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The Ecstasy and the Agony: Exploring the Nexus of Music and Message in the Act III Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

MICHAEL PURI

On 22 May 1862 Richard Wagner drafted three letters to close friends. In all three, he tells of an epiphany that he had just experienced during his work on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. In the letter addressed to Mathilde Wesendonck, the most elaborate of the three, he proclaims that “it has now become clear to me that this work will be my most perfect [vollendetest] masterpiece and—that I will complete [vollenden] it.”

Sparked by a concept for the act III Prelude, his epiphany seemed to illuminate a pathway to the end of the work. The element of the Prelude that Wagner singles out for detailed description is itself a moment of enlightenment; after a “quiet, soft, deeply melancholic passage,” the “Wach’ auf” chorale will emerge in a brilliant and “sublime outburst” (erhabenen Ausbruch) of enthusiasm. Despite the absence of both singers and text in the Prelude, Wagner describes to Mathilde how the chorale breaks into the instrumental texture “wie ein Evangelium”—“like a gospel.”

This article stems from work in a graduate seminar at Yale University on Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger*, led by Patrick McClees. I am grateful to him and to James Hepokoski, Warren Darcy, and Kristina Muxfeldt for reading earlier versions of this article and providing helpful suggestions.

At one level of interpretation, the association between the chorale and evangelical language seems warranted and reasonable. The chorale’s polyphonic texture brings to mind J. S. Bach’s Lutheran Choralgesänge, which often set texts about New Testament events. Furthermore, the chorale genre encourages a mode of hearing that coordinates the melody with a specific text; a listener may well underlay the instrumental chorale with its eventual text, Sachs’s “die Wittemberg’sche Nachtigall.” By recalling the poem’s opening eight lines that appear in Die Meistersinger, one may interpret the song of the nightingale and the sunrise as metaphors not only for Luther and his Reformation but more generally for salvation and resurrection, two primary elements of the Gospel.

At a deeper level of interpretation, however, Wagner’s simile “wie ein Evangelium” can be understood to involve his personal ambitions for the opera. The religious association may even have played a fundamental role in prompting Wagner to proclaim his work a “masterpiece.” Lacking a text, the chorale obviously cannot promulgate Christianity, a fact reflected in the language of Wagner’s simile. By writing that the chorale emerges like “a Gospel” and not “the Gospel,” Wagner is alluding to the symbolic power of the Gospel without endorsing it. Critics of Wagner’s ideology have often cited the composer’s own “Religion and Art” (1880) to lay bare the rationale that governs religious allusion in his works: “One could say that where religion is becoming artificial . . . it is for art to salvage the nucleus of religion by appropriating the mythic symbols, which [religion] wished to propagate as true, for their symbolic worth, so as to reveal the truth buried deep within them by means of ideal presentation of the same.” The inherent abstraction of music qualifies it to be “the most redeeming art,” which can best strip away religion’s “dogmatic conceptual fiction” to salvage underlying universal ideals. Thus at the “sublime outburst” of the act III Prelude the listener witnesses Redemption being redeemed through music.

Not all scholars have agreed that discussions of religion, or even of an aesthetically transformed religion, are germane to Die Meistersinger, a nineteenth-century comedy in which church chorales and Reformation figures may seem to provide only historical “color.” As Arthur Groos illustrates in an analysis of “chorale reminiscences” in act III, the fundamental typologies—realizations and representations of

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2 On 10 December 1861, Wagner wrote a letter to Betty Schott, the wife of his publisher, requesting two collections of folk songs and a volume of reformation chorales. In Richard Wagners Briefwechsel mit B. Schott’s Söhne, ed. Wilhelm Altman (Mainz: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1911), pp. 31–32; cited in Komow, Genesis and Tone of “Die Meistersinger,” p. 132. The first extant sketch for this chorale was dated by Wagner “Taverne Anglais. Jan. 62” and stored loosely in the back cover pocket of the Green Notebook, Bayreuth NA ms. B146 (Komow, Genesis and Tone of “Die Meistersinger,” p. 22). However closely Wagner studied the reformation chorale, Carl Dahlhaus argues that the “modern” technique of delaying dissonance resolution (sevenths in chords setting “gen” und “Tag,” for example) distances Wagner’s chorale from its historical model. See Dahlhaus, Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 73. Arthur Groos also points out traces of modernity in the chorale’s “dynamic variety and shifts of meter from 2/4 to 3/2, wide leaps, lack of fermatas, and seamless melody” (Groos, “Constructing Nuremberg: Typological and Proleptic Communities in Die Meistersinger,” this journal 16 [1992], 18–34 [31]).


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3 This quotation figures prominently in discussions of Wagner’s “religion of art” in Dahlhaus, Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas, pp. 143–44; Robert Raphael, Richard Wagner (New York: Twayne, 1969), pp. 77 and 128, which predates Dahlhaus’s original German edition by two years; and Morse Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century (New York: George Braziller, 1962), to which Raphael’s ideological analysis is explicitly indebted.


Biblical events and figures by post-Biblical events and figures—in this opera could not function without the strategic positioning of church music and quasi-religious ritual. Nevertheless, the bourgeois representation of sixteenth-century Nuremberg and the somewhat parodic presentation of religious rituals (for example, in the opening scene in St. Catherine’s and in the Baptism scene of act III) invest the opera with a fundamental ambivalence toward religion. This ambivalence is epitomized in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, whose presence in Die Meistersinger extends beyond the mere citation of Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung in the “Wahn”-monologue. Lucy Beckett’s assessment of Schopenhauer’s philosophy as “both explicitly atheist and explicitly sympathetic not just to the sense of aspiration common to all religious expression but to the Christian description of the world as fallen in man and redeemed in Christ” helps illuminate aspects of Wagner’s opera as well. If the redemptive entry of the evangelical “Wach’ auf!” chorale in the Prelude evinces a Christian sympathy, the mixed identity of the redeemer (a combination of Sachs, Walther, Wagner, Luther, and their typological partners Christ and John the Baptist) dilutes the purely religious aspect of the allusion. Wagner’s typologies and deliberate appropriation of religious symbols, both musical and otherwise, only helped further erase the line dividing the sacred from the secular, already “a blurred affair” by the mid-nineteenth century.

