non-musical ideas, Beethoven's *Eroica* (1803) and *Pastoral* (1808) being two popular examples. Hoffmann's manifesto is significant, however, because it suggests that the orchestra in Romantic opera should also convey meaning.

Hoffmann encourages composers to adapt their approach to composition depending on the subject matter. He does this by encouraging a rejection of traditional structures in favour of a reliance on instinct and imagination. The musical structure of a Romantic opera, therefore, should be different in each case and embedded with specific meanings related to individual works. As such, the orchestra is to be used to denote a variety of scenarios. The voice of the orchestra could function as a chronological musical narrative, but also as a depiction of various aspects of the drama, including expressions of the natural world, the inner worlds of characters, and changes of character and situation.³³ In practice, and as recognised by Baileyshea, the orchestra is not limited to one voice at each specific moment, but has the potential to express numerous voices simultaneously.³⁴ According to Hoffmann's manifesto, therefore, the orchestra can also express aspects of the drama that cannot necessarily be expressed in words. The orchestra in Romantic opera, therefore, is opened up to the possibility of being used to allude to the ineffable Absolute. However, Hoffmann believed this could only be achieved through finding a suitable subject matter.

The central debate of *Der Dichter und der Komponist* is whether the libretto and the music should be the result of one person's creativity and if this would benefit opera. But this debate is left largely unresolved.³⁵ Markx, however, argues that this debate, and whether the libretto is of a suitable standard, regardless of who wrote it, is somewhat irrelevant. For

³³ Almén's *sibling model*, which promotes 'an indirect relationship between musical and literary narrative as distinct media sharing a common conceptual foundation', can be used to help explain Hoffmann's understanding of the voice of the orchestra, Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative*, 13. The removal of any hierarchy between music and subject matter in Almén's model, for example, is similar to Hoffmann's belief that the music and subject matter should be united spiritually, which implies that one should not be dependent on the other.

³⁴ Baileyshea, 'The Struggle for Orchestral Control', 3.

³⁵ For a brief summary of the different interpretations, see Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 178.

example, she points out that despite its ‘deplorable verse’, Mozart was still able to compose ‘highly-inspired music’ to *Die Zauberflöte* (1791).³⁶ To put it another way, whether or not a composer is skilled enough to write a suitable libretto and whether it was them or somebody else that wrote it is irrelevant. As Hoffmann states, ‘it is the subject-matter, plot and situation, rather than fine words, which must inspire the composer’.³⁷ What takes greater precedence, therefore, is the suitability of the subject matter and how it stirs the imagination of the librettist and composer.

Hoffmann draws attention to the Italian dramatist Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806).³⁸ As Ludwig explains to Ferdinand (the two fictional characters in *Der Dichter und der Komponist*), ‘think of the excellent Gozzi. In his dramatic fairy-tales he has provided exactly what I demand of a librettist and it is incredible that this rich storehouse of outstanding operatic subjects has not yet been more exploited before now’.³⁹ Hoffmann picks out *Il Corvo* (1761) as one suitable example, identifying several ‘irresistible situations’, particularly the ‘conflict with the spirit world’, that make it suitable for a serious tragic opera.⁴⁰ His praise of Gozzi’s *fiabe* was shared among the early nineteenth-century Romantics. Goethe, for example, staged *Turandot* in 1802 and the appeal of Gozzi’s *fiabe* continued throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.⁴¹ The Romantics were also interested in other supernatural tales removed from the present day, particularly Norse mythology, folklore, and legend. Hoffmann suggests these Romantic topics be used as the basis for a libretto: ‘let the poet be prepared for daring flights to the distant realm of romanticism, for it is there he will find the marvellous things that he should bring into our lives’.⁴² These extraordinary settings would require the librettist to embrace their imagination, allowing them to consider scenarios beyond everyday reason. Hoffmann suggests, therefore, that these settings allow the librettist to connect with a

³⁶ Marx, E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 179.

³⁷ Charlton, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Musical Writings*, 206.

³⁸ Hoffmann also briefly mentions Tieck as someone who could provide a suitable libretto.

³⁹ Charlton, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Musical Writings*, 197.

⁴⁰ Charlton, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Musical Writings*, 199.

⁴¹ Notable examples include Wagner’s *Die Feen*, which will be looked at in detail in chapter three, Prokofiev’s *The Love for Three Oranges* (1921), and Puccini’s *Turandot* (1926).

⁴² Charlton, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Musical Writings*, 196.

realm akin to the Absolute, which he believed would be revealed to the audience through opera. He goes on to say that ‘we willingly believe ourselves as in a blissful dream to be transported from our meagre everyday existence to the flowery avenues of that romantic land, and to comprehend only its language, words sounding forth in music’.⁴³ Notably, Hoffmann implies that this ‘romantic realm’ can only be expressed properly through music. Therefore, the essence of this ‘romantic realm’ – the extraordinary subject matter and allusions to the Absolute – should be expressed primarily through the voice of the orchestra.

If all of Hoffmann’s guidance was implemented, he believed that in opera a ‘romantic dimension’, i.e. the Absolute, would be revealed.⁴⁴ The choice of subject matter was especially important, as ‘action and situation, carried forward by irresistible sonorities, seize and transport us more potently’.⁴⁵ This would have been the ultimate achievement of opera, the purpose that Hoffmann’s aesthetics were geared towards. But as well as giving opera the means to reveal this ‘romantic dimension’, his manifesto was also geared towards the formation of a national style of German opera.

Hoffmann’s national agenda

Hoffmann’s opera manifesto was published at a critical point in the establishment of a German national style of opera. In the early nineteenth century, more composers began to write German-language opera. Published in the widely read *AMZ*, his manifesto provided a singular line of thinking to unite German opera, his Romantic agenda distinguishing it from other national styles.

At first glance, however, it appears that Hoffmann’s aesthetics are not overtly nationalist, but more cosmopolitan. Alongside Gozzi, Hoffmann speaks highly of the achievements of Gluck, whose ‘opera[s] are and will remain classical masterpieces that every young composer anxious to venture upon serious tragic dramas cannot study enough’.⁴⁶

⁴³ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 196.

⁴⁴ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 197.

⁴⁵ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 197.

⁴⁶ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 261.

Despite Gluck's German identity, he wrote almost exclusively in Italian and French, but Hoffmann embraced these works and had only the highest praise towards the operas of this 'demigod'.⁴⁷ Hoffmann also expressed his deepest admiration for the Italian composer Gaspare Spontini (1774-1851). This seemingly cosmopolitan appreciation, however, was in fact the foundation of the national agenda of his opera manifesto. As Markx comments, 'his unwavering support of Spontini and his opera *Olimpie* demonstrates that neither German ethnic origin nor German subject matter was an essential element for constituting German opera as Hoffmann envisioned it'.⁴⁸ In other words, the German national style of opera that he was trying to create was to be a fusion of the merits of these foreign styles. By mastering the merits of these traditions and fusing them into a new unified style, Hoffmann believed this new German style would elevate these individual elements to a higher state. Consequently, German opera would have a distinction from, and indeed dominion over, other national styles of opera. These materialist features, however, would remain secondary to the Romantic qualities that would primarily define German opera.

The importance of Hoffmann's employment of Romantic philosophy was twofold: firstly, it aligned his opera manifesto with the wider Romantic mission of romanticising the world; secondly, it distinctively sought to set German opera apart from the Italian and French styles, both in terms of aesthetic qualities and purpose. Hoffmann's encouragement of exploiting the orchestra as a dramatic vehicle, for example, would contribute to setting German opera apart stylistically from Italian and French opera. The voice of the orchestra, however, would also contribute to the Romantic quest for the Absolute. The Absolute was in and of itself a fundamentally German concept. Therefore, by using German opera as a medium to connect with the Absolute, it would clearly be separated from the entertainment-driven Italian and French styles. More importantly, German opera would be elevated to a higher position of societal value, as its priority was to be spiritual, not materialistic.

⁴⁷ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 201.

⁴⁸ Markx, E. T. A. *Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 67.

By fully embracing Romantic philosophy, it is clear that Hoffmann wanted to take German opera in a new direction. By 1814, Hoffmann had laid the foundations for what would inform Wagner's more open and aggressive nationalist conception of German opera. Hoffmann's Romantic vision also provided a route by which composers could begin to develop a national style of opera that justified borrowing elements from other national styles. The musical structures, and whether they were borrowed from Italian or French traditions, were irrelevant as long as the subject matter was geared towards the Romantic mission of 'romanticising' the world. In other words, the Romantic vision embedded within German opera was to be its defining feature.

The quest for the Absolute was by no means the only thing that Hoffmann addressed in his opera manifesto, but it was an important foundation that united different aspects of his work. It provided a way to unite the libretto and the music, it focused the composer on using the voice of the orchestra to express the drama and was important in the pursuit of creating a German style of opera. But despite the details of his manifesto, it still leaves much to the imagination as to what this ideal form of German Romantic opera would look like. An idea of what Hoffmann was striving to achieve can be found in his own opera *Undine*.

Undine

On 20 July 1813, Hoffmann sent a letter to his publisher concerning the upcoming publication of his *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (1814), writing: 'I do not want to give my name, since that should only be known to the world by a successful musical composition'.⁴⁹ The composition in question is his second opera *Undine*, which he would have been in the final stages of composing around this time.⁵⁰ Based on the novella of the same name by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué (1777-1843), *Undine* was the crowning achievement of Hoffmann's musical career and, as the words of this letter suggest, also a great personal achievement. Whilst the work has not taken up the prominent position in the operatic canon

⁴⁹ Allroggen, 'Hoffmann, E. T. A.', section 1.

⁵⁰ Hoffmann had previously written another opera, *Aurora* (1812), but this was not of any notable success.

that Hoffmann would have likely hoped for, its legacy can be sensed in early German Romantic opera. But most importantly, *Undine* provides an insight into how Hoffmann envisaged his opera manifesto would be realised in practice, what would have been a prime example for other composers at the time to follow.

As a Romantic poet, Fouqué was the ideal librettist for Hoffmann's vision of a Romantic opera. Having embraced the thinking of A. W. von Schlegel, the subject matter of Fouqué's works – Norse mythology, folklore and chivalry – positioned him among the circle of early German Romantic writers.⁵¹ When he wrote his novella in 1811, Fouqué sought inspiration from Paracelsus's (1493-1541) *Liber de nymphis, sylphis, pygmaeis et salamandris et de caeteris spiritibus*, which is concerned with the elemental spirits.⁵² The resulting tale is one that is enriched with Romantic themes: Undine, a water spirit, falls in love with Huldbrand, a mortal man, and through their marriage, she acquires a soul. However, should he curse her, she will return to her spirit form and he too will pass away. Huldbrand inevitably ends up cursing Undine, returning her to the waters before she consumes him; in her own words, 'I have wept him to death'.⁵³

Hoffmann discovered Fouqué's *Undine* in 1812 whilst he was in Bamberg and quickly began working on his adaptation for the stage.⁵⁴ Other notable nineteenth-century stage adaptations include Cesare Pugni's (1802-1870) ballet, *Ondine, ou La naïade* (1843) and Albert Lortzing's (1801-1851) opera, *Undine* (1845), both of which premiered shortly after Fouqué's death. *Undine's* overarching theme centres upon the conflict and relationship between humanity and the spirit world, a theme that Hoffmann had praised highly in his manifesto and that resonated with Romantic philosophy. For example, as W. J. Lillyman points out, the spirits' influence over other spirits is an important theme: Undine's fate, despite being a spirit herself, is still ultimately in the hands of higher spirits.⁵⁵ This image of the spirit world intermingling with the human world can be interpreted as a representation of the Absolute.

