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Ariadne, *Daphne* and the problem of *Verwandlung*[1]

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Abstract: The theme of transformation (*Verwandlung*) plays a significant role in the work of Richard Strauss, from his *Tod und Verklärung* (1889) to his *Metamorphosen* (1945). This article examines two Strauss operas where transformation is a central aspect of the libretto: *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/16), libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and *Daphne* (1937), libretto by Joseph Gregor. Though each opera focuses on transformation, this concept is interpreted and realized in entirely different ways. For Hofmannsthal, *Verwandlung* is a journey outward to a new level of existence, attaining a new sense of humanity. For Gregor, transformation is an inward movement, joining nature, and becoming divine in the German-Romantic sense of the term.

Shortly before Strauss had put the finishing touches on *Daphne* (1937), his thirteenth opera, rumours had been leaked to the press that Strauss ('despite his seventy-two years') was composing a one-act mythological opera, the first since *Elektra* (1908), his fourth. The press release neglected another one-act mythology, the second part (*Oper*) of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/16), often ignored as such, given its status as 'opera-within-an-opera'. Though separated by more than two decades, with texts by two dissimilar librettists, *Ariadne* and *Daphne* are linked in a number of ways: by the vital presence of Bacchus (whether on stage or as an integral part of the narrative), by the extensive use of a light *Heldentenor* as the central male role (a rarity for Strauss), and – most importantly – by the fact that both operas are centred around the theme of transformation (*Verwandlung*).

Yet for Hofmannsthal, the librettist for *Ariadne*, transformation meant something quite different from what Joseph Gregor intended for his *Daphne* text. In the former, *Verwandlung* was a process of becoming at one with the social, with civilization and the community of humanity, assuring the continuity of life. For the latter, transformation involved the very act of leaving the human community, joining nature, and becoming divine. These two diverging views of transformation reveal two contrasting sides of Strauss's artistic personality: the Austrian and the German-Romantic. Though the later *Daphne* exemplifies the German-Romantic manifestation of *Verwandlung*, it was this type, connected with Utopian notions of *Bildung*, that provided a philosophical-aesthetic basis for Strauss at the beginning of his career, a career that saw a young composer working within the orbit of Wagner, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In a number of projects from the mid- to late 1930s, we see Strauss revisiting certain aesthetic ideas that had preoccupied him in his younger years.

Strauss, *Verwandlung* and the German-Romantic context

Strauss's preoccupation with the theme of transformation dated back, in its clearest form, to *Tod und Verklärung* (1889). Moreover, one may trace this fascination with

[1] I would like to thank Ulrich Konrad and Charles Youmans for their input and insight.

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transformation back to early readings of Goethe (Strauss's paradigm for the 'griechische Germane')[2] as well as Hölderlin, Rückert and others. Transformation, in this context, seems to be inextricably bound to the notion of *Bildung*, that uniquely German word comprising elements of education, cultivation and self-discovery.[3]

It is a utopian notion, not so much an achievable goal as a reason for existence. At the centre is the process of inner and outer spiritual-artistic contemplation (or even revelation) that results in a procedure where the individual is transformed, the part has found the whole, and the image (*Bild*) of the divine is revealed to us. As Herder once explained:

> In the spirit of man, [God] pressed [his] image, religion and humanity: the outline of the statue lies within the dark depths of the marble block; but it cannot carve itself out. Tradition and learning, reason and experience should do this.[4]

This theme is sharply articulated, though in a more secular way, in Goethe's dithyrambic, quasi-Pindaric *Wandrers Sturmlied*, a part of which Strauss set for chorus and orchestra in 1885. Towards the end of this choral work, the Wanderer asks not God, but Genius for protection against the storm:

> Wen du nicht verlässest, Genius,
> Nicht der Regen, nicht der Sturm
> Haucht ihm Schauer übers Herz . . .
>
> Ihr umschwebt mich, und ich schwebe
> Über Wasser über Erde
> Göttergleich.
>
> [Whom you do not abandon, Genius
> Neither rain nor storm
> Will breathe terror upon his heart . . .
>
> You hover about me, and I hover
> Across water and earth
> Godlike.][5]

[2] See Strauss's 'Letzte Aufzeichnung' (1949), in *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, ed. Willi Schuh (Zurich, 1957), 182: 'It is precisely with Goethe, in nearly every work and every phrase, that literary historians investigate the relationships between personality or experience, and the work of art – why doesn't anyone see what is novel in my works, how, in [these works], the individual becomes visible as only in Beethoven – this already begins in the third act of *Guntram* (the rejection of the collective), *Heldenleben*, *Don Quixote*, *Domestica* – and in *Feuersnot* the intentional tone of mockery, of irony, the protest against the run-of-the-mill libretto, the uniquely new, is obvious. Thus, the humorous satire of Wagnerian speech, as a result of Kunrad's speech (which should not be cut) this entire little non-opera came into being. The confession of *Intermezzo*, of *Capriccio*, is precisely what differentiates my dramatic works from the typical operas, masses, variations in direct succession to Beethoven, Berlioz, [and] Liszt. Music of the 20th century. The Greco-German!'

[3] A recent Strauss dissertation by Richard Wattenbarger cogently discusses the relevance of *Bildung* in twentieth-century Strauss reception. See 'Richard Strauss, Modernism, and the University: A Study of German-Language and American Academic Reception of Strauss from 1900 to 1990', Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2000.

[4] Johann Gottlieb Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*. Foreword by Gerhard Schmidt. (Darmstadt, 1966), 248–9.

[5] Michael Hamburger, trans., *Goethe: Poems and Epigrams* (London, 1983), 17–18.