Even if one accepts the coexistence of religious and nonreligious elements in Die Meistersinger, the concept of redemption may seem irrelevant. Indeed, the typical Wagnerian self-sacrifice of a redemptrix for a man is suppressed in this opera. Redemption in Wagner’s thought, however, is not solely confined to this manifestation. Wagner’s Zurich writings, as inspired by Feuerbach’s “The Essence of Christianity,” assert the “true kernel” of Christianity to lie in the abolition of egoism for the sake of communal welfare. As Jean-Jacques Nattiez has argued, the ascendancy of the collective over the individual is intimately connected to the Wagnerian project of redemption. The suppression of the individual impulse for the sake of the community is arguably the leading dramatic idea in Die Meistersinger and, as a philosophical topic, couples nicely with the Schopenhauerian renunciation of the Will, which wins respite for the individual from the sufferings of desire.

Incorporating both programs of redemption and renunciation, the act III Prelude to Die Meistersinger is a skeleton key to the opera. Within the opera, it is a psychological portrait of the protagonist, Hans Sachs. The standard-bearer for the Protestant Reformation, Sachs must surrender his personal claims on Eva in order to shepherd his flock, the stratified citizenry of Nuremberg, into a state of peaceful equilibrium. At the beginning of act III, however, Sachs has not assumed his destiny. The Prelude finds Sachs deeply conflicted, caught at the crux of several dichotomies: the Ideal and the Real, Redemption and Renunciation, the New and the Old.

By closely analyzing how musical detail and formal layout interact in the Prelude to represent these dichotomies, I hope in this article not merely to reveal the general presence of religious symbolism in Die Meistersinger but rather to elucidate its specific application in the opera. The act III Prelude occupies a central position within this dramatic design, functioning at three hermeneutic levels. An appeal to the collective cultural imagination of the audience, the Prelude is replete with textures and contrasts that evoke religious narrative. It incorporates within its formal structure a “narrative of frustration” that links Sachs to the archetypal figure of the disillusioned, saintly artist in Wagner’s writings. And the Prelude participates as an intermediate station within a large-scale narrative of frustration spanning acts

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8Ibid., p. 82.
10Ibid., p. 82.
II and III. A new interpretation of the Prelude’s form provides an alternative to the prevailing interpretation of an arch form and gives impetus to a host of hermeneutic forays into the thicket of Wagnerian sound and drama. I shall conclude with a perusal of religious metaphor in contemporary documents and examples of program music to show how the act III Prelude captures a moment not only on the stage of Die Meistersinger but also on the stage of nineteenth-century Western classical music.

I

My discussion begins with an overview of the form and content of the act III Prelude (ex. 1). Analysts have generally represented the Prelude as an arch form, ABCBA, which coincides with Lorenz’s “vollkommener Bogen.”¹³ Example 2 displays the melodic incipits for the sections labeled A, B, and C. Each section has its own program, which Wagner laid out in a "programmatic explanation" (programmatische Erläuterung) for a concert of orchestral excerpts on 2 December 1863. Section A begins with the melody traditionally referred to as the "Wahnmotiv" (motif of folly), since it figures so prominently in Hans Sachs’s ensuing dramatic "Wahn"-monologue in act III. In the Erläuterung, however, Wagner discusses this motive in a different dramatic context. It has already appeared in counterpoint to the last strophe of the Cobbler’s Song, where it “expressed the bitter complaint of the resigned man” beneath his “energetic and cheerful countenance.”¹⁴ For several reasons, I prefer the term "Klageuruf"—cry of complaint, a recurrent term in Wagner’s writings—to the analyst’s traditional designation, Wahnmotiv, when referring to the melody in this specific location. Wagner’s Erläuterung makes clear that the melody, insofar as it expresses a character’s internal psychological state, is to be understood here as an intersubjective communication, not as an abstract signifier for “folly.”¹⁵ Wagner’s interest in the communicative immediacy of sound, which only deepened after his encounter with Schopenhauer’s writings in 1854, explicitly supports this hypothesis. In the essay “Beethoven” (1870), admittedly the most Schopenhauerian of all his writings, he asserts that we as listeners understand “what the perceived cry for help, complaint, or shout for joy says to us without any conceptual mediation.”¹⁶ By isolating the unmediated cry and letting the act of declamation resonate in its own time and space, the monophonic instrumentation indirectly highlights the agent behind the act.¹⁷ Wagner may have found inspiration for this setting in the oboe cadenza in the first movement of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, which he singles out in “On Conducting” as a pivotal moment in the movement’s design. According to Thomas Grey, Wagner understood this cadenza to project “an intentional human subject in the music, such as [he] considered indispensable to drama, musical or otherwise.”¹⁸

The chorale at “Sehr feierlich” in m. 16, excerpted in ex. 2, begins the B section, and the fragmentary quotation of the Cobbler Song at “Etwas zögernd” in m. 26 begins the C section. In the Erläuterung, Wagner proposes that the delicate string writing in the C section paints an image of Sachs, who lifts his gaze away from his handiwork toward the heavens and loses

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¹⁴“Drückt es die bittere Klage des resignierten Mannes aus, welcher der Welt ein heiteres und energisches Antlitz zeigt” (RWGS, IX, 64).

¹⁵Compare Morse Peckham’s nuanced definition of the Leitmotiv: “The leitmotiv, then, is not a melodic conventionalization for some fragment of that objective world, nor the equivalent of a verbal or visual symbol. It is a symbolization of the psychic orientation of the self toward the self’s dealings with the objective world” (Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision, p. 268).

¹⁶“Wir verstehen ohne jede Begriffsvermittlung, was uns der vernommene Hilfe-, Klage- oder Freudeneruf sagt” (“Beethoven,” RWGS, VIII, 154).

¹⁷That Klageruf also begin the final acts of Tristan and Parsifal (Kundry’s scream) demonstrates the importance of this gesture in Wagner’s work at a specific dramatic location.

Example 1: Piano reduction of the act III Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. 
himself in reverie. Although at first glance it might seem that Wagner means to evoke a
general image of the poet and cobbler, the mu-
csic informs us that the reference is more spec-
cific. Despite some modulatory activity and
rhapsodic gestures by the cello, ex. 3 dem-
strates that mm. 26–35 in the Prelude (ex. 3b)
correspond to material found in the third and
final strophe of the Cobbling Song (ex. 3a).

Where Sachs drifts into escapist fantasies in
the Cobbling Song (twice, at “und rief mich oft
in’s Paradies” and “Doch wenn mich der im
Himmel hält”), Wagner restrains the tempo;
although the Song accelerates to faster tempi
both times, the Prelude’s C section chooses
instead to linger in extended contemplation.

Further inquiry into the relationship between
the third strophe of the Cobbling Song and the
Prelude suggests that the former was a struc-
tural model for the latter. As Wagner himself
pointed out in the Erläuterung, the Klageruf
was first heard at the onset of the final strophe.
Just as it returns with added instrumental force

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19″Wie wen der Mann den Blick von der Handwerksarbeit
ab nach oben wendete und sich in zart anmutige
Träumereien verlöre” (RWGS, IX, 64).
Example 2: Melodic incipits for sections A, B, and C.

a. Cobbling Song, third strophe.