⁵¹ Pollin, 'Undine in the Works of Poe', 60.

⁵² Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 240.

⁵³ Fouqué, *Undine and Other Tales*, 113.

⁵⁴ Allroggen, 'Hoffmann, E. T. A.', section 1.

⁵⁵ Lillyman, 'Fouqué's *Undine*', 103.

Through their human form, Undine and Kühleborn provide glimpses of the spirit world in the same way the Romantics believed art provided a glimpse of the Absolute. When Undine ‘dies’ at the end, she does not cease to exist but merely returns to her spirit form; although she is no longer visible to mortals, she is still alive and a part of the world. Similarly, the Romantics acknowledged the existence of the Absolute despite not being able to fully perceive it. The idea of spirits influencing other spirits also draws parallels to Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, where all the different elements of reality function together in one organic whole, i.e. the spiritual and non-spiritual elements are all part of the same interrelated nature, all having an effect over one another.

Although Hoffmann completed *Undine* in 1814, the Berlin premiere did not take place until 3 August 1816.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, after only fourteen performances with considerable success, the National-Theater burnt down, putting performances to a halt. This has left considerable speculation as to how the performance history of *Undine* would have been different had this disaster not occurred. It was not until 1906 when Hans Pfitzner published *Undine* as a piano-vocal score that the work received any further attention. Even since then, however, commercial interest in the work has been limited.⁵⁷ In their initial reviews for the *Vossische Zeitung*, both Samuel Heinrich Catel (1758-1838) and Johann Philipp Schmidt (1779-1853) notably recognised Hoffmann’s dramatic use of the orchestra.⁵⁸ In contrast, Count Carl Friedrich Moritz Paul von Brühl (1772-1837), who oversaw the running of the theatre, felt that some moments of *Undine* bordered on being too intense for the audience.⁵⁹ Hoffmann had indeed placed more dramatic emphasis on the music in accordance with his manifesto. As I will now demonstrate, Hoffmann used the voice of the orchestra in *Undine* to denote aspects of the drama, particularly the ineffable.

In act 1, no. 3 (see Example 1.1), the orchestra depicts the stormy seas aroused by Undine’s spirit. This music of this passage, which is characterised by rapid arpeggios in the

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that this was a pivotal moment in Hoffmann’s career. *Undine* was his crowning musical and theatrical work, but from this point on he focused more seriously on his career as a writer.

⁵⁷ Allroggen, ‘Hoffmann, E. T. A.’, section 1.

⁵⁸ Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 255-256;

⁵⁹ Markx, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 253.

violins and dotted rhythms in the chorus, illustrates how Hoffmann embedded the voice of the orchestra with meanings related to the drama. As Doerner explains, the music is an ‘expression of anthropomorphized nature’, simultaneously representing both the sea in itself and Undine in her water spirit form.⁶⁰ The music, therefore, is an expression of the ineffable spirit of nature, i.e. Undine as a water spirit. In other words, the orchestra conveys the spirit of the sea and so can be interpreted as an expression of the sublime, i.e. the Absolute.

Hoffmann’s subtitle for this scene, ‘Verwandlung des Theaters’ (‘Transformation of the Theatre’), is also noteworthy. With the appearance of a mass of water spirits (the choir), as well as the appearance of Kühleborn, this subtitle suggests a transformation not only in the drama, but in the whole theatre, possibly a hint towards the ‘romantic dimension’ that he spoke of in his manifesto.

Verwandlung des Theaters.

Nacht; wilde Gegend, in deren Mitte man auf einem hochhervorragenden mit Gesträuch bewachsenen Felsen: Undinen erblickt. Reissende Waldbäche stürzen von den Felsen, aus denen seltsamliche Gestalten hervorgucken und wieder verschwinden. Aus einem vorzüglich grossen Wassersturz an der Seite des Theaters tritt die Gestalt eines in einen weissen Talar gehüllten, langen Mannes; es ist Kühleborn. Der Chor der Wassergeister, die sich über dem Gewässer erheben, stimmt in seinen Gesang.

Allegro.

Sfr. sehn.
H. kann.
F. kann. ④

Graus, wäl - zet und rollt euch, wäl - zet und
wäl - zet und rollt euch, wäl - zet und rollt euch,

Allegro.
vi. f
Hör. Pke.
Ob.
Pke. trem.

Example 1.1: *Undine*, act 1, no. 3. Examples for *Undine* are taken from *Undine: Zauberoper in drei Akten von E. T. A. Hoffmann im Klavierauszug neu bearbeitet von Hans Pfitzner* (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 1906).

⁶⁰ Doerner, ‘German Romantic Opera?’, 14.

One of the most important reviews of *Undine* came from Carl Maria von Weber. Weber. Weber was another leading writer for the *AMZ* and would also become a seminal figure in the history of German opera. As well as simply reviewing *Undine*, of which he spoke highly, Weber framed his review within a broader discussion on the current situation of German Romantic opera. In doing so, Weber positioned *Undine* as a milestone in German opera. In his review, Weber writes, ‘of course when I speak of opera I am speaking of the German ideal, namely a self-sufficient work of art in which every feature and every contribution by the related arts are moulded together in a certain way and dissolve, to form a new world’.⁶¹ Notably, this extract shows how Hoffmann’s radical ideas and desire for a national style were shared among others (although Hoffmann’s literary contribution on the matter far outweighs anyone else’s). Like Hoffmann’s ‘romantic dimension’ and the Romantics’ Absolute, Weber also alludes to the revelation of another world. His description of the ideal German opera also looks ahead to Wagner’s notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. As will be explored fully in chapter three, numerous connections can indeed be drawn between Hoffmann and Wagner’s later works. One connection can be drawn between Hoffmann and Wagner in the final scene of *Undine* – Hoffmann’s own *Liebestod*.

We know that Hoffmann had a considerable input on the outline of the libretto and one of his original contributions to the plot was the final scene.⁶² In Fouqué’s novella, Huldbrand remains in the human world separated from Undine. But in Hoffmann’s new version, Undine takes him down to the bottom of the well where they are surrounded by other water spirits, holding him in her arms forever. This addition shifts the attention towards Huldbrand by focusing on his journey to the spirit realm, emphasising his divine transformation. Continuing with the idea that Undine and the spirit world are representations of the Absolute, Huldbrand, in his unity with Undine, has had a transformative experience. For Huldbrand, Hoffmann’s ‘romantic dimension’ has been fully revealed, but only because he has been freed from the chains of mortality, in a unity that ‘can only be consummated in

⁶¹ Weber, *Carl Maria von Weber: Writings on Music*, 201.

⁶² Chantler, *E. T. A. Hoffmann’s Musical Aesthetics*, 154.

annihilation'.⁶³ This is also the first point in the opera that takes place fully in the spirit realm. The audience follow Huldbrand's spiritual journey and too gain a glimpse of the 'romantic dimension'.

Hoffmann uses the music to illustrate the spiritual significance of this point (see Example 1.2). At the *Adagio ma non troppo* when the water spirits reveal themselves, the sudden shift to D-flat major sounds distant and ethereal in comparison to the preceding C major passage, marking the spiritual transformation of Huldbrand. A delicate veil of sound is then produced by the muted, *piano* melody in the violins, which appears to be an attempt by Hoffmann to mimic the physical nature of a spirit. Furthermore, this melody, which is marked by its rising octave leap, climbs higher on each statement, symbolically representing the strive towards a higher power.

Example 1.2: *Undine*, act 3, no. 21

The elevation of the human spirit to a higher realm became a common feature in German opera throughout the nineteenth century, especially in Wagner's music dramas. A

⁶³ Warrack, *German Opera*, 282.

parallel, for example, can immediately be drawn between this scene and Wagner's *Liebestod* in *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), where the star-crossed lovers are finally united in death, fully submitting to one another, and united in spirit. Hoffmann's message here ultimately reinforces the Romantic notion of the Absolute that it can never be completely attained as long as we are in this form of life; only by breaking free from the human condition can we ever achieve this revelation.

Romantic philosophy was seminal in the creation of Hoffmann's opera manifesto. Considering Romantic philosophy helps to decipher the meaning of Hoffmann's words, his guidelines for a true Romantic opera, and how these would characterise German opera at a time when its identity was unclear. His opera manifesto, however, was also a medium through which ideas in Romantic philosophy could be popularised and brought to a wider audience. Hoffmann's compositional theory particularly encouraged composers to exploit the orchestra as a dramatic voice, one that was also geared towards the quest for the Absolute. But how, and to what extent, did others follow his guidelines? These are the main questions that will be addressed in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Two

Tracing Hoffmann's Influence on Early German Romantic Opera: Musical Semantics in *Der Freischütz* and *Der Vampyr*

One of the most striking aspects of Hoffmann's literary output is its grounding in imagined realities. *Don Juan*, *Kreiseriana*, and *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, for example, all take place predominantly in fictional worlds conjured up by Hoffmann. Throughout these works, he also calls upon librettists and composers to embrace their imagination when writing opera and reject tradition. Additionally, the way he discusses opera is highly imaginative. Rather than discussing the technicalities of opera and the suitability of subject matter based on taste, he explores the metaphysical implications of opera, its purpose within society, and its place within Romanticism as a whole, particularly its relationship to the Romantic quest for the Absolute.

Published at a time when German composers were still searching for what they could call a national style of opera, Hoffmann's opera manifesto provided new ideas and approaches at a time when they were particularly apposite. As one of the leading writers for the *AMZ* and with the increased social prominence of music periodicals in the early nineteenth century, Hoffmann was in a prime position to inspire composers in their approach to German-language opera. Tracing his influence on early German Romantic opera and how composers responded to his imaginative ideas, however, requires careful consideration, particularly due to the somewhat abstract ideas he presented. In this chapter I will provide an insight into the considerations to be taken when exploring Hoffmann's impact on German opera. With reference to Hoffmann's aesthetics, I will then show how in the Wolf's Glen scene from *Der Freischütz*, Weber uses a range of signifiers in the orchestra to denote different aspects of the drama. Finally, I will show how Marschner uses the voice of the orchestra in *Der Vampyr* to create a musical depiction of the power of the moon.

A number of Hoffmann's ideas can readily be found to have circulated in the early nineteenth century. The fantastic and the supernatural, for example, were prominent in the subject matter

of early German Romantic opera, one of the most famous examples being Spohr's *Faust* (1816).¹ In response to Hoffmann's call for the music to 'spring' from the libretto, composers also wrote more extensive scene complexes, using structures that suited the dramatic arc of the subject matter. The Wolf's Glen scene from Weber's *Der Freischütz* is one of the most famous examples of a Romantic scene complex and Spohr's *Jessonda* (1823) is another notable opera that utilises them.

Although Hoffmann did not explicitly call for composers to write their own libretti (rather, he seemed to call more for the two mediums to be united in the same Romantic spirit), there are notable attempts: Poissl had written the libretti for *Athalia* (1814) and *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia* (1815), Carl Loewe (1796-1869) had done so for *Rudolf, der deutsche Herr* (1825), and Albert Lortzing (1801-1851) had written the libretto for *Ali Pascha von Janina* (1828).

Poissl's *Athalia* was particularly successful after its premiere and was hailed by the *Münchener Theater-Journal (MTJ)*. Reflecting on Poissl's attempt to create a distinctive style of German grand opera, the *MTJ* claimed that he 'tried to solve this problem by uniting great power with charm. In this way his music is of a new kind: it is in more intimate accord with the drama and the motive of the subject, it emphatically seizes hold of the character of the action in the individual scenes, and it remains true to them'.² This review suggests that Poissl's approach to the music was considerably imaginative, as called for by Hoffmann. But most importantly, it suggests that there was a coherent relationship between the music and the subject matter. The music clearly left a remarkable impression on the reviewer, who recognised the way Poissl used the voice of the orchestra as a distinctive dramatic element.