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One can easily imagine how such rhapsodic, dynamic writing – which connects an artist's *Genius* with a higher cosmic force – appealed to a brash, egotistical young composer who ranked his own *Genius* above most of his contemporaries. Eleven years later, Strauss was drawn to that same type of ecstatic, ego-assertive writing in Nietzsche, resulting in the tone poem, *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

In Strauss's view, Goethe and Nietzsche were cut from the same cloth, despite the latter's critique of *Bildung* in *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*. Nietzsche's complaint against *Bildung* was less an attack on the fundamental concept than on the fact that it had become conservative, institutionalized and escapist during a time of an increasingly technological, fragmented and differentiated modern society:

> Our modern *Bildung* is . . . really not *Bildung* at all, what remains are the ideas and sensations of *Bildung*, but no *Bildung*-resolve . . . The inner process, that is the thing itself, that is the real '*Bildung*'.[6]

Both writers impressed Strauss in the way they disparaged their complacent, contemporary German societies, which leaned towards *Bürgertum* rather than *Menschlichkeit*; the latter could only be attained through the act of individual artistic creation or contemplation.

This belief is the framework for *Tod und Verklärung*, where artistic contemplation leads to the revelation of an artistic Ideal in the individual rather than to the discovery of the divine, as Goethe might have argued. This most metaphysical of Strauss's tone poems seems a curious choice after the provocative, earthly *Don Juan*. Indeed, *Tod und Verklärung* stands apart from all his other nineteenth-century tone poems in the way it sustains an elevated, serious mode of expression not to be equalled until the *Metamorphosen* more than five decades later. *Tod und Verklärung* is a Janus-faced work: rooted in the metaphysics of Schopenhauer, yet definitely an artwork of this world. In this work, an artist, at the threshold of death, at the moment of keenest insight, is transfigured by finding the artistic Ideal from within.[7]

The biographical context is equally important, for at this time in Strauss's life he was seeking a philosophical basis to support an as-yet unreflective, if not idiosyncratic, atheism. The connection between Strauss's scepticism about a metaphysical hereafter and Goethe might appear strained, but it was Goethe's highly individualized, unsystematic style of Christianity, his belief in the potential for the divine in human work that so appealed to Strauss.[8] 'Whoever ceaselessly strives, can be redeemed', Goethe reminds us in *Faust*, Part II, and, for Strauss, artistic work

[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (II) in *Gesammelte Werke* VI (Munich, 1922), 259. Nietzsche goes on to criticize what he terms the *Bildung*-Philistine.

[7] A comparison to Mahler's Second Symphony ('Resurrection'), which ends with the text, 'What you have overcome shall lead you to God', illustrates the differing world views of these two composers: one in search of a utopian, metaphysical afterlife, and the other finding the potential for transfiguration through one's earthly work.

[8] Otto Klemperer reports Strauss once questioning Mahler's post-Wagnerian, Parsifal-like obsession with *Erlösung* (Redemption). With tongue firmly in cheek, Strauss purportedly observed: 'When I sit at my desk in the morning and an idea comes into my head, I surely don't need redemption'. See 'Memories of Mahler', *Klemperer on Music: Shavings from a Musician's Workbench*, ed. Martin Anderson (Exeter, 1986), 148.

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is the closest thing to a divinity. Schopenhauer's musical metaphysics, as much as it appealed to Wagner and most composers of Strauss's generation, fell short. For Schopenhauer's ultimate aim, as articulated in Book Four of his *World as Will and Representation*, is ascetic [*asketisch*] self-negation, something quite at odds with Strauss's celebration of the Individual.[9]

Hofmannsthal, *Verwandlung* and the Austrian context

The remainder of Strauss's tone poems and his first four operas overtly rejected Schopenhauer and embraced the anti-metaphysical Nietzsche, Stirner, and the notion of ego-assertion, that is until *Der Rosenkavalier*, his first real collaboration with the Austrian poet, Hugo von Hofmannsthal. In this work, and the libretti that followed, Hofmannsthal sought to steer Strauss away from Nietzsche, from the German, offering Strauss a different view of transformation, from a decidedly Viennese perspective and from the Austrian-Baroque tradition.[10] In *Ariadne auf Naxos* Hofmannsthal offered Strauss his first, clear alternative.

Hofmannsthal well understood the *Innerlichkeit* of contemporary German thought; he was, likewise, cognizant of that inwardness in his own early lyric poetry. But, as we know, he also realized that he had to make a break with the aesthetic poets of his day, to find a path from 'pre-existence' (dream) to 'existence' (reality); as he once termed it, 'Vom Tempel auf die Strasse' ('from the temple to the street').[11] The world of 'pre-existence', despite its lyrical, even ecstatic qualities, amounts only to a solipsistic prefiguration of the complexities of active life. Hofmannsthal asserted that 'if we wish to find ourselves, we cannot descend into our inner being: we are to find ourselves outwardly, from without'. Thus, we make the journey (or the transformation) from 'Ich' to 'Über-ich', from 'Werden' to 'Sein'.[12]

[9] Günter Zöllner discusses Schopenhauer's ultimate call for the negation of the will – a curious blend of Christian Grace and Buddhistic asceticism – in his essay, 'Schopenhauer on the Self', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, ed. Christopher Janaway (Cambridge, 1999), 38. The sexual act, for Strauss, was not to be sublimating or transfiguring, as in *Tristan*, or denied, as in *Parsifal*, rather it should simply be humanly enjoyed – as in Strauss's *Don Juan* or *Feuersnot* – for what it is. Just a few years after *Don Juan*, a recently married Strauss wrote a diary entry describing the blissful, post-coital expression on a woman's face. 'That smile – I have never seen such [an] expression of the true sensation of happiness! Is not the way to the redemption of the Will to be sought here (in the condition of the receiving woman)! . . . Affirmation of the Will must properly be called affirmation of the body'. (Richard Strauss Archiv, Garmisch.)

[10] Michael Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theater and Ideology, 1890–1938* (Ithaca, 1990). See, in particular, Chapters 1 ('The Ideology of the Baroque') and 5 ('Allegory and Authority in the Work of Hugo von Hofmannsthal').

[11] In his seminal essay marking the twentieth anniversary of Hofmannsthal's death, Richard Alewyn shows how the poet himself made this transformation from the 'priesthood' of aestheticism to humanity with all its responsibilities. That journey is to be found in 'love, marriage, [and] . . . society'. See his 'Hofmannsthals Wandlung', in *Über Hofmannsthal*, 3rd edn (Göttingen, 1963), 178.