Example 3: The Cobbling Song Reverie and its quotation in the act III Prelude.

at the conclusion of this strophe (which also concludes the entire Song), so too does it return fortissimo at the end of the Prelude (mm. 51ff.). In both cases, the bookending statements of the Klageruf enclose material from the Cobbling Song. Although the Prelude additionally interpolates the “Wach’ auf” chorale into the Cobbling Song form ACA, the resemblance between the two passages is nonetheless unmistakable and striking. Table 1 compiles and collates these observations.

The symmetrical design displayed in Table 1 is the exact feature Lorenz found most salient in his analysis of the act III Prelude as an arch form. As is well known, Lorenz defended Wagner’s music against charges of formlessness by often analyzing it as either bar (AAB) or arch (ABA) forms or some combination of the two. The arch form plays a central role in this defense. An emblem of classical architecture and its symmetry, the arch projects an image of naturalness and grace. Moreover, the palin-
Table 1
Schematic Comparison of Form and Content
in the Cobbling Song and the Act III Prelude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cobbling Song, Third Strophe</th>
<th>Act III Prelude</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (Klageruf)</td>
<td>A (Klageruf; fugal extension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/B (&quot;Wach' auf&quot; chorale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (body of Song)</td>
<td>C (Cobbling Song quotation; contrapuntal fantasy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/B (&quot;Wach' auf&quot; chorale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (return of Klageruf)</td>
<td>A (return of Klageruf; fugal extension; coda with Cobbling Song flourish)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dromic ordering of internal elements in the arch form lends it a sense of autonomy and closure. But to accept the arch-form interpretation as the sole analytical possibility would overlook some crucial aspects of the music that reflect an underlying program. Wagnerians have learned to be critical but not wholly dismissive of Lorenz’s legacy, and I shall explore the archform interpretation to reflect on its advantages and disadvantages.

The closed program of the Erläuterung corresponds neatly to the design of the arch form. Whereas the opening A section’s Klageruf sounds the complaint of the “resigned man” and “dies away in resignation,” the same motive in the final A section (mm. 51ff.) achieves a “cheerfulness of a mild and blessed resignation.” Thus Wagner suggests that not merely the motive but its associated concept—“resignation”—returns in the final section of the Prelude. Two observations diminish the persuasiveness of the closed-form interpretation, however. The second A section drastically transforms the presentation of the Klageruf, surrounding it with dense instrumentation and embedding it within dissonant harmonies. Whereas the first A section presented the “bitter complaint of the resigned man,” the second A section burdens this motive with the “powerful expression of the emotion of a deeply affected soul.” The form is therefore better described as ABCBA’. Also, the Erläuterung was produced specifically for a performance in which the Prelude was to appear as a self-sufficient concert piece; within the context of the opera, however, where the Prelude introduces but does not solve a musical-dramatic conflict, it is disadvantageous to interpret it as a closed narrative.

In support of the arch-form interpretation, the Erläuterung describes a distinction between the two B sections and the C section. After the strings in the C section have finished their quotation of melodies from the Cobbling Song [m. 43], the “horns, with an increased volume of sound, continue the hymn of the Meister.”

Although the transition away from the chorale into the Cobbling Song material is marked by a “very gentle” and “hesitant movement,” the return to the chorale is marked by an augmentation of sound and texture. In contrast to the fragility of the C section, the B sections bask in sonic plenitude. This return to plenitude is also remarkable as the first moment in which the audience, listening in real time, may become aware of the arch form as a nested structure. The music no longer ventures forth into new thematic regions ("A, B, C, ...") but begins to

\[\text{21}^{\text{nd}}\text{Nun tritt das erste Motiv der Saiteninstrumente mit dem mächtigen Ausdrucke der Erschütterung einer tief ergriffenen Seele wieder ein" [ibid.].}\

\[\text{22}^{\text{nd}}\text{Da setzen die Hörner in gesteigerter Klangfülle den Hymnus des Meisters fort" [ibid.].}]}
double back (“A, B, C, B!”), as if the composer’s exploratory impulse were curtailed by the call of the hymn and all that it symbolizes.

The return of the chorale and the “bracketing” of the Cobbling Song by the chorale are represented in the analytical scheme “BCB.” Yet as the Erläuterung tells us, B is not simply repeated but completed; in fact, the second B rounds off and complements the first B. Moreover, the two parts form halves of a periodic phrase structure with dominant interruption. The first part moves toward a perfect authentic cadence in the dominant, D major (m. 24), and the second part begins in the tonic and moves toward a perfect authentic cadence in the tonic. The C section is thus interpolated between the two halves of the chorale, halting the Prelude’s real-time flow perhaps to introduce a temporality that Carl Dahlhaus called “unreal duration.” Wagner’s Erläuterung suggests that we are to imagine Sachs losing himself in reverie during the interpolated C section. As a moment of “lived time,” the C section is an emblem of the private individual. The C section thus contrasts with the chorale, which represents the public sphere in two important ways. Within the opera, the “Nightingale” chorale is the artwork by which Sachs has won public acclaim (as its spontaneous repetition by the folk in act III, sc. 5, will demonstrate). In addition, Wagner’s nineteenth-century audience would immediately recognize its status as a historical artifact, since it is modeled on the Lutheran chorale. In comparison, the interpolated C section is an unstable, perhaps even “psychological” form, structured like a fantasy and progressing “somewhat hesitantly,” as if its “unreal duration” were actually the present time—unreal within the fictive world of the opera but real andengrossing for the audience who believed they were witnessing Wagner in the act of improvisation.

Having completed a preliminary analytic overview of the Prelude, I want to pause and review our understanding of the relation between form and content in the piece. To acknowledge the differential and hierarchical relations hitherto established between formal sections, one can revise the scheme ABCBA as A(B|C)|B^2A’. This act of emendation, however inelegant the result, provokes a critical insight of increasing significance in the continuing examination of the Prelude: the arch-form interpretation, based on the assertion of formal symmetry, cannot account for details that disrupt this symmetry. Nevertheless, this interpretation, founded on valid perceptions about the structure of the Prelude, need not be discarded. The subsequent analysis will rescue and build on aspects of the arch-form interpretation, while developing an alternative understanding of the interaction between music and program in the Prelude.