Pinpointing these features as a direct result of Hoffmann's influence, however, should be done with caution. Hoffmann, after all, did not associate his name with his writings until

¹ Spohr's opera was based on Goethe's *Faust Part One* (1808), which spawned numerous musical adaptations in the nineteenth century. Other notable examples include Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (1814), Berlioz's *Le damnation de Faust* (1846), Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* (1844-1853), and Liszt's *Faust Symphony* (1857).

² *Münchener Theater-Journal* 1/7 (1814), 187-8, trans. John Warrack, see Warrack, *German Opera*, 289.

after the premiere of *Undine* in 1816.³ Therefore, it would be misinformed to say that Poissl's artistic choices in *Athalia* were a direct result of reading Hoffmann's work. It was likely that Poissl would not have known who the author was, if he had read them at all. Furthermore, Poissl had his own literary skills which, according to Warrack, was what encouraged him to write his own libretti.⁴ Had *Athalia* and *Der Wettkampf zu Olympia* not been the peak of his career,⁵ Poissl would have perhaps been recognised as a more crucial figure in the history of German opera.

Besides Hoffmann, there was a general consensus among composers to firmly establish the identity of German opera. Attributing major changes in style to Hoffmann, therefore, is difficult as his cause for German opera was shared by many. In fact, when composers did embrace Hoffmann's ideas for the advance of German opera, their admirable attempts generally failed. Weber's *grosse heroisch-romantische opera*, *Euryantbe* (1823), though somewhat in line with Hoffmann's aesthetics through its expansive, often through-composed orchestral music, did not match the success of its precursor and has since struggled to find a stable position in the standard repertoire. Schubert's *Fierrabras* (1823) is another example where high ambition was met with failure, though by this point Schubert had firmly marked his contribution to Romanticism through Lieder, not opera. Beethoven, the other leading musical figure in German Romanticism alongside Schubert, had received the highest praise from Hoffmann for his instrumental music. Beethoven, however, rarely wrote music for the stage. By the time of *Undine*, Beethoven had revised his only operatic attempt *Leonore* (now *Fidelio*) for the third time and showed no further interest in writing for the stage. But considering how Hoffmann's manifesto implies that a Romantic opera needs an expressive orchestral voice, if Beethoven had attempted another opera, then it too would likely have been praised by Hoffmann.

When considering the impact Hoffmann had on early German Romantic opera, one of the most insightful things to do is to look at how composers responded to his writings (if at

³ Allroggen, 'Hofmmann, E. T. A.', section 1.

⁴ Warrack, *German Opera*, 288.

⁵ Brown, 'Poissl, Johann Nepomuk, Freiherr von'.

all) and whether they were compelled to reflect and express their own views. Throughout his life, Hoffmann embraced numerous forms of art; we know he enjoyed painting from an early age and had experimented with dramatic writing as early as *Die Maske* (1799), for which he had written his own libretto. Together with his endorsement of Romantic ideas, Hoffmann's passion for the arts would have encouraged him to document his highly imaginative ideas. Hoffmann ultimately wanted to revolutionise (German) opera by reimagining what it could be. His writings were the means through which he could communicate his ideas and encourage composers to reconsider their own understanding of opera. Reflections in the same vein as Hoffmann, however, were rare in the early nineteenth century. One notable example, however, is Spohr's 'Appeal to German Composers' (1823) which was published alongside the premiere of *Jessonda*.⁶ As Hoffmann had done with *Undine*, Spohr used *Jessonda* to realise the ideas he had presented in writing. However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century, over thirty years after *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, that Wagner formulated a comparable manifesto within *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849), and *Oper und Drama* (1851).⁷

Despite Spohr's Hoffmann-style essay, it is more beneficial to study the life and work of Weber as to where Hoffmann had the most substantial impact on German Romantic opera. Weber's review of *Undine* (mentioned in chapter one) shows how he shared a similar appreciation of opera to Hoffmann, as both alluded to the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Weber's position alongside Hoffmann in the *AMZ* and their close friendship also meant that he was in the prime position for being exposed to Hoffmann's thinking and subsequently implementing his ideas.

⁶ Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera*, 20-21.

⁷ As will be discussed in chapter three, Hoffmann's earlier writings laid important foundations for Wagner's later conception of opera.

***Der Freischütz* and Romantic roots**

Weber first met Hoffmann on 3 March 1811 and was supposedly ‘fascinated by [his] Romantic aura’,⁸ marking the beginning of a professional relationship and close friendship. We know that Weber was intrigued by the *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (1814), which contained some of Hoffmann’s most extensive discussions on opera – *Der Dichter und der Komponist* and *Kreisleriana* – meaning that he would have been aware of Hoffmann’s radical ideas.⁹ Weber was also familiar with *Undine* from attending performances in Berlin as he prepared his review.¹⁰ But after the premiere of *Der Freischütz* on 18 June 1821 at the Berlin Schauspielhaus, the absence of a formal review from Hoffmann marked the end of their close relationship. Hoffmann’s silence confused Weber; a review would have naturally been expected in light of Hoffmann’s involvement in the preparations and also as a gesture of good will in return for his review of *Undine*.¹¹ The reason for Hoffmann’s silence is unresolved, but it raises the question as to what he thought of the work, in particular how it aligned with his own vision of Romantic opera.

The success of *Der Freischütz* was primarily due to its strong nationalist connotations, namely the forests and the xenophobic attitude towards ‘outsiders’, and has been the main text that has kept Weber’s name alive since his death.¹² *Der Freischütz* was unveiled when Germany was still a collection of states with their own governments and cultures, but there was an ever-increasing desire from the reading classes for national unity. Weber’s new opera resonated with the prevailing ideas of pan-Germanism and was an immediate success, a moment for which he had waited eleven years.¹³

Der Freischütz was nevertheless conceived in the Romantic spirit called for by Hoffmann. Weber had first discussed the idea of a ‘Freischütz’ opera with Alexander von Dusch (1789-1876) in 1810, but this initial idea did not materialise.¹⁴ It was not until 1817 that

⁸ Warrack, *Carl Maria von Weber*, 123.

⁹ Warrack, *Carl Maria von Weber*, 172.

¹⁰ Markx, E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 403.

¹¹ Markx, E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Cosmopolitanism, and the Struggle for German Opera*, 420-421.

¹² Dent, *The Rise of Romantic Opera*, 145.

¹³ Brown, ‘Weber, Carl Maria von’, section 1.

¹⁴ Brown, ‘Weber, Carl Maria von’, section 1.

he considered the idea again, this time with Friedrich Kind (1768-1843).¹⁵ Weber and Kind first met in 1816 as members of the Dresden-based literary society known as the 'Liederkreis' (Song Society).¹⁶ In response to German Romantic philosophy, the arts took up a more prominent position in German culture. Groups such as the Liederkreis provided a space for the bourgeoisie to engage with art in such a way that they did not need to conform to standard practices but were free to revel in their imagination. This directly opposed the professional artisan traditions that Hoffmann proclaimed would inhibit access to the spirit realm, providing a romantically fruitful environment for the birth of *Der Freischütz*.

For the basis of *Der Freischütz*, Weber and Kind turned to the *Gespensterbuch* (1811-1815), a book of ghost stories published by Johann August Apel (1771-1816) and Friedrich Laun (1770-1849).¹⁷ A brief synopsis of *Der Freischütz* is as follows, which is set in Bohemia at the end of the Thirty Years War: Max, a huntsman from one of the villages, has failed in a shooting competition and has been warned that he shall not be able to marry Agathe if he fails at the shooting trial the next day. Convinced by Caspar, he seeks out Samiel (the devil/Black Huntsman) at the Wolf's Glen that night who will supply him with seven magic bullets that will not fail. At the shooting trial the following day, Max uses his final magic bullet, appearing accidentally to shoot Agathe but instead shooting Caspar. Max confesses to his pact with Samiel and is deemed to be banished, that is until the Hermit steps in and decides that he be given a year of probation, after which he can marry Agathe.

According to Hoffmann, an appropriate subject matter would engage directly with the supernatural, which would often take the form of a myth, legend, or folk tale. In other words, the subject matter should be removed from everyday life so that the artist is forced to stretch their imagination and access a part of the mind where, according to Novalis, the Absolute supposedly resides. Despite its everyday setting, the supernatural elements of Apel's

¹⁵ Brown, 'Weber, Carl Maria von', section 2.

¹⁶ Warrack, 'Kind, Friedrich'.

¹⁷ Collections of short folk stories were popular in early nineteenth-century German literature. Their supernatural themes resonated with German Romantic philosophy. Other famous examples include Achim von Arnim and Clemens's Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805-1808) and the *Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1812).

Der Freischütz, i.e. the magic bullets and the magic of the crossroads (the Wolf's Glen), provided a suitable foundation for Kind and Weber to realise elements of Hoffmann's manifesto.¹⁸ The two artists realised Hoffmann's aesthetics most successfully in the opera's most iconic moment: the Wolf's Glen scene.

The Wolf's Glen scene: music as drama

Throughout most of *Der Freischütz*, the supernatural appears secondary to the simple quaint life that the villagers lead. This, however, is reversed in the Wolf's Glen scene, as Caspar forges the magic bullets, arousing fiery wheels, ghosts, thunderstorms, as well as a troop of dead huntsmen. These fantastical elements and the imagination required to bring them to life have resulted in the act 2 finale becoming a director's 'signature scene'.¹⁹ By bringing these different elements to life through the music, not only is an enthralling spectacle created for the audience, but, in light of Hoffmann's aesthetics, a fleeting glimpse of the Absolute is revealed.

When preparing the libretto, Kind made some notable changes to the crossroads scene to enhance its suitability for a Romantic opera. In Apel's account, Wilhelm (Max) goes there by himself and each supernatural occurrence is independent of the casting of the bullets.²⁰ Kind, however, used Caspar to lure Max into the Wolf's Glen, and by connecting the casting of the bullets to each supernatural occurrence, the supernatural became more prominent in the drama. Kind's decision to enhance the supernatural aspects of the plot is notable as this was one of Hoffmann's main criteria for a successful libretto. In line with Hoffmann's manifesto, Kind did not simply rely on the source material but used his imagination to produce his own Romantic libretto.

¹⁸ Warrack, *Carl Maria von Weber*, 210.

¹⁹ Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 186.

²⁰ Warrack, *Carl Maria von Weber*, 213.