[12] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Blicke: Essays*, ed. Thomas Fritz (Leipzig, 1987), 106.

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Though all of Hofmannsthal's opera libretti deal with the concept of transformation, none focuses on the theme more sharply than *Ariadne auf Naxos*.[13] Because of all the various intersections between the ridiculous and the sublime (*opera seria* and *commedia dell'arte*), *Ariadne* is one of Strauss's and Hofmannsthal's least understood operas.[14] No opera since *Così fan tutte* (Strauss's favourite stage work by Mozart) had been at once so light-hearted and so profound. Zerbinetta leads the *commedia dell'arte* troupe positioned on the island of Naxos to offer comfort to the lamenting Ariadne. Yet, despite her plain talk and frilly coloratura, Zerbinetta is full of perception and insight into the human condition of Ariadne's loss, and Ariadne is far more human than the stiff, stylized mythological character she superficially appears to be.[15]

It is well known, of course, that Strauss was not excited about composing an opera he believed to be overly abstract and schematic, and he put himself squarely in the camp with his potential audience. In order to lure Hofmannsthal away from the abstract and into more concrete ways of thinking, Strauss asked his librettist to 'think of the dumb oxen in the audience, beginning with the composer'.[16] It was not until Hofmannsthal's famous *Ariadne-Brief* of July 1911 that Strauss had a change of heart:

> What [*Ariadne*] is all about is one of the straightforward and stupendous problems of life: fidelity; whether to hold fast to that which is lost, to cling to it even in death – or to live, to live on, to get over with it, to transform oneself, to sacrifice the integrity of the soul and yet in this transmutation to preserve one's essence, to remain a human being and not to sink to the level of beast, which is without recollection.[17]

With remarkable clarity, this letter stripped away the Baroque surface of *Ariadne* and revealed to Strauss an essential human element. The central focus of the opera was ultimately on sexual fidelity and the importance of rising beyond one's present self, yet in that process preserving one's inner essence.[18] Such a dialectical problem, the paradox of forgetting while remembering, could only be solved by the act of

[13] The first version of *Ariadne* dates from 1912, the second version from 1916.

[14] Not unlike Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (of the same year), *Ariadne auf Naxos* offers up *commedia dell'arte* in an alienating setting. In the case of Strauss and Hofmannsthal, the setting is the Naxos, where Zerbinetta and her troupe (Harlekin, Scaramuccio, Truffaldino and Brighella) seek to comfort the lamenting Ariadne.

[15] An otherwise bizarre production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Salzburg Festival (2001) tried, if clumsily, to point out this important fact.

[16] Letter to Hofmannsthal (19 July 1911), *Richard Strauss-Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Briefwechsel* (Zurich, 1978), 136.

[17] Letter to Strauss (July 1911), *ibid.*, 134. English translation in *The Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, ed. Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers (Cambridge, 1980), 94.

[18] Hofmannsthal returned to this theme in *Die ägyptische Helena*, when husband and wife, Menelas and Helen, experience this same process. Helen, much like Ariadne, offers herself to death (risking her life by offering her husband the potion of remembrance) and is similarly transfigured. In turn she transforms her husband, for the jealous Menelas is finally able to resolve the good and bad in Helen (and himself) and – reborn – he accepts her: 'Ever the same, ever new'.

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transformation. This theme strongly resonated with Strauss who believed he could now get beyond the world of abstraction, beyond the seemingly stiff, lifeless figures of *opera seria* and *commedia dell'arte*.

Nonetheless, as reactions to the première (25 October 1912) and early performances suggest, the audience proved to be the very 'oxen' that Strauss had feared, though they were, of course, partly right.[19] The original work consisted of two parts: Hofmannsthal's reworked translation of Molière's play, *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, followed by the one-act opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. But the Molière treatment served only to obscure Hofmannsthal's central concept of Ariadne's transformation and, with the encouragement of Strauss, part one was dropped. In its place stood an operatic introduction (*Vorspiel*) that takes us behind the scenes shortly before the performance of the opera-with-the-opera (*Oper*). This backstage perspective offered Strauss and Hofmannsthal the opportunity to make strategic allusions to Ariadne's transformation in the ensuing *Oper*. Poet and composer were necessarily equal partners in achieving this essential intelligibility, though the collaborative process was not without often-heated exchanges.

References to transformation abound in the *Vorspiel*, and Hofmannsthal even paraphrased his own *Ariadne-Brief* in the voice of the Composer, who – given the character's artistic temperament – may be seen less as an extension of Strauss, the composer, than of Hofmannsthal himself:

> [Ariadne] is the woman who does not forget. . . . She gives herself to Death – is no longer there – disappears – is reborn – throws herself again in [Bacchus'] arms. Then he becomes a god! How else in the world could one become a god except through this experience?[20]

There is, however, a vital new element to this extension of the Ariadne-Brief, and that is Bacchus' own transformation in the process. Through mutual love, Ariadne and Bacchus are mutually (Hofmannsthal would say 'allomatically') transformed.[21] Mutual transformation, as Donald Daviau has observed, 'accomplishes the important additional function of restoring contact with the world'.[22] If, in the first version of *Ariadne*, the *Oper* is remarkably schematic, it is pared down even further in the second version, as Hofmannsthal (prodded by Strauss) focuses more efficiently on the principle of transformation. Both fundamentally agreed that the final scene must lead to an unambiguous culmination. Indeed, while revising, Strauss suggested doing

[19] The revised version premiered in Vienna (16 October 1916) and was a far greater success; it remains the commonly performed version.

[20] 'Sie gibt sich dem Tod hin – ist nicht mehr da – weggewischt – stürzt sich hinein ins Geheimnis der Verwandlung – wird neu geboren – entsteht wieder in seinen Armen! Daran wird er zum Gott. Worüber in der Welt könnte eines zum Gott werden als über diesem Erlebnis?'