The interpretation of the Prelude as an arch form stakes its first formal claim on the distinction between the A and B sections. This is sensible, since the first momentous event in the Prelude occurs in the transition between the sections marked “Etwas gedeihnt” and “Sehr feierlich.” One can measure this shift by various indices: a shift in mode from G minor to its parallel major, a change in instrumentation from strings to horns and brass, an overall elevation of tessitura, and a moderate change in polyphonic procedure. The change is accomplished by shifting from an instrumental to a vocal style (note how the wide successive leaps of the fugal subject contrast with the linearity of the chorale part writing), and thus from one referential historical model to another. The Erläuterung implicitly distinguishes between these stylistic gestures and genres, acknowledging A’s motivic presentation and development by the strings and B’s consequent sounding of a “ceremonial song” by the horns. The two sections are distinguished as well by their references to moments within the opera: the Klageruf first occurs in act II during the Cobbbling Song; the Chorale appears later in the culminating Festwiese scene of act III. Thus, at the moment of the overlap between the

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24Jetzt [im Vorspiel des dritten Aktes] wird dieses Motiv allein gespielt und entwickelt, um die Resignation zu ersterben: aber zugleich und wie aus der Ferne lassen die Hörner den feierlichen Gesang erröten” (RWGS, IX, 64).
cadential tonic of the A section and the initial tonic of the B section (mm. 16), the Prelude turns, Janus-like, from the past to future time within the opera; as Wagner suggests with the description of the chorale emerging as "wie ein Evangelium," the chorale unfolds as if heralding a new world order. The evangelical outburst of the chorale is rivaled in its sheer sensuous impact only by the onset of the second A section in m. 51, which follows thickly on the heels of the second chorale phrase. The expressive force of these two moments establishes a fundamental tension between the A and B sections.

Although A, B, and C are distinct from each other, the variety of content within each section threatens to undermine their integrity as formal units. Since both sections A and C divide into subsections, they are not well represented merely by the incipit melodies shown in ex. 2. The opening A section falls into two parts: the monophonic Klageruf (mm. 1–4) and the fugal exposition (mm. 5–16). The exposition unfolds three stages: the presentation of a fugal subject derived from the Klageruf (mm. 5–8), the succession of entries based on the subject (mm. 8–13), and the coincidence of the voices at the cadence (mm. 14–16). All four subsections are distinct yet interdependent stages that gradually reshape the borrowed melody into a material unique to the Prelude.

Wagner's careful control of register contributes in large part to the interdependence of these stages. The Klageruf unfolds the octave between the semitonal Seufzer b♭–a to B♭–A by stepwise descent. The fugal subject (mm. 5–8) then falls by step within the octave d–D, dragging the tessitura a fifth below the Klageruf. The fugal entries at two-measure intervals slowly and deliberately reset the melody higher while expanding the overall texture—first up an octave to d³ (m. 8), then by a minor third to f¹ (m. 10), and finally up a whole tone to g¹ (m. 12). The decrease in interval between successive entries suggests a certain resistance within the musical material, as if the specific gravity of the local affect were preventing the melody from taking flight. This resistance makes the breakthrough moment of the chorale all the more dramatic. Through Wagner's manipulation of register within a fugal exposition we are made witness to the masterly handiwork of the composer—the Meisterwerk as Handwerk.

After passing through the thematically and texturally homogeneous chorale phrase, the Prelude arrives at the C section, whose internal segmentation is more elaborate than the A section. The C section divides into two parts: the Cobbbling Song material and the contrapuntal fantasy of mm. 35–43. The four successive phrases in the Song quotation take the chordal, melodic, and rhythm of the Song's third strophe through a gentle modulatory scheme, a circle of fifths with the tonal stations E major (m. 27), A major (m. 30), and D major (m. 33). The transitional cello figure in mm. 24–26, also drawn from the original Cobbbling Song, counterbalances the immediately preceding bassoon line with a stepwise fall through a diminished octave, d to the applied leading-tone D♭, thereby mitigating the otherwise jarring shift from the chorale's perfect authentic cadence in D major to the dominant of E major. The related cadenza-like elaborations by the cello between the phrases of the Cobbbling Song recall, in their harmonic vagrancy, broad leaps and expressive appoggiaturas, the music for the lovers' pantomime during the act I Chorale. In addition, these interpolations within a large-scale formal interpolation, the C section

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25 Some readers may disagree with my decision to end the Klageruf at m. 4 instead of m. 8. Indeed, the two prior appearances of this motive in the Cobbbling Song present it as an eight-measure unit, the companion of a discursive vocal line, as will be shown in ex. 7. Thus, the Klageruf merely overlaps the beginning of the fugal exposition by one measure (m. 8). In my understanding, however, the context determines the analytical division. Regardless of what transpired in the Cobbbling Song, where the Klageruf does not have a contrapuntal appendix, in the act III Prelude a new section begins in m. 5 with the commencement of fugal pageantry. When the second violins enter in m. 10, one is aware that the pace of polyphony has accelerated from the three-measure stagger of mm. 5–7 to the two-measure delay of mm. 8–9. The perception of this acceleration, important for appreciating Wagner's dramatic shaping of musical events, flows from the discrimination, conscious or unconscious, of a new contrapuntal section at m. 5. Moreover, the design and implicit tonality of the cello line change remarkably from m. 4 to m. 5.

26 The harmonic motion up a step, from D to E major, by an intermediate applied dominant can be described as an example of the ascending 5–6 contrapuntal technique.
itself, elevate the nesting gesture—a nod to the Wagnerian concept of das Unendliche as "infinitesimal"—to a position of considerable importance. In one way, these gestures indicate an introspective turn of mind consistent with the image of the daydreaming Sachs from the Erläuterung. In another, they belie the Song's optimistic façade by suggesting restlessness and unrequited desire; Sachs's gaze heavenward may be an appeal to escape the confines of reality. Indeed, the registral arrangement of the tonal stations by ascending fourth seems to follow Sachs's upturned gaze and permits further contrast with the first half of the chorale, whose melodic ambitus from g to g¹ is presented—or even ordained by an omnipotent being (the composer?!)—in its first measure.