Bar/Reference	Plot	Harmony
bb. 1-39, <i>sostenuto</i>	An offstage ghostly choir sing of a sacrifice that night	F# minor
b. 40	The clock strikes twelve	(pause bar)
bb. 41-50	Caspar summons Samiel	Adim7
bb. 51-109, <i>agitato</i>	Caspar tells Samiel his plan to ensnare Max	C minor
bb. 110-152, <i>allegro</i>	Caspar is left on his own to wait for Max	C minor
bb. 153-197, <i>recit.</i>	Max arrives	Eb major
bb. 198-235	Max sees the ghost of his mother	C minor
bb. 236-260, <i>agitato assai</i>	Max sees a vision of Agathe	A minor – C minor
bb. 261-275	Caspar summons Samiel for the casting of the bullets	Adim7
bb. 276-292, <i>allegro moderato</i>	Casting of the first bullet; the birds become restless	A minor
bb. 293-307, <i>poco più moto</i>	Casting of the second bullet; a wild boar appears	Bb (with sharpened fifth)
bb. 308-323	Casting of the third bullet; a storm appears	D minor
bb. 324-335	Casting of the fourth bullet; fire-rimmed wheels appear	C minor
bb. 336-372	Casting of the fifth bullet; a troop of dead horsemen appear	Ab (with sharpened fourth)
bb. 373-411, <i>presto</i>	Casting of the sixth bullet; more thunder and lightning	C minor
bb. 412-430	Casting of the seventh bullet; Samiel appears	F# minor

Figure 2.1: Structure of the Wolf's Glen scene

The Romantic spirit of the Wolf's Glen scene is evident by the expansiveness of its structure, which does not follow a conventional shape (see Figure 2.1). As a Romantic scene complex, it demonstrates well Hoffmann's anti-artisan aesthetics. In an eighteenth-century opera finale, the musical structure was generally dictated by harmony, which typically moved from the tonic to closely related keys before returning back to the tonic in a somewhat predictable manner. Consequently, the dramatic arc of the music and libretto were somewhat juxtaposed. Hoffmann was only one of a number of German critics who recognised this problem, which was supposedly 'exemplified by Italian opera'.²¹ In contrast, the Romantic scene complex embraced a more liberal approach to harmony (as with most music of this period), meaning composers had greater freedom to use the music, especially the harmony, in

²¹ Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera*, 8.

accordance with the drama. The Romantic scene complex, therefore, directly answered Hoffmann's call for individuality and his explicit instruction that the 'music should spring directly and inevitably from [the] poetry'.²² Rather than forcing the libretto into a structure that did not match the Romantic quality of the text, Weber's imaginative musical structure for the Wolf's Glen scene was built around the needs of the libretto. As this scene is focused on the supernatural, which does not conform to natural laws, it is especially fitting that the structure does not follow any standard formulae.²³

In his break away from tradition, Weber's unorthodox tonal plan – F♯ - C - E♭ - C - A - C - A - C - F♯ – is suited specifically to the Wolf's Glen. Throughout *Der Freischütz*, for example, the diminished seventh (F♯ - A - C - E♭) represents Samiel, which, as shown above, is embedded into the scene's key scheme, voicing the threat he poses to the world.²⁴ The absence of predictable modulations also reflects the spiritual unrest of the Wolf's Glen, another example of the subtle but dynamic relationship between music and subject matter. As Hoffmann would likely have argued, these are examples of how Weber allowed himself to be led by the Romantic spirit, i.e. the imagination, unfettered by knowledge of craft and skill, which, as a result, allows for this spirit, i.e. the Absolute, to be sensed in performance.

Throughout the scene, Weber uses a mixture of diegetic and extra-diegetic music, as well as conventional musical topics and symbols, to create a musical narrative in the orchestra infused with the spirit of the subject matter.²⁵ This helps unify the dramatic arc of the music and subject matter as called for by Hoffmann, thereby blurring the boundaries between the two (i.e. into a complete work of art, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*). For example, take the horn call on Max's arrival (see Example 2.1). Although Max does not play a horn, the horn call immediately conjures up the image of a heroic huntsman (Max); by the early nineteenth century, the horn call was widely recognised as a musical signifier to represent the topic of the

²² Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 197.

²³ Doerner, 'German Romantic Opera?', 22.

²⁴ Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 187.

²⁵ Musical topics did exist in eighteenth-century music, but, as Tarasti notes, they 'did not yet disturb the tonal hierarchy', serving 'only to animate the basic tonal unfolding of a piece', Tarasti, *Signs of Music*, 33. In other words, they were secondary to the harmonic structure of a piece of music.

hunt and was also associated with the forest.²⁶ In using familiar signs that were synonymous with aspects of the onstage drama, Weber's music is elevated from an accompaniment to a dramatic voice within the drama, one that is able to communicate its own ideas. The music, as such, functions as part of the narrative, clearly conceived within the libretto akin to Hoffmann's manifesto.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the Wolf's Glen scene in *Der Freischütz*. It features several staves: Fag. (Bassoon), Corni in Es. (E-flat Horn), Corni in C. (C Horn), and Max. (Maximilian). The music is in 6/8 time and includes a prominent horn call. The lyrics are: "auf einer Felsenspitze, dem Wasserfall gegenüber sichtbar und beugt sich in die Schlucht herab.) Ha! Furchtbar gähnt der düst're Abgrund! Welch ein".

Example 2.1: *Der Freischütz*, the Wolf's Glen scene, Max's horn call. Examples for *Der Freischütz* are taken from *Der Freischütz*, Op. 77 (New York: Dover Publications, 1977).

Weber similarly uses conventional musical topics at the casting of the fifth bullet when a troop of dead huntsmen appear (see Example 2.2). He is able to convey the image of huntsmen through the music by again exploiting the hunting topic: the prominence of the horns (notably centred around Eb), as well as the use of 6/8.²⁷ These horn calls, however, can be seen as diegetic sounds, i.e. they are the horn calls of the huntsmen, the choir *is* the huntsmen.²⁸ The music, as such, is one with the onstage drama – as Hoffmann would have said, it is rich in the spirit of the drama. In other words, the music has a crucial narrative role in its connection with, and spiritual embodiment of, the subject matter.

²⁶ Monelle, *The Musical Topic*, 35.

²⁷ Monelle, *The Musical Topic*, 55.

²⁸ Diegetic music in the orchestra is an important trait that Carolyn Abbate picks out in her conception of 'voice', Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, xii.

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 141, for the scene 'the Wolf's Glen scene, the dead huntsmen' from the opera *Der Freischütz*. The score is for a full orchestra and a chorus. The instruments listed are Fag. (Bassoon), Corno in B. (Horn in B-flat), Corno in F. (Horn in F), Corni in E. (Horn in E-flat), Tromboni (Trumpets), and Chorus (Tenor, Bass unsichtbar). The music is marked 'sempre tutto fortissimo possibile' and 'ff'. The chorus part includes the lyrics '(Hundegebell und Wiehern in der Luft.)' and '(Nebelgestalten von Jägern zu Fuss und zu Ross, Hirsche und Hunde ziehen in der)'. The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex, rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes.

Example 2.2: *Der Freischütz*, the Wolf's Glen scene, the dead huntsmen

Hoffmann's aesthetics can be interpreted most pertinently in the numerous orchestral voices at the casting of the third bullet. A violent storm with rushing winds arises, which Weber depicted through rapid ascending and descending scales in the strings (see Example 2.3). These can be recognised as signifiers for the topic of a storm, as they can be found in other examples of storm music, e.g. Vivaldi's *L'estate* (1725; see Example 2.4) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 (1808; see Example 2.5). The music, again, is able to communicate ideas on its own accord. But as an expression of nature, the storm music can also be seen as an expression of the sublime. As such, the music *is* the storm, expressing the ineffable spirit of nature. Furthermore, the storm relates to the idea of pathetic fallacy, i.e. nature taking on human emotions, which was especially prominent in Romanticism. In this scene, for example, the storm is also an expression of Max's inner torment as he faces the evil of the Wolf's Glen. It is worth noting that the use of music to express the inner world of characters was not only found in Romantic opera. Schubert's Lieder, for example, frequently have different voices; in *Der Erlkönig* (1815), for example, the repeated quavers both represent the horse galloping, but also convey the urgency the boy feels within to escape the Erlkönig. Both in *Der Erlkönig* and Weber's storm music, the music clearly communicates ideas without words, what the

Romantics would have argued to be under the influence of the Absolute and demonstrates the spiritual unity between the music and subject matter demanded for by Hoffmann. Of further interest is how Weber's use of multiple voices in the orchestra pre-empts Wagner's mature music dramas. For example, at the opening of act 2 of *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), the horns of King Mark's hunting troop are both diegetic sounds within the drama, but simultaneously extra-diegetic symbols in Isolde's mind.²⁹

The image shows a page of a musical score for an orchestral work, page 139. It features multiple staves for different instruments: Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Clar. cresc.), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns in E-flat (Corni in Es. cresc.), and Horns in C (Corai in C.). The bottom staff contains the vocal line with the lyrics "jagt Funken vom Feuer u.s.w.". The music is written in a key with one flat and a common time signature, with various dynamics and articulation markings.

Example 2.3: *Der Freischütz*, the Wolf's Glen scene, the storm

The image shows a page of a musical score for a violin concerto, page 210. It features five staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The music is written in G minor and 3/4 time, marked 'presto'. The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, typical of Vivaldi's style.

Example 2.4: Vivaldi, *L'estate, presto*, from *Violin Concerto in G minor, RV 315* (Milano: G Ricordi & C, 1950).

²⁹ Abbate draws upon the idea of multiple meanings and voices within orchestral narratives in *Unsung Voices*. Particularly noteworthy is her chapter on Paul Dukas's (1865-1935) *L'apprenti sorcier* (1893) in which she explores the idea of musical narrative and the past tense, a technique which Wagner used extensively, Abbate, 'What the Sorcerer Said', in *Unsung Voices*, 30-60.



Example 2.5: Beethoven, Symphony No. 6, *Gewitter, Sturm*, from *Ludwig van Beethoven's Werke, Serie 1: Symphonien, Nr. 6* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1863).

As part of Weber's overt nationalist agenda in his fight for 'the cause of German opera',³⁰ he relied on strophic folk songs throughout the majority of *Der Freischütz*. Yet despite their nationalist tone, they also align with Hoffmann's Romantic aesthetics. The purpose of these songs was to embrace the spirit of the *Volk* – the German people.³¹ Therefore, as Hoffmann would have said, the strophic songs embrace the spirit of the subject matter, creating a meaningful relationship between the two mediums. Their contrast with the through-composed music and harmonic instability of the Wolf's Glen also reinforces *Der Freischütz's* overarching theme of good versus evil, which is denoted through musical style.

Despite the Wolf's Glen scene's numerous alignments with Hoffmann's aesthetics, the scene also occasionally conflicts with Hoffmann's guidance. In *Der Dichter und der Komponist*, Hoffmann states that 'in opera the influence of higher natures on us should be seen to take place'.³² Yet in the Wolf's Glen, the supernatural and the forces of nature do not directly influence the plot. The storm music, for example, which in isolation embraces Hoffmann's aesthetics, does not in itself have an effect on the drama, but is confined to that

³⁰ Brown, 'Weber, Carl Maria von', section 2.

³¹ Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was an important figure associated with the idea of the *Volk*. He is remembered today for his collections of traditional German folk songs, which he published and used to promote the *Volk*, e.g. *Voices of the Peoples in Their Songs* (1773).

³² Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 197.

moment. Similarly, the ghosts of Agathe and Max's mother do not directly interact with Max, who observes them from a safe distance; the spirits are nothing more than a moment of heightened drama before the action quickly moves on to the casting of the bullets. However, in *Undine*, the storm (and therefore the storm music) is fully integrated into the drama: the storm appears when Huldbrand and the fisherman and his wife search for Undine, but the storm *is* Undine (at least, it represents her inner world) and is therefore integral to the action.

In fact, the necessity of the spirit realm across the whole of *Der Freischütz* can be called into question. Max's motive, i.e. the main driving force of the drama, is Agathe. His goal is to receive her hand in marriage, but to do that he must be successful in the upcoming shooting trial. Max would naturally take any help he could find to be able to get Agathe. He is not specifically concerned with experiencing any sort of epiphany from Samiel, whose supernatural powers are convenient for Max. The spirit world, therefore, is ultimately a means to an end, it is not embedded into the libretto as a dramatic necessity and could ultimately be replaced. Max and Agathe would still be united in marriage. Therefore, according to Hoffmann's stipulations, *Der Freischütz* may not necessarily be considered a Romantic opera, at least in its entirety.