[21] One of the earliest discussions of the 'allomatic', or mutual transformation, in Hofmannsthal's work is by Judith Ryan, 'Die "allomatische Lösung": Gespaltene Personlichkeit und Konfiguration bei Hugo von Hofmannsthal', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 44 (1970): 189–207.

[22] George J. Buelow and Donald G. Daviau, *The Ariadne auf Naxos of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss* (Chapel Hill, 1975), 149.

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Table 1. *Ariadne auf Naxos, Oper*, Scene 3 ('III. Szene')

Section 1					
Trio	Bacchus	Trio	Bacchus (&A.)	Trio	Bacchus
C♯	c♯/E	D♭ (C♯)	A (B♭)	B♭	IV/B♭
'Ein schönes Wunder'	'Circe'	'Töne'	'Circe'	'Töne'	'Circe'
Transition I	**Section 2**		**Section 3**		
Ariadne	Ariadne		Bacchus		
(V/B♭)	B♭		A–E		
'Theseus!'	'Ich grüße dich'		'Bin ich ein Gott'		
Transition II					
Ariadne	Bacchus				
C	A				
'Gibt es kein hinüber?'	'Du! Alles du!'				
Section 4					
Bacchus	Trio & Ariadne	Zerbinetta	Ariadne & Bacchus		
D♭	D♭	D♭ (V/D)	D♭		
'Die Höhle da!'	'Töne,' etc.	'Kommt der neue Gott'			
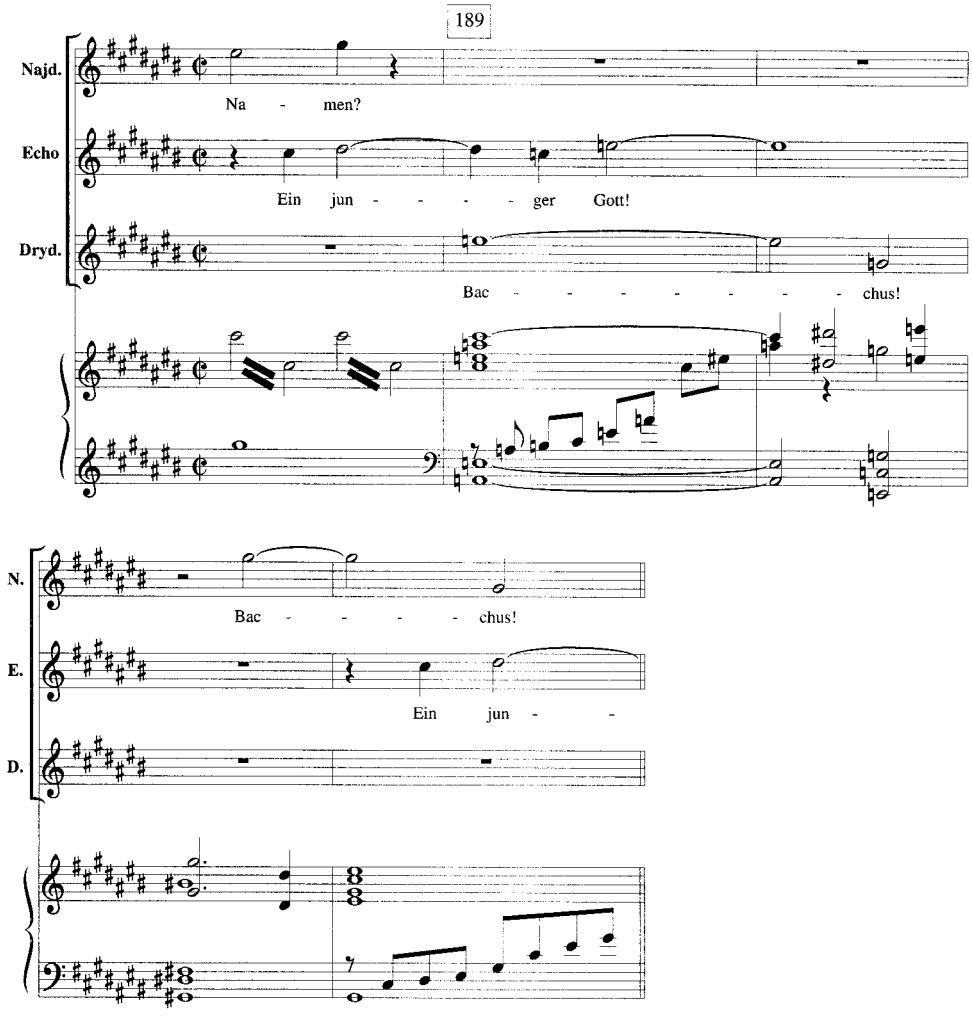
away entirely with Zerbinetta's reappearance at the end of the opera. Hofmannsthal balked at the idea, but they worked out a compromise where – though she has a few lines – the aura of transformation is not broken.

More important, in the second version, is the way in which Strauss heightened this aura, preparing for us for it thematically, timbrally and harmonically. With the substituted C major *Vorspiel* (a *tabula rasa* of no sharps, no flats, no nonsense) the everyday, behind-the-scenes world is firmly established. The transformational journey may be the space of a mere semitone from C to D♭, but it will take the duration of the entire two-part opera (from the opening of the *Vorspiel* to the end of the *Oper*) to get there.

The semitone may well be the closest interval in Western tonal music, but Strauss recognized them as 'die zwei entferntesten Tonarten' (the two most distant tonalities), as he discussed the relationship between nature (C) and humanity (B) in *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896). Strauss continued to articulate powerful semitone dualities in his music, even in the operas, such as in *Der Rosenkavalier*, where the banal realm of Baron Ochs (C major) is worlds apart from the sublime D♭ major Final Trio, or where, in Act I, Octavian's libidinal E major is tempered by the Marschallin's serene E♭.