The cadenzas may be interpreted as a gestural counterpart to the harmonic dynamism of the Song quotation. Instead of moving to the second half of the chorale at the return to D major in m. 33, as one might expect, the music remains faithful to the Song’s poetic structure and continues with its fourth phrase. In mm. 33–35, Wagner’s varied instrumentation counterbalances the harmonic stasis in D major by introducing the high tessitura of the contrapuntal fantasy. The alteration of A to A♯ in the second clarinet and cello in m. 35 warps the anticipated D-major triad into a tonally ambiguous entity, the augmented triad. This chord (D, F♯, A♯/B♭), borrowed directly from the corresponding moment in the original Cobbling Song, has already appeared within the Prelude. Wagner had placed the same sonority at the juncture between the Prelude’s first two sections (m. 15), with a B♭ falling to an A (the same Seufzer that begins the Klageruf) instead of an A♯ ascending to a B. In both places, the chord appears at a formal crux, where its modulatory potential may be effectively displayed. The use of this harmony in the contrapuntal fantasy exemplifies a more general technique in Wagner’s "art of transition," in which tonally multivalent entities propel transitional sections while simultaneously grounding the transition in a specific affect.

The sound of the augmented triad is only one of many aspects interrelating the A and C sections. Both feature the string instruments in a four-part texture, emphasize descending cello lines at their beginnings, place thematic repetition within a tonally dynamic context, and adopt counterpoint in their second half. As noted in Table 1, both sections borrow music from the act II Cobbling Song. The contrapuntal fantasy in C, however, is more elaborate than the corresponding fugato of A.

Instead of flowing into the fantasy, as the Klageruf leads into the fugato, the Song opposes the fantasy in several ways: the fantasy features polyphonic exchange, while the Song harmonizes its melody with a simple chordal texture; the fantasy exploits the upper range of each string instrument, while the Song remains at a moderate tessitura, at least until the transitional fourth phrase; as shown in ex. 4, the fantasy uses linear progressions—an ascending 5–6 in mm. 35–38 [note, in particular, the unusual 6/4 chords that result from the transfer of the soprano to the bass] followed by descending 5/3 chords with 7–6 suspensions—while the Song remains primarily on diatonic chord progressions (II–V–I in each of its phrases, with a subposed third in the bass below each supertonic). Closer inspection, however, reveals an underlying similarity in the harmonic techniques of the two halves of C. By means of the four phrases, the Song returns by basic diatonic motion (root motion by fifth) to its D-major point of departure,²⁷ the structural dominant of the Prelude. The fantasy’s initial D-major chord (m. 35) is prolonged by an ascending 5–6 sequence until the downbeat of m. 39; the sequence’s four augmented triads systematically express the chromatic aggregate. The pitches of the opening motive, D–C♯–B–A♯–B–C♯–D of the second violin’s mm. 35–36, in conjunction with the hem of the cello line, A♯–B–B♭–C♯–D of mm. 35–39, make the prolongation audible by filling in a component interval of the prolonged chord, D/A♯. In both halves of C, prolongational techniques bend the harmonic structure into closed circuits, despite an apparent through-compositional procedure. Finally, an arching tessitura, cresting at m. 39, forms a sensible whole from the two harmonically closed halves.

²⁷A tonal analyst would describe D major [V] prolonged through the song by its upper neighbor, E. The neighbor is introduced by an ascending 5–6 and elaborated by a descending circle-of-fifths sequence.
Example 4: Linear progressions in the contrapuntal fantasy of the C section.

Example 5: Motives in the contrapuntal fantasy.

Five transitional measures distort the rounded symmetry of the contrapuntal fantasy. These measures divide into two sections. Measures 39–41 lower the extreme tessitura, restore surface diatonicism, and thin out the instrumentation. Measures 42–43 stabilize the tessitura, modulate back to the overall tonic, and conclude the whole fantasy by referring back to the initial melodic exchange between the violins. Moreover, each section of the fantasy’s three parts introduces a distinct motive, whose subsequent repetition strengthens its individual profile within the unabated musical flow. Example 5 displays the three motives in the order of their appearance.

Since the Erläuterung proposes merely a vague dream state (Träumerei) for the entire C section, we must draw on our own knowledge of the opera to make sense of the succession of motives in the fantasy. Motive 1 of ex. 5 fills in a diminished fourth, a gesture recalling the “Lenzes Gebot” motive of Walther’s Spring Song. By the time Motive 1 appears in the act III Prelude, its progenitor, the Spring Song motive, has already been presented as a worthy object of contemplation for Sachs. The Spring Song motive appears in isolation at the very end of act I, a foreshadowing that helps prepare the extended rumination it will receive in the “Flieder-monologue.” Within the contexts of the Spring Song and the Flieder-monologue, this motive, so closely associated with Walther, comes to connote youthful and possibly even illicit desire (Sehnsucht). In the Prelude, the augmented triads that underpin Motive 1 bespeak a cognitive dissonance in the unfolding psychodrama of the Prelude: libidinous thoughts, the unexpected destination of Sachs’s reverie, instigate a crisis within the daydream of the protagonist. Following closely on Motive 1, Motive 2, a close relation of Eva’s motive in act III, sc. 4, seems to indicate the object of Sachs’s desire. Wagner later reuses this material in the lead-in to the Quintet, precisely during stage action that features Eva, thus reinforcing our assignment of Motive 2 to her character. Motive 3 combines features of Motives 1 and 2. A slightly more chromaticized version of Motive 3 will figure prominently late in act III, sc. 4, at the moment when Eva expresses her feelings for Sachs and Walther.

The three-part mini-program of the C section’s fantasy is designed similarly to both

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28 Ray Komow also makes this comparison in his dissertation, Genesis and Tone of “Die Meistersinger,” pp. 249–50.
A sections: a problematic concept is introduced, developed, and eventually dissolved within an attitude of “resignation.” Programmatic meaning arises not only from the dialectical succession of the three motives but also from the transition between formal sections. The neat dovetailing of Motive 3 into the chorale’s second half further suggests that the act of resignation involves both Sachs’s relationship to Eva and his relationship to the Nuremberg community. To assume an exemplary public role, he must set aside any private desires that might conflict with the demands of this role.

As shown, the arch-form interpretation of the act III Prelude makes a valid distinction among the thematic areas that it labels A, B, and C. It fails, however, to capture crucial continuities and discontinuities that become salient and meaningful on viewing the music as a discursive unfolding, rather than as a spatial and symmetrical form. Several phenomenological perspectives on the relationship between the two sections that return, A and B, demonstrate the shortcomings of the arch-form interpretation. The reentry of the horns at the beginning of the second B section [m. 43] marks the first time in this constantly transforming texture that a large-scale section has been repeated. Since the repetition of large-scale formal sections often indicates closure, the listener might well imagine that the piece will end with the chorale and the optimistic message it bears. The return of A in m. 51 thus not only denies the B section its cadential tonic, shattering its beatific affect, but also negates the expectation of immediate closure. In addition, the perception that the two massive harmonic arrivals in mm. 16 and 51, both located at the juncture of A and B sections, are balanced symmetrically about the BCB interior is potentially misleading, whereas the first arrival [m. 16] thrusts into the chorale with a gesture of liberation [the “ecstasy”], the second arrival [m. 51] hurls us back into the painful zone of the Klageruf [the “agony”], thereby rejecting the chorale and its message of redemption.