Despite these limitations, and whether or not Weber's primary aim was that of a Romantic or nationalist agenda, *Der Freischütz* is enriched with Hoffmann's aesthetics. Particularly in the Wolf's Glen scene, his imaginative structure and use of musical topics and symbols created a dynamic musical narrative that works coherently with the onstage drama and gave the music its own voice. *Der Freischütz*, infused with some (but not all) of Hoffmann's key ideas, became a landmark in German opera, one that would inspire later composers who also strove for a national style of opera. One such composer who was greatly indebted to Weber, whose importance in the history of German opera is often overlooked, is Marschner, whose operas also embraced Hoffmann's ideas.

Heinrich Marschner

Marschner would have perhaps featured more prominently in discourses of German opera had the peak of his career not been caught between Weber and Wagner. His achievements and contributions, however, should not be overlooked, especially as Wagner was exposed to many of his works as a young musician. Despite his father's musical training, Marschner was discouraged from pursuing a serious career in music, encouraged to simply enjoy it as a pastime.³³ Yet alongside his formal liberal studies as a child, Marschner was able to receive some musical tuition from Karl Gottlieb Hering, August Bergt, and Friedrich Schneider. His exposure to the theatre, however, was limited in comparison to Weber. Nevertheless, his informal musical training may have helped nurture a more imaginative approach to composition, one that would have been approved by Hoffmann.

It was not until 1813 upon his move to Leipzig that Marschner became interested in opera. In fact, instead of focusing on his law studies, he became more interested in associating himself with two of the leading music critics of the day: J. A. Wendt and Rochlitz. His close friendship with Rochlitz began around the time Hoffmann was (anonymously) publishing *Don Juan*, *Kreisleriana*, and *Der Dichter und der Komponist* in the *AMZ*. Although we do not know for certain the extent to which Marschner was familiar with Hoffmann's writings, there is a strong possibility that there was some crossover between the two and that Marschner would have been familiar with Hoffmann's aesthetics.

Traits of Hoffmann's aesthetics can be found in the leading roles from three of Marschner's most famous operas: *Der Vampyr*, *Der Templer und die Jüdin* (1829), and *Hans Heiling* (1833). Each of the leading baritone roles symbolise a fusion of good and evil, natural and supernatural (as opposed to the polarised good versus evil in *Der Freischütz*). As noted by Derek Hughes, this can be compared to *Undine*, especially Undine herself, which 'portrays the human and the spirit worlds not as hostile opposites, as in *Der Freischütz*, but as mirrors of each other'.³⁴ Marschner's leading baritones act as bridges between the two opposing worlds,

³³ The following paragraphs draw information from Palmer's 'Marschner, Heinrich August', section 1, in *Grove Music Online*.

³⁴ Hughes, "Wie die Hans Heiling", 195.

through which the supernatural would supposedly better infiltrate the human world and as such realise Hoffmann's call for the 'influence of higher natures on us'.³⁵ Notably, they also all bear a distinctive resemblance to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. *Don Giovanni* (1787) had informed Hoffmann's *Don Juan*, which was published in the *AMZ* the same year that Marschner met Rochlitz. This figure of the 'tormented baritone', a prominent figure in early nineteenth-century opera, would also later find resonance in Wagner's operas, such as *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843).³⁶

Today, Marschner's operas are mostly remembered for their use of scene complexes and chromaticism. These are considered to be two of the main hallmarks of German Romantic opera, but they were not initially developed by Marschner. Spohr and Hoffmann, for example, had experimented with scene complexes and chromaticism in *Faust* and *Undine* respectively, and Schubert had extensively expanded the size of the orchestra in *Alphonso und Estrella* (1821) and *Fierrabras*.³⁷ These works, however, did not achieve the same commercial success as those of Marschner, whose style was more mature and refined. A particularly noteworthy moment from Marschner is the innovative scene complex at the opening of *Hans Heiling*. Unconventionally placed before the overture, the position of this scene complex in the opera directly answers Hoffmann's anti-artisan approach and his call for the music to suit the needs of the drama.³⁸ Marschner's *Der Vampyr* also holds an important position in the history of German Romantic opera, as it was based heavily on *Der Freischütz* and was particularly influential on Wagner in his early career.³⁹ As Weber had done in the Wolf's Glen scene, Marschner used the voice of the orchestra in *Der Vampyr* to denote the drama. As I will now demonstrate, this is particularly evident in Marschner's musical depiction of the power of the moon.

³⁵ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 197.

³⁶ Meyer, 'Marschner's Villains, Monomania, and the Fantasy of Deviance', 111.

³⁷ Palmer, *Heinrich August Marschner, 1795-1861*, 217.

³⁸ In 1925, Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949) revised *Der Vampyr* and rearranged it so that, like *Hans Heiling*, the overture was played after act 1, no. 5.

³⁹ Wagner took it upon himself to write a new ending to Aubry's aria 'Wie ein schöner Frühlingsmorgen' entitled 'Doch jetzt wohin ich blicke', Millington, Deathridge, Dahlhaus and Bailey, 'Wagner, Richard', section 11, iv.

Ruthven's revival music

Marschner's *Der Vampyr* was based on the story *The Vampyre* (1819) by John William Polidori (1795-1821) with a libretto by August Wilhelm Wohlbrück (1795-1848). It was premiered in Leipzig at the Stadttheater on 19 March 1828,⁴⁰ coincidentally the same year that Lindpaintner wrote his vampire-opera, also based on Polidori's *Vampyre*. The synopsis of Marschner's opera is as follows: The vampire Lord Ruthven has requested another year on earth before he must go to hell. His wish is granted by the Vampire Master, providing that Ruthven can sacrifice three victims by the following midnight. One of his unsuspecting victims is the young lady Malwina, who is set up by her father to marry the Earl of Marsden. The Earl of Marsden, however, is Ruthven. Aubry, Malwina's secret lover, recognises Ruthven, but has sworn to Ruthven an oath of secrecy. At the wedding of Malwina and Ruthven, Aubry can no longer keep his secret and so risks his life by revealing Ruthven's true identity. Ruthven is dragged down to hell and Malwina and Aubry marry.

To explore how *Der Vampyr* incorporates Hoffmann's aesthetics, I have chosen to analyse the instrumental melodrama (no. 5, *sostenuto*) from act 1.⁴¹ Instrumental melodrama was especially important to Marschner as a way of enhancing dramatic effects,⁴² which, as Hibberd notably points out, was originally used for 'dramas of suspense and heightened emotion'.⁴³ Particularly in *Der Vampyr*, Marschner uses it to emphasise the demonic power of Ruthven and the power of the moon (and indeed nature as a whole).⁴⁴ At this point in the drama, Aubry and the lifeless Ruthven cross paths. Ruthven asks that Aubry take him into the moonlight so that he can be healed. Aubry then realises who Ruthven is; Ruthven is the vampire who had previously saved his life. But because Aubry knows the truth, he is bound to an oath of secrecy. As the moonlight heals Ruthven, Aubry runs off terrified into the night.

⁴⁰ Palmer, 'Vampyr, Der'.

⁴¹ For a more comprehensive study on the dramatic significance of orchestral interludes of late nineteenth-century opera, see Morris's *Reading Opera Between the Lines* (2002).

⁴² Palmer, 'Marschner, Heinrich August', section 2

⁴³ Hibberd, 'Introduction', in *Melodramatic Voices: Understanding Music Drama*, 1.

⁴⁴ The supernatural power of the moon is also evident in the Wolf's Glen scene from *Der Freischütz*, which takes place under a full moon.

The supernatural power of the moon was commonplace in German Romanticism and resonated with Hoffmann's aesthetics. This scene embraces the Romantic notion of the sublime, i.e. the sheer inexplicable awe and wonder of the natural world. The sublime, as realised through nature, was especially prominent in Romantic painting. Artists portrayed nature (often in the form of mountains, forests, oceans, as well as the moon) in such a way that it would be the focus and would encourage the onlooker to feel overwhelmed in amazement at the natural world. One famous example of a Romantic painting of the moon is Caspar David Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819-20 and 1825-30; see Figure 2).



Figure 2.2: Caspar David Friedrich, *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1825-30), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438417>>.

Hoffmann recognised that we should strive for the Absolute through art. He believed that instrumental music, above all other art forms, had the power to express the sublime, i.e. what mere words cannot express. According to Hoffmann, music was ‘the mysterious Sanskrit of nature, translated into sound that fills the human breast with infinite yearning; and only through it can they perceive the sublime song of – trees, flowers, animals, stones, water!’⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Charlton, E. T. *A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 94.

Having described music as ‘the audible sound of nature’,⁴⁶ Hoffmann suggests that in opera, therefore, composers should express the power of nature through music. As demonstrated in Friedrich’s painting, nature should be a prominent ‘character’ in opera, having a seminal influential on the drama. Hoffmann, for example, realised this in *Undine* when Undine and Kühleborn manifest themselves physically into the natural world, which he then portrayed through the music.

In the *sostenuto* from *Der Vampyr*, Marschner integrated the role of the moon into the plot so that it had a supernatural influence on Ruthven (which Weber did not fully realise in the Wolf’s Glen scene). In response to Hoffmann’s instruction that the ‘music should spring directly and inevitably from poetry’,⁴⁷ the music in this scene becomes more dynamic as Ruthven regains his strength by the power of the moon. As a result, a musical depiction is created that reflects Ruthven’s increasing physical strength. Additionally, the music serves to voice the power of nature and its ability to transform Ruthven. In line with Hoffmann’s manifesto, it is appropriate that there are no words in this scene. Hoffmann believed that instrumental music has the power to express the unfathomable, specifically referring to music’s ability to serve as the voice of nature. Thus, it is most appropriate that the voice of the orchestra speaks for itself, for Hoffmann believed it to be the voice of nature.

No 5.

Example 2.6: *Der Vampyr*, act 1, no. 5, bb. 1-9. Examples for *Der Vampyr* are taken from *Der Vampyr: Grosse romantische Oper in zwei Akten, Klavierauszug des Komponisten* (Leipzig: Friedrich Hoffmeister, n.d., Plates 1356a, 1356b).

⁴⁶ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 164.

⁴⁷ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 197.



Example 2.7: *Der Vampyr*, act 1, no. 5, bb. 15-20

41 (Sie erreichen die Höhe. Aubry legt Ruthven so, daß die Strahlen des Mondes auf sein Antlitz fallen.)

cresc.

f cresc.

Example 2.8: *Der Vampyr*, act 1, no. 5, bb. 27-32

The *sostenuto* opens with an extended melody in the horn, accompanied by a march-like figure in the strings (see Example 2.6). As Ruthven begins to regain his energy, the music becomes more rhythmically active with ascending and descending triplet quavers in the strings (see Example 2.7). This is also an example of how Marschner incorporated chromatic melodies into his music to enhance the orchestral colour. As Ruthven's revival continues, the

rhythmic activity in the orchestra becomes increasingly agitated (see Example 2.8) as the dynamics concurrently increase and the orchestral texture continues to build.

Particularly noteworthy is a point after the orchestral climax (at which point Aubry flees the scene) when the woodwinds play tritone leaps in thirds (see Example 2.9). The tritone was widely recognised as the ‘devil’s interval’, implying Ruthven’s devilish revival. The shriek-like figure in the woodwind section is also reminiscent of *Der Freischütz*: Weber used a distinctive woodwind figure in association with Caspar’s evil ways (see Example 2.10), which, like the woodwind figure in Ruthven’s revival, is also marked by interval leaps.

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The image shows a musical score for Example 2.9. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The bass line features a triplet of eighth notes marked 'dimin.' and a series of chords. The treble line has a melodic line with tritone leaps. The second system includes woodwind parts. The upper staff is for Oboe (Ob.) and Horn (Horn.). The Oboe part has a melodic line with tritone leaps. The Horn part has a rhythmic accompaniment. The text '(Ruthven's Gesichtszüge fangen an sich)' is written above the woodwind parts. Dynamics include 'fp' and 'p'.