Though the score to the *Oper* is clearly apportioned into three scenes, only the last one (the scene of transformation) is designated in the published score as such ('*III. Szene*'). True, this final scene is the most self-contained, sealed off from the preceding by a C♯ tremolo, but it nonetheless depends upon our memory of the first two scenes: scene 1, Ariadne's scene, revolving around her B♭ major, and scene 2, the *commedia dell'arte*'s scene moving between F and D major. The great mastery of this final scene is the way in which both poet *and* composer skilfully pace events (in four subdivisions) leading up to the transformation (see Table 1). Section 1 (the space belonging to the Nymphs) heralds the arrival of Bacchus, who is disoriented in his new surroundings. In section 2 (Ariadne's space), she accepts the fact that 'Hermes' (in fact, Bacchus) has come to fetch her ('Es ist der schöne stille Gott!

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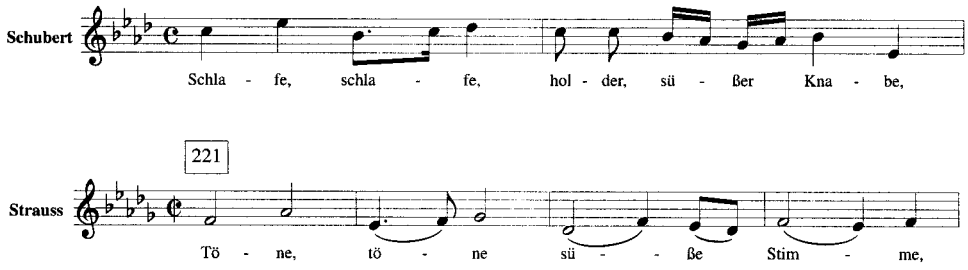


Ex. 1: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Oper, reh. 189.

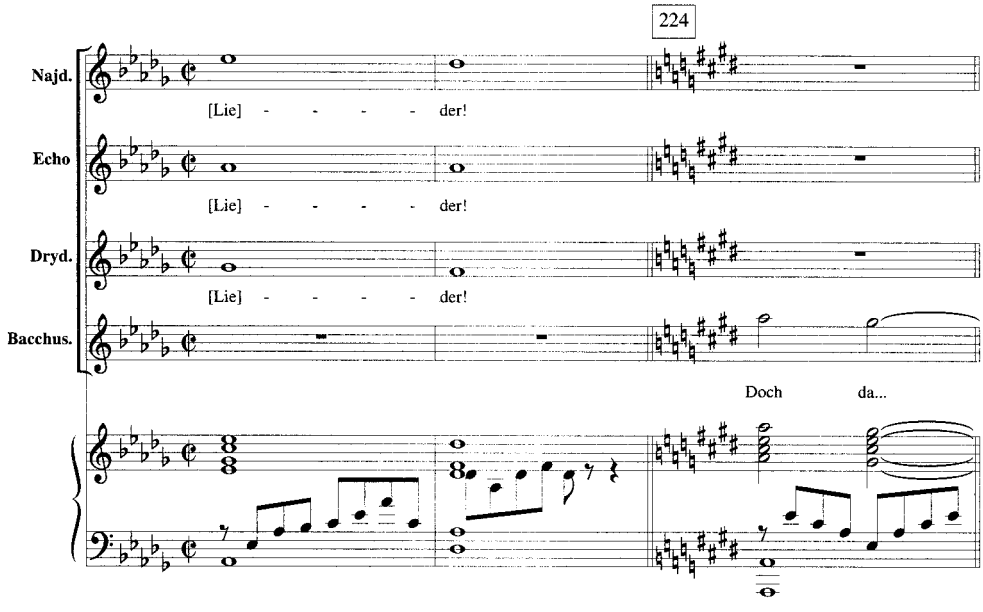
Ich grüße dich, du Bote aller Boten!'). In section 3 (Bacchus's space), he realizes his own godhead ('Bin ich ein Gott, schuf mich ein Gott'), and, in section 4, they are mutually ('allomatically') transformed.

The harmonic pacing is no less ingenious. Indeed, that initial, sudden move down a semitone (from D to C♯/D♭), which begins scene 3 poses a potential problem: how does one articulate the tonality of transformation (suggesting that this scene is like no previous one), yet indicate that transformation has not yet taken place? Space does not permit a full discussion, though a few strategies are worthy of mention (see Table 1). An abrupt change in tempo ('Sehr schnell') and timbre (tremolo) mark the abrupt semitone drop to C♯ opening scene 3. This opening section, articulated by the trio of nymphs, often breaks out briefly into A major, suggesting that this opening is more about Bacchus than anything else. Indeed, the shift to A occurs at the very moment the nymphs utter his name (see Ex. 1). By reh.

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Ex. 2: A comparison of Schubert, *Wiegenlied*, D. 498, and Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Oper, reh. 221.



Ex. 3: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Oper, reh. 224.

200 the nymphs shift to Bacchus's primary E major (which Strauss later uses as a Bacchian signifier in *Daphne*). If the fact that Bacchus has not yet been transformed is still not well enough understood, the nymphs clearly establish this fact at reh. 206, where we temporarily return to the harmony of the *Vorspiel*, C major. Equally explicit are Strauss's articulation of the 'everyday' C major and Hofmannsthal's text, 'Nicht verwandelt, nicht verbunden' ('untransformed, unconnected').

Subtler, however, is the way in which Strauss handles the Nymphs' Schubertian 'Töne, Töne, süße Stimme', a trio based on Schubert's *Wiegenlied*, 'Schlafe, schlafe, holder süsser Knabe' (Ex. 2). Though in the transformational tonality of D♭, Strauss avoids the root position throughout, offering us only the promise of transformation. Any dream of transformation this soon in the process is shattered by the Bacchian breakthrough in A ('Doch da ich unverwandelt'), prepared for by Example 3. But a reprise of the Schubertian Trio finds a more appealing tonality: Ariadne's B♭ major, which was fully established in scene 1 of the *Oper*; Bacchus is lured into her