The second B section merely resumes an incomplete first part, but the second A section is a true and tragic return. Moreover, the second A section sparks the listener’s recognition that the first A section was not merely a G-minor introduction to a G-major prelude but an integral part of the Prelude. Many details of the first A section, however, have been altered in its return. The Klageruf is presented at a shriller pitch, beginning on g\(^1\) instead of b. Although Wagner’s direction for the violins to play only on the G string may enrich the sonority, it also heightens the expressive force of the Klageruf’s octave span by limiting the available melodic ambitus—there is more tension involved in spanning the g to the g\(^1\) on the G string than to the g\(^1\) on the D string.

Further analysis of the second A section will reveal it to be not merely an altered version of the first A section, but rather an amalgam of themes and textures from all three section types A, B, and C. Consequently, I shall henceforth refer to mm. 51–64 as the “reprise” section and the entire Prelude as a “reprise form,” an interpretation that is programmatically more potent and musically more accurate than the arch-form interpretation. I am not, however, asserting that material from each of the three sections appears uniformly in these measures; behind the overt presentation of the Klageruf and Cobbling Song lies a trace of the chorale, which in fact marks the B section as palpably absent. From a careful investigation of the final measures of the Prelude a new interpretation will emerge, one that acknowledges vital details of the score and helps explain their contribution to the “message” of the act III Prelude.

In the reprise, the Klageruf is not only transposed but also fully harmonized in a chorale texture that maintains some continuity with the preceding B section. The initial g\(^1\) participates in a doubly deceptive cadence in the chorale’s G major. The transposition level of the melody (which begins on scale degree 3) and the harmonies of the cadential preparation in mm. 54 indicate the local key to be E minor—vi in the chorale’s G major. But a C# in the bass further deceives the deceptive cadence. We have already encountered the harmonic technique of supposition in the Cobbling Song quotation. In mm. 26 and 29, the supertonic sonorities that begin the verse lines are supported by a subposed tone a minor third below the chordal root. These sonorities correspond exactly to the half-diminished chords that begin each strope and half-strophe of the Cobbling Song in act II.
The “subposed” C♯ also forms an anguished tritone between the outer voices, which recalls not only the initial Cobbling Song chords but also the Prelude’s first B section. This harmony, which I refer to as the “agony” chord, is the same chord at the same pitch level as the chord found on the third beat of m. 21, where the chorale shied away from the strong assertion of a C-major triad. Moreover, the chord has already reappeared strikingly in m. 48, during the second part of the chorale, where Wagner invests it with a new confidence. At m. 48, the melody above the chord does not merely sound but “achieves” the a¹ above the chorale’s registral upper limit of g¹; the half-diminished harmony is now fully diminished, the dynamics swell within its duration, and the full wind and brass instrumentation is maintained. When the chord reappears three measures later, endowed with such negative force, the fall from the redemptive zone of the chorale may be even more acutely perceived. Example 6 groups these three chords together for quick comparison.

Example 6: The “Agony” chord and its two predecessors in the Prelude.

Although based primarily on the first A section, the reprise is nevertheless extensively recomposed. Recalling the closed harmonic motions of the C section’s two parts, the reprise describes a tonal arch, swinging decisively away from G major at the deceptive C♯ half-diminished chord and then drawing closer to G major again tentatively and gradually. The harmonies setting the Klageruf prepare the approach to G major through its relative minor. After striding purposefully along the E-melodic-minor scale toward the B of the dominant harmony in m. 54, the bass line loses its nerve and falls to a G♯, thereby initiating a dominant-chain and recalling the Cobbling Song quotation. Once destabilized, the bass line is vulnerable to small chromaticisms that deflect its motion to G major. In contrast to the first A section, the reprise omits the monophonic presentation of the fugal subject and launches immediately into the subsequent entries. Before attempting to explicate this change, I shall first examine the material that concludes this musical passage.

The entries also depart from their initial model, occurring at different relative pitch levels than in the first A section. The intervals between the successive entries generate a melodic ascent by thirds (g¹, b¹, d², f♯²) that seems to seek its culmination in a g². This pitch, however, is never achieved. In m. 61, where, according to the rhythmic pattern of the entries, one would most likely expect to find the g² and its tonic harmonization, the melody has already begun to descend. Indeed, even an alternative cadence on a lower G in m. 65 is elided in typical Wagnerian fashion. The harmonic and melodic failure to reach G in the reprise may be involved in portraying Sachs’s inability, at this point in the opera, to fulfill his role within the community represented by the G-major chorale.

The reprise also diverges at a significant moment from the thematic design of the initial A section. In the initial A section, the fugal entries are fit into the strong rhetorical format of the sentence. In mm. 8–15, a two-measure basic idea (mm. 8–9) and its varied repetition (mm. 10–11) culminate in a four-measure continuation (mm. 12–15). In the section of the reprise (mm. 59ff.) that corresponds to the continuation portion of the initial A (mm. 12–15), however, musical elements associated with the Cobbling Song conspicuously replace previous cadential material. An augmented triad recalling the Song (and the Prelude’s C section as well) initiates an extended borrowing from the Song, namely the playful flourish that ends the first half of the Song’s second strophe (“jetzt Engel schustern müssen,” p. 268 of the Schirmer vocal score). In the Prelude, however, this quotation is muffled and distended according to the musical directions, “hesitantly” and “molto rallentando,” thereby projecting a more melancholy affect.

At this point in the analysis, one may consider a rationale for Wagner’s decision to omit the first subject presentation (corresponding to mm. 5–7 in the first A section). By removing
these three measures, the first two subject entries maintain a consistent two-measure stagger, which outlines the presentation portion of a sentence even more clearly than in the initial A section. Aided by deceptive harmonic arrivals at the beginning of each entry in mm. 55 and 57, the phrase structure whets the listener's appetite for the final entry at m. 59, where one also anticipates the beginning of the final portion of the sentence, the continuation and cadence. Indeed, the arrival of m. 59 is a remarkable event. For the first time in either section, the subject entry is accompanied by a vertical sonority that aligns with one's harmonic expectations and features a major triad (that is, the D-major triad as the basis for the dominant seventh). Wagner decks out this gorgeous harmonic and rhythmic coincidence in m. 59 with a full and variegated string orchestration, only to tarnish its brilliance with a deceptive chromaticism in the following measure, followed by a bass arpeggiation that abandons the tonality (in the cellos and basses, the C♯ of m. 60 obliterates the memory of the leading tone C♯ in m. 58). In m. 62, however, the music gains firmer footing by aligning once again with the Cobbling Song, namely the beginning of the third strophe. Example 7 stacks the pertinent melodies on each other to facilitate comparison.