Example 2.9: *Der Vampyr*, act 1, no. 5, bb. 35-40

The image shows a musical score for Example 2.10. It is a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a series of tritone leaps (tr) marked with 'tr' above the notes. The dynamics are marked 'ff' (fortissimo).

Example 2.10: *Der Freischütz*, act 1, ‘Schweig!’

Although this musical depiction by Marschner is not as complex or developed as the Wolf’s Glen scene, there is still a clear parallel between the onstage drama and the music, as called for by Hoffmann. However, where Marschner succeeded over Weber is the influence of

a 'higher nature' within the plot. Marschner's music embodies the supernatural power of the moon on Ruthven – it is the voice of nature, the sublime. His music expresses the ineffable spirit of nature that is strived and longed for, thereby revealing a glimpse of the Absolute.

It is evident that Hoffmann's radical aesthetics can be traced within the operas of Weber and Marschner, two of the most important figures in German opera of the 1820s. In the Wolf's Glen scene and Ruthven's revival music, Weber and Marschner used a range of signifiers to create voices in the orchestra that denote the drama – voices that also allude to the Absolute. However, neither developed Hoffmann's ideas any further. In contrast, Wagner shared Hoffmann's radical conception of opera, which formed the basis of his own manifesto. As I will discuss in chapter three, Wagner's *Die Feen* looks ahead to his mature music drama and the ideas he presented in his own literary works. But as one of the last examples of this early style of German Romantic opera, *Die Feen* still remains firmly rooted in Hoffmann's aesthetics.

Chapter Three

Hoffmann's Influence on Wagner's Aesthetics of Opera: Musical Semantics and Scenic Transformations in *Die Feen*

His teaching and exercises soon filled me with the greatest disgust, as to my mind it all seemed so dry. For me music was a spirit, a noble and mystic monster, and any attempt to regulate it seemed to lower it in my eyes. I gathered much more congenial instruction about it from Hoffmann's *Phantasiestücken* than from my Leipzig orchestra player; and now came the time when I really lived and breathed in Hoffmann's artistic atmosphere of ghosts and spirits.¹

The above quotation is taken from *Mein Leben* (written between 1865 and 1880) as Richard Wagner recalls the insignificance of his early music lessons with Christian Gottlieb Müller (1800-1863). From Wagner's earlier letters, however, we can deduce that his indebtedness to Müller was far greater than he was willing to admit.² We can almost certainly conclude that this account from *Mein Leben* was no mistake on Wagner's part, but an attempt to set the record straight, to put forward a self-promoting account of his apparent innate genius.

Inconsistency and unreliability are issues associated with most of Wagner's writings. As a result, caution (and an open mind) is of crucial importance when studying the life of one of the most discussed composers in history.³ Returning to the opening quotation, if the validity of Müller's influence is one question that this excerpt raises, then its counterpart is the validity of Hoffmann's influence. There is in fact substantial evidence for Wagner's indebtedness to Hoffmann, as Hoffmann was not only someone that Wagner embraced in his youth, but someone whose mark can be traced all the way to his mature music dramas. In this chapter I will explore how Wagner's ideas about the role of the orchestra are grounded in

¹ Wagner, *Mein Leben*, 37-38.

² Spencer and Millington, 'Introductory Essay 1813-1839', in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 4. Wagner did not start dictating *Mein Leben* to Cosima Wagner until 1865, which gave him over sixty years to come up with an account he would deem correct.

³ Issues surrounding the validity of Wagner's own letters and the notion of the Wagner 'brand' have been explored in Vazsonyi's *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (2010), which has brought greater awareness to this historiographical issue.

Hoffmann's aesthetics. I will then explore how Wagner uses key associations and diegetic music in *Die Feen* to denote scenic transformations, showing how they embrace Hoffmann's aesthetics, but also look forward to Wagner's mature style.

Wagner's aesthetics of opera

There are a number of similarities between the early careers of Wagner and Hoffmann. Both were self-defined artists who from a young age had developed a passion for music. Neither, however, underwent the formal training that would have been expected of an aspiring musician. In this respect, Wagner followed in Hoffmann's footsteps by rejecting institutionalised training in favour of a self-determined style. They also both embraced a grand vision for the future of opera and art more generally. In both cases, their lack of formal training did not prevent them assuming the authority to publish their radical ideas (nearly thirty years apart) in what I am referring to as their manifestos.⁴

The ties between the two artists can also be traced to a more personal level: Adolf Wagner, Richard's uncle, was good friends with Hoffmann,⁵ whose 'fantastic tales had caught [Richard's] imagination as a boy'.⁶ Wagner's youthful fascination with the fantastic and the magical can be attributed to this exposure, which later found a voice in his mature music dramas, including (but not limited to) *Tannhäuser* (1845), *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) and *Siegfried* (1876).⁷ Although it is uncertain whether Wagner knew of *Aurora* and *Undine*,⁸ there is evidence that he had read Hoffmann's literary works and it can therefore be assumed he was aware of Hoffmann's aesthetics.

Despite nearly thirty years between their respective manifestos, Wagner's aesthetics of opera are comparable to Hoffmann's.⁹ The following themes are explored in both: the belief

⁴ For Wagner's manifesto, I am mainly referring to *Die Kunst und die Revolution, Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, and *Oper und Drama*.

⁵ Grey, 'Meister Richard's apprenticeship', 24.

⁶ Millington, *Wagner*, 25.

⁷ Siegel, 'Wagner and the Romanticism of E. T. A. Hoffmann', 598-600.

⁸ Warrack, *German Opera*, 383.

⁹ Besides Hoffmann, Wagner also drew on other sources to inform his manifesto. By the 1830s, Hoffmann's writings were somewhat out of date and a wealth of new literature was around for him to draw upon. One such source was Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) *The World as Will and Representation*

that opera has the power to reveal another world, the importance of the supernatural in the subject matter, the use of the orchestra as a dramatic agent, and the relative roles of the composer and the librettist. Both also wanted to increase the societal value of opera. Wagner believed this was possible through mythical subject matter, which could ‘convey the universal themes of will, renunciation, rejection of love, guilt and redemption’.¹⁰ Myth, Wagner believed, would lift opera from its mere entertainment value to a more truthful sphere, where it would ‘express the spirit of emancipated humanity’ and thus transform society.¹¹

Like Hoffmann, Wagner believed that the music of the orchestra should be used to express the drama. In Wagner’s own words, ‘in the total expression of the performer’s every message, to the ear alike as to the eye, the *orchestra* thus takes an unbroken share, supporting and elucidating on every hand: it is the moving matrix of the music, from whence there thrives the uniting bond of all Expression’.¹² This clearly embraces Hoffmann’s call for spiritual unity between the music and subject matter which, as explored in chapter two, found realisation through the voice of the orchestra in early German Romantic opera. Wagner, however, reversed Hoffmann’s aesthetics: whereas Hoffmann had suggested that the subject matter be the source of drama through which the music is conceived, Wagner proclaimed that the music should be the main source of the drama through which all other factors are united.¹³

The close relationship between Wagner’s orchestral music and the subject matter can be demonstrated through the transformations of leitmotifs in his mature music dramas – the ‘semanticization of music’.¹⁴ As noted by Scruton, ‘when such motifs recur, woven into the musical fabric, they recur as memories, burdened however with an accretion of thoughts and

(1818/19; expanded 1844 and 1859), which has been most famously associated with *Tristan und Isolde* (1865). From Schopenhauer’s work, Wagner embraced the idea of music having the power to represent the human will and sought to exploit and represent the struggles of the human will in his music dramas, Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*, 206. But the will, as an unconditioned part of the mind, can be understood as a manifestation of the Romantic Absolute.

¹⁰ Tarasti, *Semiotics of Classical Music*, 198.

¹¹ Millington, Deathridge, Dahlhaus and Bailey, ‘Wagner, Richard’, section 4.

¹² Wagner, *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, 335.

¹³ A more detailed insight into Wagner’s musical narratives can be found in ‘Wotan’s Monologue and the Morality of Musical Narration’ and ‘Brünnhilde Walks by Night’ in Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 156-105, 106-249, as well as Harper-Scott’s article ‘Medieval Romance and Wagner’s Musical Narratives in the *Ring*’.

¹⁴ Defined as ‘the motifs’ gradual saturation with meaning’, Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*, 357.

emotions, so that with each recurrence the meaning of the motifs is changed and enhanced'.¹⁵ Whether utilised by Wagner consciously or unconsciously, the subtle transformation of musical ideas empowers the orchestra in its ability to tell the story; it gives the voice of the orchestra an unrivalled authority, and invites interpretations on its own accord. The orchestra, therefore, becomes an influential voice as it can reveal what is beyond the immediate knowledge of the characters,¹⁶ and even deceive them.¹⁷ Wagner's mature musical narratives, therefore, and the way they relate to the subject matter are far stronger than what Weber, Marschner, and Hoffmann, were able to achieve; they do not simply narrate in a linear fashion, but transcend time and are able to express the unconditioned subconscious of the characters and the world around them (what the Romantics would have understood as the Absolute). Consequently, Wagner's musical narratives express the subject matter on a deeper level, bringing opera closer to the 'ultimate sublimity' of which Hoffmann spoke.¹⁸

Wagner also discusses his thoughts on the relationship between composer and librettist. But whereas Hoffmann had been more elusive of his opinion, which has led to different interpretations, in *Oper und Drama*, Wagner was far more explicit about the matter: 'They are One; for each knows and feels what the other feels and knows. The Poet has become musician, the Musician poet: now they are *both* an entire Artistic man'.¹⁹ Wagner appears more confident that they should indeed be one person. After all, he wrote all the libretti for his operas, thereby setting an example for others. But notably, and what Hoffmann does not suggest, is that in this dual role, the individual (and not only their work) is somehow transformed or enlightened.

Because of Wagner's fascination with Hoffmann from an early age, traces of Hoffmann's aesthetics can also be found in Wagner's early operas. The ideas within Wagner's prose works were not fully conceived in the post-Dresden years, but rather a culmination of his entire career to that point. *Die Feen*, Wagner's first and frequently overlooked opera,

¹⁵ Scruton, *The Ring of Truth*, 149.

¹⁶ Scruton, *The Ring of Truth*, 159.

¹⁷ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 157.

¹⁸ Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 195.

¹⁹ Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 300.

therefore, provides an important insight into the foundations that stimulated his later works. Consequently, it can be recognised as a pivotal moment in German Romantic opera, situated at a time when Wagner's own conception of opera was beginning to formulate. However, in the context of 1834, *Die Feen* is rooted in Hoffmann's aesthetics. Stylistically, it is closer to *Der Freischütz* and *Der Vampyr* than say *Der Ring*. In the context of this thesis, therefore, *Die Feen* can be considered one of the last examples of early German Romantic opera enriched with Hoffmann's aesthetics, before Wagner's own rapid reforms began to take place. As I will demonstrate, Hoffmann's influence in *Die Feen* is most evident in the musical depictions of scenic transformations.