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tonal and physical realm, but not without creating fear and confusion. She believes she has seen Theseus (see Table 1, Transition I) and the harmonic instability (the sonic signifier for her confusion) is not resolved until the end of Transition I (V/B♭). She now believes her visitor to be Hermes, the god of death. Her serene acceptance of death is the most poignant moment in scene 3, a moment of unprecedented harmonic relaxation, with brief thematic allusions to her first scene, culminating in the moment where Ariadne thinks she is giving herself up to Hermes (Ex. 4). Strauss, however, negates her delusion, taking us as far away (via semitone or tritone) from B♭ major as he can, as Bacchus (Table 1, section 3) begins a moment of self-discovery ('Bin ich ein Gott').
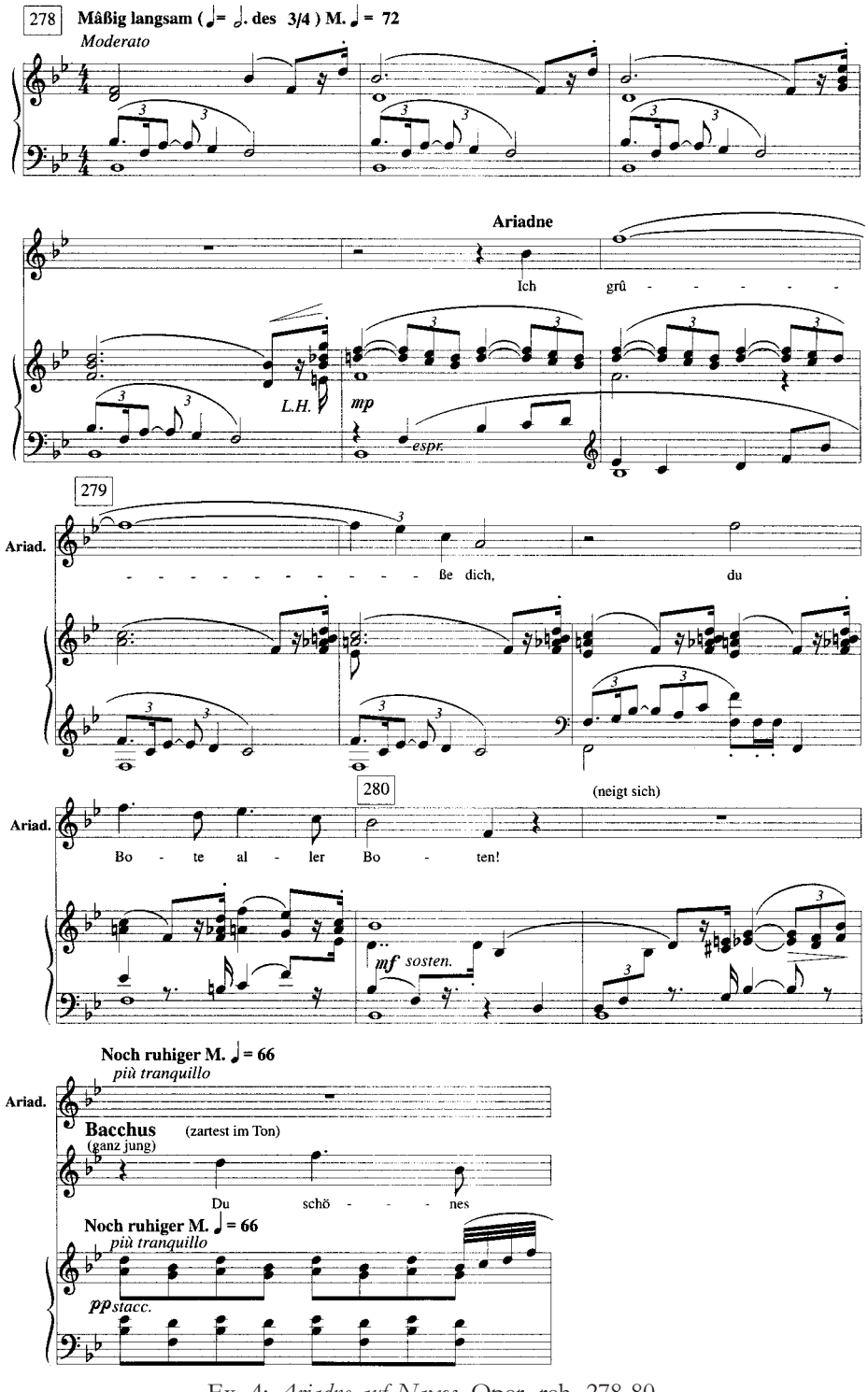
The process of transformation (Table 1, Transition II) is about to take place, and Strauss is entirely at one with Hofmannsthal's intentions as Ariadne expresses her confusion ('Gibt es kein hinüber? Sind wir noch da?'). She now exists between two worlds, speaking of a higher realm yet grounded in C major. But before an ultimate transformation can occur, Bacchus must recognize his own godhead and at the end of Transition II, Strauss asserts A major one last time as Bacchus sings, 'Der Sinn des Gottes ist wach in mir, dein herrlich Wesen ganz zu fassen!' ('My godhood is awakened in me to grasp your glorious being'). The composer goes to great pains to suggest just how far apart these two principal characters are through either semitone or tritonal relationships, but those tensions finally all resolve through the power of the transformational tonality, D♭ major, which is sustained for a remarkably long time, indeed, throughout the final fourth section (see Table 1).

Daphne's Transformation

Taken separately, this second part, the *Oper* of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, was Strauss's last one-act mythology for twenty-one years (twenty-five if one takes the first version as the starting point). His next one-act mythology, *Daphne* (1937), was likewise an opera centring on the transformation of the title role, but Strauss no longer had Hofmannsthal (who died in 1929) as his collaborator. The libretto was conceived by another Austrian, Joseph Gregor, a theatre historian whom Strauss first met on 7 July 1935, at Berchtesgaden, where, less than twenty-four hours earlier, Strauss had been officially informed of his dismissal as president of the Reichsmusikkammer. Strauss had been dismissed because of an intercepted letter to his Jewish librettist, Stefan Zweig. In it, Strauss expressed negative views of the Reich that were ultimately forwarded to Hitler himself, and the composer soon became *persona non grata* in the Third Reich. Without Hofmannsthal, without Stefan Zweig – who withdrew himself as Strauss's librettist – and now without a decent prospect for a libretto, Strauss became increasingly depressed.