Example 7a presents Sachs's vocal line from the third strophe of the Cobbling Song, stripped of ornamental skips and runs for analytical purposes. Example 7b displays the Klageruf as it accompanies ex. 7a in the score. Example 7c returns to the Prelude, forming a melodic line from two separate areas of the Prelude's reprise: mm. 51–54 and mm. 59–64 (in this example, an apostrophe in parentheses marks the division between these two groups of measures). By eliminating the first two entries in mm. 55–58, which form the presentation portion of the sentence, we notice that the melody of ex. 7c is the synthesis of ex. 7a, the vocal line, and ex. 7b, the instrumental line. After emulating the eight-measure Klageruf of 7b, 7c appends the vocal flourish of 7a for its last three measures.

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29See n. 25 above.
By ending the instrumental melody with vocal material, Wagner "personalizes" the Klageruf, reappropriating it for the character of Sachs just as the curtain rises on his workshop. In retrospect, the first two entries generate hypermetrical momentum for the arrival at m. 59, when the melody realigns with its model material from the Cobbler Song.

The reprise incorporates elements of A and C into the melos [that is, Wagnerian Melodie as a mobile Hauptstimme], but reduces B to a ghostly trace, sensible only as a marker of its own absence. In addition to the chorale texture that seeps into the reprise, the first horn and bassoon in a Nebenstimme intone the chorale’s Hauptstimme of mm. 46–47 [ex. 8a] very softly in mm. 59–60 [ex. 8b]. The suppression of B within the reprise has important implications for the program of the Prelude. If the A section showcases the “bitter complaint of the resigned man” and the C section moves between Sachs’s inner aspirations and dilemmas, the chorale is the only section that does not relate to Sachs as a private individual. As commentators have noted, the act III Prelude distinguishes itself from the Overture (which Wagner also labels as “Prelude” [Vorspiel] in the Erläuterung) in its thematic reference to Sachs—the Overture conspicuously omits Sachs-related themes, whereas the act III Prelude is saturated with them. The marked absence of the chorale within the reprise scotches the chorale’s message of communal redemption. By relegating this vision to a pipe dream, this omission ousts Sachs from his putative evangelical pulpit. One can descry Wagner’s intent to convey the passive and ephemeral nature of the chorale vision in the Erläuterung. He does not simply state that the horns play the chorale; rather, the horns “let the ceremonious song resound as if from a distance.” Redemption is premature for the long-suffering Sachs, that surrogate Wagner who must first learn to renounce his personal desires before he may assume a leadership role in his community and, more broadly, in History itself.

The three thematic entities that contribute to the melos of the revised exposition—the

\[\begin{align*}
\text{Hn. I} & \quad \begin{game3}
\text{G} & \text{F} & \text{E} \\
\text{E} & \text{G} & \text{F} \\
\text{A} & \text{G} & \text{F}
\end{game3} \\
\text{Bn. I} & \quad \begin{game3}
\text{G} & \text{F} & \text{E} \\
\text{E} & \text{G} & \text{F} \\
\text{A} & \text{G} & \text{F}
\end{game3}
\end{align*}\]

Example 8: The Trace presence of the chorale in the reprise.

Klageruf, the fugal exposition, and the Cobbler Song—form a narrative complex that is involved in portraying the Passion of the protagonist. This complex acts like a “red thread” binding together the second and third acts. With this term, Thomas Grey pinpoints those thematic groups whose “intermittent resurfacings are intuitively understood as significant events, orienting us within the web of the musical texture and dramatic text.”

This complex appears significantly in three places: during the Cobbler Song’s final strophe, in the reprise section of the Prelude, and immediately after Walther completes the Morgentraum-Deutweise in act III, sc. 4 (Schirmer vocal score, p. 443). The latter event, new to my discussion, takes place in a context similar to the Prelude, just as the “agony” chord in the Prelude violently displaces the chorale’s cadential tonic, the final chord of Walther’s homage to artistic inspiration is overridden by the music accompanying Sachs’s actual complaints. William Kinderman has called particular attention to this moment, asserting that “the music heard during this long and intense moment represents the climax of the entire internal level of the drama.”

Wagner’s stage directions help portray the dramatic idea governing this scene—

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30 For example, see Warrack, Richard Wagner, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, p. 12.
the pain of renunciation. As Walther and Eva approach their common friend, their mutual longing consummated in music, Sachs physically tears himself away from them and launches into a self-pitying diatribe. Only at the quotation from *Tristan und Isolde* a few minutes later, however, does Sachs fully recognize his desperate position within the love triangle. This interopos reference breaks the meniscus of *Die Meistersinger* and disrupts the otherwise strictly controlled unities of time (*Johannestag*), place (*Nuremberg*), and action (*sixteenth-century Mastersingers’ contest*). Although Eva’s chromatically inflected outburst helps prepare the direct quotation, listeners often find it intrusive and disturbing. Michael Tanner locates its purpose in a destructive irony, which grotesquely exposes and repudiates the “metaphysics of transcendent love.” That Wagner hastily abandons the *Tristan* quotation to begin the Baptism scene supports this reading.

II

Wagner associated the technique of large-scale thematic returns with Beethoven’s legacy. He valued this technique particularly for its capacity to project long-range dramatic structure. In transposing Beethoven’s implicitly dramatic techniques from the symphony into the music drama, Wagner understood himself to have brought the specifically Germanic symphonic tradition to its culmination. Beethoven’s Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, which incorporated thematic recurrence into heroic-redemptive teleologies, represented particularly significant programmatic achievements. As Arthur Groos has illustrated through the concepts of typology and prolepsis, narratives of fulfillment are also central to *Die Meistersinger*. But the programmatic trajectory involving the thematic complex in question is not redemptive but pessimistic and outlines a narrative of frustration.