Musical semantics and scenic transformations in *Die Feen*

Wagner composed *Die Feen* whilst he was working as chorus master at the Würzburg theatre, a position he had secured thanks to his brother Albert. As part of his role in preparing the chorus, he immersed himself in the music of Weber, Marschner, Auber, and Cherubini, to name but a few.²⁰ Upon setting out for Würzburg in January 1833, Wagner boldly declared in *Mein Leben* that he 'was now really a 'musician' and a 'composer', marking this point in his life as particularly important in the discovery of his identity.²¹ After all, he had previously wanted to become a writer and had completed an ambitious play titled *Leubald und Adelaïde*, which he had prioritised over his studies at the Nicholaischule in Leipzig.²²

The source material for *Die Feen* was *La donna serpente* (1762), one of Carlo Gozzi's *fiabe*. As explained in chapter one, this would have been identified by Hoffmann as suitable for the basis of a Romantic opera.²³ Though Hoffmann had singled out *Il corvo* as a prime example, the specific features of praise he picked out – 'conflict with the spirit world' and 'heroic self-sacrifice' – are also evident in *La donna serpente*:²⁴ the mortal king Farruscad, for example, is willing to die fighting for the return of his lover, the fairy Queen Cherestani.

²⁰ Millington, Deathridge, Dahlhaus and Bailey, 'Wagner, Richard', section 2.

²¹ Wagner, *Mein Leben*, 88.

²² Millington, Deathridge, Dahlhaus and Bailey, 'Wagner, Richard', section 1.

²³ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 197.

²⁴ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 199-200.

As both composer and librettist, Wagner made some notable changes to the plot. These included the alteration of character names (some of which he had taken from his previous operatic attempt, *Die Hochzeit*),²⁵ as well as more substantial additions such as Arindal playing the lyre to bring Ada back to life, who in Wagner's account was turned to stone (not into a snake as in Gozzi's play). The plot of *Die Feen* is as follows: eight years ago, Arindal the prince of Tramond fell in love with the fairy Queen Ada. For these eight years he was to resist asking about her true identity. But days before the end of his testing period, unable to resist his curiosity, he asks the forbidden question and is magically transported to a desert. Arindal is eventually reunited with Ada, but she warns him of further trials that will test his devotion to her, and that above all he must not curse her. Arindal fails the tests and ultimately curses Ada, turning her into stone. But with the help of the magician Groma and by playing a lyre he provides, Arindal is able to bring Ada back to life. Arindal is blessed with immortality and rules the fairy kingdom with Ada.

Of all of Wagner's works, *Die Feen* has perhaps had the most troublesome history. Wagner set the negative tone by refusing to get the work published on two occasions,²⁶ and it was not performed in its entirety until 1888.²⁷ With the astonishing artistic achievements of *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger*, *Der Ring*, and *Parsifal*, his early works were naturally overlooked and struggled (as they still do) to find a position in the standard repertoire. This struggle was recognised in a 1932 review of a performance of *Die Feen* in Stuttgart, which described the occasion as 'a milestone in Wagnerian history' that overcame 'the "impossible"'.²⁸ Free from the shadow of Wagner's later works, *Die Feen* was surprisingly well received. As noted by the reporter Herbert F. Peyser, 'the enthusiasm of the audience encouraged one to hope that *Die Feen* may achieve a measure of the recognition that ought to have been its share a century ago'.²⁹ Peyser's vision for the future of *Die Feen*, however, has not been fulfilled as he would have hoped. Performances in the second half of the twentieth century were scarce, and

²⁵ Millington, *Wagner*, 141.

²⁶ Syer, "It left me no peace", 325.

²⁷ Millington, 'Feen, Die'.

²⁸ Peyser, 'Wagner's *Die Feen*, 8.

²⁹ Peyser, 'Wagner's *Die Feen*, 8.

despite a recent flourish of performances since the bicentenary of Wagner's birth, prejudices still exist towards the work; in 2013, Wagner's first three operas – *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* (1836), and *Rienzi* (1842) – were all performed at Bayreuth, but only as part of the pre-festival, and *Die Feen* was only brought to life in a concert performance.³⁰

As with the discrepancy surrounding Müller's teaching, it becomes evident from studying Wagner's letters that he thought more of *Die Feen* than he was always willing to let on. From a letter to Rosalie Wagner in 1833, we know that he took great pride in completing the work, admitting that its completion was delayed due to his 'somewhat pedantic manner of writing out the full score immediately as neatly and clearly as possible'.³¹ There is also a record of him defending the work in a letter to Franz Hauser.³² Even to the end of his career, Wagner still held on to his first masterpiece, as he himself sang the Romanze from act 1 upon the eve he completed *Parsifal*.³³ But composed at a time when he was still experimenting and establishing himself as composer, especially one of opera, he would have wanted to downplay this work, as it would discredit his 'innate genius'.

As explored at the beginning of this chapter, Wagner's mature conception of musical narratives was akin to Hoffmann's aesthetics. But even as early as *Die Feen*, the uptake of Hoffmann's aesthetics is apparent. The following case studies will provide an insight into the techniques Wagner used to create musical depictions of the scenic transformations in *Die Feen*. Both examples also allude to the Absolute and the revelation of the 'romantic dimension' that Hoffmann speaks of in his manifesto. In addition, taking into account Wagner's own aesthetics, I will explore how traces of his mature music dramas can be found in this early work.

In act 1, scene 10 of *La donna serpente*, Gozzi's stage instruction is as follows: 'While Farruscad sleeps, the desert is transformed into a garden. The background changes from a desert, cliffs, and boulders to a magnificent shining palace. Meanwhile, sweet orchestral music

³⁰ Loomis, 'In Wagner's Backyard, Early Works Get Their Due'.

³¹ Wagner, Letter to Rosalie Wagner, 11 December 1833, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 17.

³² Wagner, Letter to Franz Hauser, March 1834, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 19-20.

³³ Syer, "It left me no peace", 325.

is playing. The music ends with a loud, boisterous *allegro vivace*. Farruscad is awakened by the noise, and looks around in amazement³⁴. It is apparent that this was to be a visual spectacle, a moment where the magic of the fairy world was brought to life in performance. In *Die Feen*, Arindal, in his despair at the loss of Ada, falls asleep in the desert, at which point Wagner includes a similar performance instruction (see Example 3.1): ‘The scene transforms into a lovely fairy garden, in the background there is a gleaming palace’.

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Die Scene verwandelt sich in einen reizenden Feengarten, im Hintergrunde ein glänzender Palast.

Allegretto.

Example 3.1: *Die Feen*, act 1, *Verwandlungsmusik*. Examples for *Die Feen* are taken from *Die Feen: Romantische Oper in drei Akten* (Berlin: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1912).

This scene is an early example of the *Verwandlungsmusik* (transformation music) that is commonplace in Wagner’s mature music dramas. In these later works, Wagner often used the exchange of leitmotifs in the orchestra to voice the scenic changes, but in *Die Feen*, Wagner used a simpler approach: key associations. The shift to E major at the beginning of the *Verwandlungsmusik*, for example, serves a dramatic purpose in the musical depiction of the

³⁴ Gozzi, ‘The Serpent Woman’, 206.

drama as it is the key associated with the fairies. By 1834, key associations were not uncommon in opera; Weber, for example, had successfully exploited them thirteen years earlier in *Der Freischütz*. But more than simply representing the fairy world, E major is also associated with the ineffable magic of the fairies (this becomes more explicit in the second example) and serves to express this. The voice of the orchestra thus expresses a world that cannot be expressed rationally, concepts that are beyond our limited understanding (the magic of the fairy kingdom), alluding to Hoffmann's 'romantic dimension'.³⁵

Another vivid transformation takes place at the end of *Die Feen*, which is also expressed through the orchestra. Arindal's magical lyre playing – an addition on Wagner's behalf and possibly a reference to Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607) – transforms Ada from stone back to her fairy form, before he is blessed with immortality and transformed. At the same time, the scene around them transforms from the desert to the fairy kingdom. In *La donna serpente*, Gozzi describes the scene as follows: 'Impetuously, [Farruscad] approaches the tomb. The serpent emerges, as before. After quelling his disgust, Farruscad kisses the serpent. The stage grows dark. Lightning and thunder. The tomb is transformed to a magnificent triumphal carriage. On it stands Cherestani, richly dressed as a queen. The stage lightens again'.³⁶ From Gozzi's stage instructions, the importance of the visual spectacle is again highlighted, particularly the prevalence of nature which would no doubt have been praised by Hoffmann.

Through the calculated use of diegetic and extra-diegetic music, this scenic transformation is expressed through the multiple voices in the orchestra that each have specific implications. In doing so, the music and subject matter are closely united as demanded for by Hoffmann. One voice is the diegetic music of Arindal's lyre, represented by the harp in the orchestra (see Example 3.2). This diegetic music conveys a number of ideas that relate to Hoffmann's aesthetics. Particularly important is the power of instrumental music, which in this case brings about the physical transformation of both Ada and the world

³⁵ As Hoffmann himself states, 'is not music the mysterious language of a distant spirit-realm', Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 196. Associated with the magic of the fairy kingdom, the music also brings about the transformation process, i.e. the visual drama is realised through the music as Wagner later called for in *Oper und Drama*, Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 335.

³⁶ Carlo Gozzi, 'The Serpent Woman', 236.

around them. In *Beethovens Instrumental Musik*, Hoffmann writes that ‘music reveals to man an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him’.³⁷ This example can be seen as an almost literal realisation of Hoffmann’s words; the music from Arindal’s lyre exposes this other world. Hoffmann then goes on to say that in this realm, one is able to ‘embrace an inexpressible longing’, an obvious reference to the Absolute.³⁸ In the context of *Die Feen*, Hoffmann suggests that Arindal’s lyre music is the agent which brings about the transformation of the desert to the fairy kingdom. Or to put it another way, by denoting the magic of the fairy kingdom, the voice of the harp provides a glimpse of the Absolute to the audience.

Larghetto. 433
(Arindal die Leier spielend.)

Arpa.

Ar. O ihr des Bu - - sens Hoch - ge -

Vi. I.

Vi. II.

Vla.

Vel. e Basso.

Arpa.

Ar. fühl - - le, die - - hold in Lie - - besich um - fahnt und - - du Ver - lan - - gen, hei - - les

Vi. I.

Vi. II.

Vla.

Vel. e Basso.

Example 3.2: *Die Feen*, act 3, ‘O ihr, des Busens Hochgefühle’

³⁷ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 96.

³⁸ Charlton, E. T. A. *Hoffmann’s Musical Writings*, 96.

The extra-diegetic music (the orchestra) is another voice that has dramatic implications. Of significance is the chord progression during the transformation (see Example 3.3). Bribitzer-Stull refers to this progression as the ‘transfiguration’ theme,³⁹ a sequence of chords that rise by a perfect fifth each time, first stated at the opening of the overture and, according to Moortele, the first example of Wagner’s use of ‘chord magic’ (see Example 3.4).⁴⁰ In his article ‘The End of *Die Feen* and Wagner’s Beginnings’ (2006), Bribitzer-Stull shows how the theme relates to the drama. He demonstrates how in the context of a double-tonic complex, the harmonic progression of the theme is used to shift the tonal centre from C (associated with the human world) to E (associated with the fairy world). Therefore, within the harmonic context of Arindal’s aria, the ‘transfiguration’ theme voices the physical transformations of Ada and Arindal.⁴¹ By introducing the parts gradually, Wagner also creates an aural representation of the cumulative fairy magic that Arindal conjures up, thereby adding an extra dimension to the musical depiction. Furthermore, the extra-diegetic voice of the orchestra reinforces the dramatic implications of the diegetic voice of the harp – it is the power of Arindal’s lyre music (the diegetic music) that summons the magic of the ‘transfiguration’ theme (the extra-diegetic music). The musical depiction of the transformation is enhanced further through Wagner’s treatment of the ‘transfiguration’ theme in the texture of the orchestra; during the transformation itself, the theme is presented in the background (p. 435), but once Ada has been transformed and the fairy kingdom is in full spectacle, it is played boldly in the foreground (p. 436). As such, the theme’s position in the orchestral texture voices the physical transformations of Ada and Arindal.⁴²

³⁹ Bribitzer-Stull, ‘The End of *Die Feen* and Wagner’s Beginnings’, 327.