Though Zweig withdrew as Strauss's librettist, he left the composer with a scenario for a one-act opera to be called *Friedenstag* (1936); Gregor fleshed it out into a libretto. Alas, the more Strauss reread Gregor's reworking of Zweig's original plan, the less he liked it, and in August 1935, he confessed to Pauline, his wife, that he might give up opera composing altogether. His wife secretly sent the *Friedenstag* libretto to Clemens Krauss, confiding, '[Strauss] is in a terrible state of

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Ex. 4: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Oper, reh. 278-80.

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mind . . . worst of all is that he wants to give up on his work and make nothing more for himself out of life'.[23] Less as diversion than solace, Strauss forgot about composing opera and immersed himself in the poetry of Goethe and Rückert. Setting three Rückert poems (*Die drei Männerchöre*, 1936) that late summer and early autumn seemed to get Strauss out of depression, and he was able to complete *Friedenstag* in less than a year. The opera was intended to be paired with *Daphne* for a première of two one-act operas.[24]

Daphne, Gregor's original libretto and another favourite theme of Baroque opera, proved to be a far more complicated creative process. Without Hofmannsthal to provide Strauss with a solid aesthetic grounding, the composer seems to have instinctively returned to his pre-Hofmannsthal roots of the late nineteenth century, to the German Romantics (such as Rückert) and also to Nietzsche. Michael Steinberg is correct – with qualifications – that '*Daphne* returns to the ceremonial conceits of court masques and Baroque evocations of Arcadia. It is a Baroque costume play, what the opera seria *Ariadne auf Naxos* would be if it were not a play within a play.'[25]

True, there are those common elements between the *Oper* of *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Daphne*, articulated above, the most important of these being transformation. I disagree with Steinberg that *Daphne* is a mere ceremonial conceit. That may have been true for Gregor's original libretto, but – as correspondence shows – it certainly was not the case for Strauss, for whom transformation meant far more than mere *tableau vivant*. After the loss of Zweig and the disgrace of his governmental dismissal (July 1935), the composer took an inward turn. He not only immersed himself in German-Romantic poetry about purification, renewal and the divine to be found in nature (*Göttergleich*) symbolized by the process of transformation, but he also returned to the old ego-assertive, Nietzschean impulse.[26]

The most important common musical element between *Ariadne* and *Daphne* is Strauss's decision to signify transformation by harmonic movement of a semitone. Where *Ariadne auf Naxos* takes us from a *Vorspiel* in C to a transformation in D♭, Daphne's transformation takes us from G major (at the opening with Daphne as the innocently human) to F♯ major (at the end, as the laurel tree). Strauss carefully prepares us for this important modulation, towards the end of the opera, in Daphne's opening monologue ('O bleib geliebter Tag'; see Table 2). This preparation was not, however, the original strategy; indeed, Daphne's monologue

[23] Günter Brosche, ed., *Richard Strauss-Clemens Krauss Briefwechsel* (Tutzing, 1997), 204.

[24] Despite the original plan, *Friedenstag* premiered without *Daphne* in July 1938. *Daphne* premiered three months later, paired with *Friedenstag*.

[25] Michael Steinberg, 'Richard Strauss and the Question', in *Richard Strauss and his World*, ed. Bryan Gilliam (Princeton, 1992), 180.

[26] In another study, I discussed a Nietzschean unfinished Cello Concerto (summer 1935), which pits the artistic Individual against the Collective, Strauss described it as the 'struggle of the artist's spirit (cello) against pseudoheroism, resignation, [and] melancholy (orchestra as [the] opposition'. See Bryan Gilliam, ' "Friede im Innern": Richard Strauss's Public and Private Worlds around 1935' (forthcoming). The idea of an artistic hero battling an indolent world has its roots in *Ein Heldenleben*, and, of course, an (anti)hero, depicted by solo cello, confronting his outer world is the very essence of *Don Quixote*. Strauss, of course, had always considered these two adjacent tone poems as a pair.

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Table 2. *Daphne* ('O bleib geliebter Tag!')

Section	Tonality	Text
1	G	'O bleib geliebter Tag!'
	[*F*♯	'*Du läßt mich leben mit meinem* ***Brüder*** *den Bäumen*']
2	(mod.)	'Wenn du mich verläßt . . .'
3	(mod.)	'Warum lieber Vater . . .'
4	F♯	'O wie gerne bleib ich bei dir . . .'
	[*G*	'. . . *und so mein* ***Brüder***']

(as we know it) did not appear until the third version of the text; the shift to F♯ major at the end of the opera was likewise a relatively late development.

Gregor's original plan was a choral finale to match the final chorus of its one-act partner opera, *Friedenstag*; both works were to end in C major. The *Daphne* chorus was to sing, 'Herrlich geliebter Baum! Wie zu Zweigen sich wandeln, die schlanken Glieder!' ('Splendid, beloved tree! How your slender limbs are transformed into branches!') In a second version the sense of Baroque pageantry was strengthened as the chorus was directed to enter the stage in ten male–female pairs, each singing a couplet as they enter:

The first pair: 'Sei du Beschützer unserer Liebe!' ('Be the protector of our love!')
The second pair: 'Dein holder Schatten erquicke uns!', ('May your gentle shade refresh us!'), etc.

Once assembled in front of the laurel tree, they sing a revised C major chorus:

'Gesegneter Baum, hoch über die Menschen ragst du empor!' ('Blessed tree, high above humanity, you loom upward!')[27]

The details of *Daphne*'s genesis point to a fundamentally different way in which Strauss approached an operatic libretto. In *Ariadne*, Strauss worked entirely *with* the grain of Hofmannsthal's text; the music is a direct and felicitous extension of poet's libretto. With *Daphne* Gregor, no doubt, influenced Strauss, but in an entirely different manner; the latter opera derives its expressive power from the absence of real poetry. Faced with a mundane, prosaic libretto, Strauss was forced to reach deeper into himself in order to gain musical inspiration.