⁴⁰ In his article, ‘The Sorcerer as Apprentice’, Moortele explores how this early example of ‘chord magic’ is used specifically in the context of the overture to *Die Feen*. Moortele also references the relationship between ‘harmonic magic’ and ‘magical phenomena’ in the subject matter of Wagner’s mature works, Moortele, ‘The Sorcerer as Apprentice’, 2.

⁴¹ Bribitzer-Stull, ‘The End of *Die Feen* and Wagner’s Beginnings’, 327.

⁴² The subtle and calculated structure of the music and how it relates to the subject matter looks ahead to Wagner’s ambition to use music as the ‘uniting bond’ of all elements.

Ob.
 Clar. A.
 Fag.
 Cor. E.
 Arpa.
 Ar.
 Vl. I.
 Vl. II.
 Vla.
 Vcl.
 Basso.

Gat - tin mir zu - ruck, mei - ne Gat - tin mir zu -

Fl.
 Ob.
 Clar. A.
 Fag.
 Cor. E.
 Tr. E.
 Tromb.
 Timp.
 Arpa.
 Ar.
 Vl. I.
 Vl. II.
 Vla.
 Vcl.
 Basso.

rück, mei - ne Gat - tin mir zu - rückt

436 Maestoso.

Fl. *p dolce*

Ob. *p dolce*

Clar. A. *p dolce*

Fag. *p dolce*

Cor. E. *p dolce*

Tr. E. *p dolce*

Tromb. *p*

Timp. *p*

Arpa. *p*

Der Stein hat sich allmählig in Ada verwandelt, diese sinkt
 Ada. entzückt in Ariadals Arme.

Jetzt kann mich keine Macht dir rauben!

Farzana und Zemina wenden sich entsetzt
 ab: Die Scene verwandelt sich in einen
 herrlichen Feenpalast, von Wolken umge-
 ben. - Auf einem Thron der Feenkönig, um
 ihn der Chor der Feen und Geister.

VI. I. *trem. p*

VI. II. *trem. p*

Vla. *trem. p*

Viol. e. Basso. *trem. p*

Example 3.3: *Die Feen*, act 3, Ada's transformation ('transfiguration' theme outlined)

Violino I. *ppp*

Violino II. *ppp*

Viola. *ppp*

Violoncello. *ppp*

Basso. *ppp*

Adagio.

Example 3.4: *Die Feen*, overture, 'transfiguration' theme (E - B - F# - C# - G#)

Wagner's use of diegetic and extra-diegetic music looks directly ahead to his mature music dramas. But in these later works, the diegetic or extra-diegetic presentation of individual ideas is more variable and complex. As Tarasti notes, this is important as the 'constant

oscillation' between diegesis and extra-diegesis 'may function as a transcending element'.⁴³ In *Das Rheingold*, for example, this is demonstrated in the treatment of the Nibelung leitmotif in the second *Verwandlungsmusik*: according to Tarasti, the Nibelung leitmotif is a musical icon, i.e. 'an extension of the sound of the anvils',⁴⁴ and whilst it is initially presented as an extra-diegetic icon in the orchestra, as the stage visually transforms into the Nibelung mines, it is transformed into a diegetic icon, moving from the orchestra to the anvils. This is comparable to the background-foreground presentation of the 'transfiguration' theme in *Die Feen*, which is expressed differently depending on the subject matter.

At the end of *Die Feen*, and indeed at the end of this period of early German Romantic opera, the revelation of Hoffmann's 'romantic dimension' is perhaps most fully realised. Hoffmann himself alludes to this in the final scene of *Undine* when Huldbrand is united with Undine in the world of water spirits. Similarly, at the end of *Die Feen*, the fairy kingdom is fully revealed and Arindal is united with Ada, both now immortal. However, in *Die Feen*, the 'romantic dimension' is revealed not only visually but also within the music;⁴⁵ the different voices in the musical depiction are specifically tailored to express the visual transformation, particularly the magic that can only be expressed through music. Principally, the music brings about the transformation of scene and character. It expresses the incomprehensible nature of Hoffmann's 'romantic dimension', i.e. the Absolute, and is also an early attempt from Wagner to use music as the 'uniting bond' of all the elements.

Despite being Wagner's first completed opera, a mature and imaginative approach to composition is evident in *Die Feen*. Wagner's early exposure to Hoffmann's writing played a seminal role in how he used the orchestra to create powerful musical depictions for scenic

⁴³ Tarasti, *Semiotics of Classical Music*, 236.

⁴⁴ Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, 77.

⁴⁵ The visual transformation was particularly important to Wagner, believing it should work coherently with the music: 'Eye and Ear must mutually assure each other of a higher-pitched message, before they can transmit it convincingly to the Feeling', Wagner, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, 318. Because *Die Feen* was not staged until 1888, we cannot know how Wagner would have approached staging this transformation. However, there is evidence that in the 1932 Stuttgart performance, lighting – the 'vogue' of German opera houses of the day – was used to great effect for the 'numerous scenic shifts and "magical" problems were easily and adroitly contrived', Peyser, 'Wagner's *Die Feen*', 8.

transformations. In doing so, *Die Feen* aligns with Hoffmann's aesthetics as not only is spiritual unity created between the music and subject matter, but the different voices in the orchestra express the supernatural qualities of the fairy kingdom, alluding to the ineffable Absolute. Hoffmann's writings, however, continued to be explored by Wagner beyond *Die Feen* and were an influential source in his own vision of opera, particularly in relation to the dramatic role of the orchestra. Hoffmann's writings, therefore, are an important source in understanding not only early attempts of German Romantic opera, but German opera throughout the nineteenth century.

Conclusions

The principle aim of this thesis was to explore how Hoffmann's aesthetics underpin milestones in early German Romantic opera. I initially explained how Hoffmann's aesthetics were grounded in Romantic philosophy, particularly the Romantics' quest for the Absolute and their mission to 'romanticise the world'.¹ I then explained how Hoffmann's aesthetics, infused with Romantic philosophy, encouraged composers to use the orchestra as an agent to express the drama. Finally, I traced how other composers embraced Hoffmann's aesthetics by exploring musical semantics in Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Marschner's *Der Vampyr*, and Wagner's *Die Feen*.

This thesis aimed to enhance the current understanding of early German Romantic opera by viewing it primarily in light of Hoffmann's manifesto, tracing his seminal influence. Because Hoffmann's operatic output was limited and has not entered the standard performance repertoire, his influence can often be overlooked. But as I argue throughout this thesis, it was through his literary output, his manifesto, that he had most influence. Because of his connections to the early Romantics, Hoffmann's manifesto was a melting pot of ideas from Romantic philosophy and music, with nationalist undertones. His manifesto, therefore, is important as it provides important and direct links between opera and contemporary cultural trends.

One of the most important threads in this thesis was understanding Hoffmann's manifesto in relation to Romantic philosophy. The early Romantics appreciated art for its ability to express things that, they claimed, language cannot – things pertaining to the unknowable Absolute. Similarly, Hoffmann did not appreciate opera primarily for its entertainment value, but for its ability to reveal 'the wonderful apparitions of the spirit-realm'.² When considered in the context of Romantic philosophy, it becomes apparent that Hoffmann's manifesto served two main purposes: firstly, to advocate the Romantic agenda,

¹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 8.

² Charlton, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, 196.

using opera as a means to reveal a glimpse of the Absolute; secondly, to give German Romantic opera a distinctive musical style. Drawing upon the Romantic quest for the Absolute, Hoffmann's manifesto suggests that the orchestra should express aspects of the drama that cannot be put into words or fathomed, an allusion to the Absolute. Consequently, the expressive range of the orchestra was to be increased, which was to be a defining feature that would distinguish German-language opera from Italian and French traditions.

Hoffmann's aesthetics called for composers to reject traditional modes of composition and rely instead on instinct and their imagination, i.e. where the Absolute was assumed to reside. He encouraged composers to tailor the orchestra to the individual needs of each opera. In the Wolf's Glen scene from *Der Freischütz*, Weber embraced Hoffmann's aesthetics by using musical topics, symbols, and diegetic music to create an orchestral narrative structured in relation to the subject matter. In numerous cases, the music *is* the subject matter. The choir at the casting of the fifth bullet, for example, supposedly *is* the collective voice of the huntsmen. Similarly, the music at the casting of the third bullet serves to express the ineffable spirit of the storm, alluding to the sublime, i.e. an inexpressible awe of the natural world, a manifestation of the Absolute. In *Der Vampyr*, Marschner also used the voice of the orchestra to express the sublime. But whereas Weber created a chronological musical narrative, Marschner's music is better understood as a musical depiction of the supernatural power of the moon. In both cases, however, the orchestra acts as an agent to express specific ideas relating to the subject matter, embracing the spirit of the drama in accordance with Hoffmann's manifesto.

Wagner's response to Hoffmann's manifesto was notably different in that he used Hoffmann's aesthetics as the foundation of his own manifesto. It is evident from reading Wagner's literary works that he shared a similar ambition and admiration for opera to Hoffmann. Indeed, there are many similarities between the two, most notably the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the connection between the orchestra and the drama. One notable difference between the two, however, is that whilst Hoffmann believed the subject matter should be the main source of drama, Wagner believed the orchestra should be used as the

principle dramatic medium. Wagner was responsible for one of the most rapid developments of German opera in the nineteenth century, but he embraced a vision that I argue is rooted in Hoffmann's aesthetics. Had Hoffmann not documented his ideas down so extensively, a crucial output of work that informed Wagner's manifesto would not have been available.

As demonstrated in this thesis, *Die Feen* holds an important position in the history of German Romantic opera as it bears traces of Wagner's later ambitions alongside Hoffmann's aesthetics. My analysis showed how through key associations and diegetic music, Wagner used the orchestra to express the scenic transformations in *Die Feen*. These were techniques he would go on to utilise and develop in his mature music dramas. *Die Feen*, therefore, can be considered as a marked moment in the history of German opera, a crossover between the respective thinking of Hoffmann and Wagner. More generally, my research draws attention to *Die Feen*, which meant more to Wagner than he was willing to admit. In association with the bicentenary of Wagner's birth, there has been an increased output of scholarship on Wagner's earliest opera, and the research of this thesis adds to this.³

Perhaps the most significant consequence that has arisen from this thesis is how Hoffmann can be considered not only as a contributor towards the maturity of German opera, but as someone of seminal importance whose ideas underlie some of the most important milestones. Whilst many narratives have Wagner as the overarching figure and goal, I kept Hoffmann as the main figure of my narrative and only considered Wagner in response to Hoffmann. By taking the focus off Wagner, this allowed me to convey with greater clarity how Hoffmann's ideas, eventually transmitted through Wagner, informed the development of German Romantic opera.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown how the radical ideas Hoffmann presented in his literary output, what I have referred to as his manifesto, underpin some of the major

³ Recent scholarship includes Brittner-Stull's 'The End of *Die Feen* and Wagner's Beginnings' (2006), Syer's "It left me no peace" (2011), and Moortele's 'The Sorcerer as Apprentice' (2019). *Die Feen* has also undergone a small revival in the twenty-first century with a 2009 production at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, the belated US staged premiere at Lyric Opera of Los Angeles in 2010, and a production in 2013 as part of the Bayreuth pre-festival. It was also due to be staged in 2020 by the Glimmerglass Festival but was cancelled as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

milestones in early German Romantic opera. What it has also shown is how Hoffmann's ideas were rooted in Romantic philosophy. Furthermore, this thesis has shown how Hoffmann's manifesto was seminal in the forging of a national style of opera, and that it left traces throughout the nineteenth century.

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