But for what was he reaching? On one level, he was looking to Nietzsche, particularly his *Birth of Tragedy* in trying to overcome, musically, Gregor's vapid ending; he suggested to Gregor: 'Apollo betrays his godhead by approaching Daphne with Dionysian feelings; she feels this betrayal in his kiss . . . After this adventure, Apollo, before he can mount his sun chariot again, must also undergo a purification within himself, which has its dramatic climax in the killing . . . *of the Dionysian element within himself*. The symbol of his own purification would be Daphne's salvation through her transformation into the laurel tree!'[28]

[27] Gilliam, 'Daphne's Transformation', in *Richard Strauss and his World* (see n. 25), 33–66.
[28] Letter to Gregor (9 March 1936), *Richard Strauss-Joseph Gregor: Briefwechsel, 1934–1949* (Salzburg, 1955), 55.

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On a deeper level, we should remember that Strauss had already immersed himself in his own interpretation of German-Romantic *Innerlichkeit* as early as summer 1935. Two Rückert poems he briefly considered setting for his above-mentioned *Männerchöre* are entitled *Friede im Innern* and *Sühnung*, two poems that share the common theme of an existing evil that is overcome, or redeemed, by the spirit to be found in nature. In the former poem Rückert writes:

Dieser Halm, ja diese Palme,
Mit dem schlanken Riesenhalme,
Sei der neue Freiheitsbaum!
Nicht mit Blut, mit Thau begossen,
Soll er rein zum Himmel sprossen,
Schattend über'm Erdenraum.

[Let this very blade, this palm,
With its slim and towering stem
Be the new tree of peace, the balm!
Watered not with blood, but dew,
Let it sprout toward heaven's realm
And its shadow earth o'erwhelm.][29]

Thus, blood is washed away, purified by water, and the rebirth of the spirit is suggested by the flowering of nature. The Nietzschean Strauss, who saw the spirit made manifest in music, was attracted to these Rückert poems with their focus on the divine aspects of nature and the human spirit. Though Strauss never set *Friede im Innern* to music, he revisited the theme of transformation in *Daphne*.

The result is a kind of double transformation: the one on stage and the transformation of what Strauss called 'schulmeisterliche Weltanschauungs-banalitäten' ('school-masterly world-view banalities') into a finale of remarkable depth, radiance and beauty. Strauss tried transposing Gregor's choral finale ('Gesegneter Baum') into F♯ major but was not satisfied. Thus, he replaced the chorus with a two-part miniature tone poem with the same sonic magic of the F♯ dream of Don Quixote, or the dream-like F♯ presentation of the rose in *Rosenkavalier* Act II. The first section (which begins the transformative process) is initially articulated by a unison C♯ ('V'/F♯), which quickly dissipates into tonally ambiguous semitone sequencing in the orchestra with soprano obbligato above ('Ich komme, ich komme . . .'). Section two is for orchestra alone, joined in the coda by a wordless soprano as a voice of nature (see Fig. 1).

Strauss called the whole section an 'extended orchestral piece', and in composing it, he found a deeper mode of expression than any choral finale could have provided. The way in which Strauss joins these two parts is ingenious. Though the tonally inchoate section 1 finally coalesces into a powerful, unambiguous articulation of the dominant of F♯ major, it does so by way of a G major 6/4 chord. It is a final revisitation of Daphne as mortal being ('unsterbliche Liebe'), but with the 6/4 voicing, lacking a root position, Strauss makes it clear that she cannot go back

[29] See Gilliam, ' "Friede im Innern" ' (see n. 26). Poem trans. Susan Gillespie.

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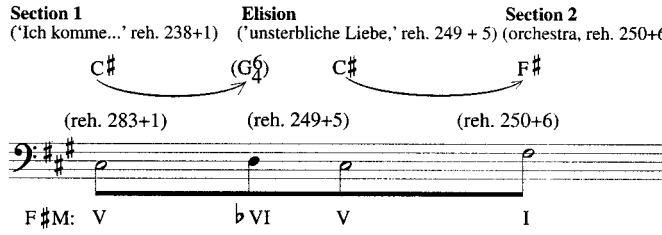


Fig. 1: Daphne's Transformation.

(see Fig. 1). That movement in the bass line (from C♯ to D back to C♯) casts an aura of the Neapolitan, though in this context it is a movement from the dominant to the flat sixth and back, before the ultimate cadence on the transformative F♯ major. This Transformation Scene, with its soaring melodies, seemingly effortless plasticity of motivic interplay and mastery of orchestral sound, is the finest finale of all Strauss's late operas.

For Hofmannsthal, the Austrian, transformation is an allomatic or mutual act (such as between Ariadne and Bacchus), leading ('Vom Tempel auf die Strasse') to the community of human beings, to real life. In *Daphne*, Strauss, acting on his pre-Hofmannsthal instincts, sees transformation as an act of an individual leaving the social, joining nature, becoming divine in a German-Romantic sense of the term. Herder explains this divine connection between humans and plants:

> The deeper someone descends into himself, into the structure and origins of his most noble thoughts, the more he will cover his eyes and feet and say: 'What I am, I have become. I have grown like a tree: the seed was there, but the air, earth, and all elements, which I did not place around me, had to take part in forming the seed, fruit, and tree'.[30]

Though they were composed a generation apart, these two operatic transformations share an uncommon beauty in thematic construction, harmonic richness and orchestral sound. The beauty of transformation in *Ariadne auf Naxos* is the way in which music is at one with its text; Daphne's transformation, which is no less splendid, derives its expressive power from its very lack of text. It is a miniature tone poem, with vocal obbligato, foreshadowing another, though far darker, *Verwandlungsstück* composed several years later, the *Metamorphosen*.

[30] Ferdinand Gottfried von Herder, 'Erkennen und Wollen', *Vom Erkennen und Erfinden in der menschlichen Seele* (1778), in *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan (Berlin, 1892), VIII, 198.

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