Beethoven’s String Quartet in C♯ Minor, op. 131, exhibiting thematic cyclism within a narrative of frustration, was well known to Wagner before he had written a note of *Die Meistersinger*. According to Wagner’s autobiography, he heard Beethoven’s late String Quartets, ops. 131 and (presumably) 127 in October 1853, as performed by the excellent Maurin-Chevillard Quartet. The enthusiasm sparked by this experience moved him to begin rehearsing the work with the Heisterhagen-Schleich Quartet. For their chamber music series in Zurich, he contributed a “programmatic explanation” of this work for their public performance on 12 December 1854. After a private performance in 1855, Wagner next coached this work with the Tribschen Quartet in 1870–71. Although he had previously criticized Beethoven’s late style for its fragmented design, his encounter in 1853 with the late string quartets transformed his attitude. The *Erläuterungen*, which were intended to “follow the composer in all moods of his rich, inner life,” are evidence that Wagner’s grasp of these works had become more sympathetic. The possibility that his newly won appreciation stemmed from an insight into their use for his work as compositional models is compelling, if unverifiable.

High esteem for Beethoven’s late style was not limited to Wagner. In a letter to Franz Brendel from 1859, Wagner’s confidant Hans von Bülow testifies to his fellow “New German” that *Tristan und Isolde* is of such sophistication that its distance from the earlier

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34“Beethoven’s recollection of discrete thematic identities from preceding movements within the Finales of the Fifth and Ninth represented, for Wagner, an overt transgression of the boundaries of instrumental form in the direction of drama” (Grey, *Wagner’s Musical Prose*, p. 105).
35Compare the final sentence of Klaus Kropfenger, *Wagner and Beethoven: Richard Wagner’s Reception of Beethoven*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [rev. version of 1975 German edn.]), p. 253: “Wagner saw music drama as the one and only way of executing the legacy of Beethoven. There was a time when he had envisaged it as fulfilling history; now it would creatively refute history . . . [as] consummation of everything yet to come.”
36Groos, “Constructing Nuremberg.”
38Kropfenger, *Wagner and Beethoven*, p. 47.
39“Dem Tonichter in allen Stimmungen seines reichen innerlichen Lebens . . . zu folgen” (RWGS, IX, 118).
40Peckham has argued that textural continuity and the technique of thematic repetition with dramatic or psychological motivation were the two main aspects of Beethoven’s late string quartets from which Wagner benefited. Peckham, *Beyond the Tragic Vision*, pp. 266–67.
a. Opus 131, fugal subject.

b. Fugato subject in act III Prelude, A section.

c. Cobbling Song melody in Prelude, C section.

Example 9: Collation of melodic material from Beethoven's String Quartet, op. 131, and Wagner's Prelude.

Lohengrin is as great as the difference between Beethoven's op. 131 and his String Quartets, op. 18.\textsuperscript{41} To clarify his analogy, von Bülow enunciates Wagner's simultaneous mastery of "detail-work" (Detailarbeit) and "architectonics" (Architechttonik) in his most recent style.

Musical similarities between op. 131 and Die Meistersinger are noticeable both in the Detailarbeit of the act III Prelude and in the Architectonik spanning acts II and III, within which our thematic complex recurs. After the Klageruf has sounded, the Prelude presents a fugal, registrally grave, string-quartet texture marked Adagio, similar to the first movement of the Beethoven work.\textsuperscript{42} In both pieces, the fugal subject has two phases. The first phase has four notes, mostly of long duration, which may be partitioned into two intervallic skips. The second skip is approached by semitone and moves in opposite direction to the first skip. The fourth note of the first phase, scale degree 6 in both pieces, receives durational and dynamic accentuation. A descending stepwise figure marks the second phase. Although the second phase of Beethoven's fugal subject is more elaborate than in Wagner's corresponding music, the exact pitches of op. 131's C♯-minor fugal tail appear in the C section's Cobbling Song quotation, as shown in ex. 9. Although the correspondence in pitch is an obvious by-product of the temporary key area, the desire to clarify the allusion to Beethoven's Quartet might have helped motivate the choice of E major, which stands out within a G-major environment. The similarity between the Song and the op. 131 fugal subject implies transitively that the Song quotation in the Prelude's C section should share features with the Prelude's fugal subject. Indeed, both begin with relatively long durations, skip intervallically during the first phase, and move in stepwise motion during the second phase. Moreover, the high tessitura of the


\textsuperscript{42}Although Ludwig Finscher suggests a similarity between the act III Prelude's fugato and Beethoven's op. 132 in his paper, he later agrees with Werner Breig's proposal of op. 131 as a model for the fugato. See the discussion transcript following Finscher's essay, "Über den Kontrapunkt der Meistersinger," in Das Drama Richard Wagners als musikalisches Kunstwerk, ed. Carl Dahlhaus (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse, 1970), p. 310. In an article examining the relationship between Beethoven's op. 130 and Wagner's Tristan, Kropfinger proposes a relationship between op. 131's first movement and the act I Einleitung to Tristan; both pieces possess "einen Zwischencharakter zwischen Introduktion und Exposition." One can also discern this structural feature in the G-minor A section of the act III Prelude to Die Meistersinger. See Kropfinger, "Wagners

Tristan und Beethoven's Streichquartett op. 130: Funktion und Strukturen des Prinzips der Einleitungswiederholung," in Das Drama Richard Wagners, p. 271.
contrapuntal fantasy in the Prelude, also set for strings, recalls the developmental episodes in Beethoven's movement [esp. mm. 63ff. in op. 131, movt. I]. The sustained allusion to op. 131's fugal movement further interrelates the A and C sections, while weakening their relationship to the chorale. The dissociation of B from A and C presages the elision of the chorale from the Prelude's reprise section.

"Architectonic" similarities between op. 131 and Die Meistersinger are best examined in conjunction with their respective Wagnerian narratives. Indeed, it is my hypothesis that the programmatic coincidence between the opera's plot and Wagner's Erläuterung for op. 131 was the primary factor that motivated him to select this specific Beethovenian model for Die Meistersinger. Wagner discusses the program for op. 131 in three places: the Erläuterung, "On Conducting," and "Beethoven." In the Erläuterung, Wagner presents the entire Quartet as the "reflection" [Gegenbild] of a day in the life of a saint, a day in which "not one wish will be fulfilled—not one!" The first movement represents the morning's melancholy "awakening," during which the saintly figure says a penitential prayer [Bussgebet] and confronts God with his belief in the eternally Good. The first movement is then interrupted by a "recognizably consoling phenomenon," corresponding to the D-major movement in 6. At the beginning of the Finale, where the first movement's fugal subject returns, Wagner discovers "the dance of the world itself: wild desire, painful complaint, love's rapture, highest joy, wailing, anger, voluptuousness and suffering; there lightning blazes and thunder growls: and above everything the monstrous puppeteer [Spielmann]. . . . he laughs at himself, since this sorcery was only a game for him." 44

Wagner's program for op. 131 corresponds closely to the narrative of frustration in Die Meistersinger. The saint at the center of this drama is Sachs—he is, after all, compared to an Engel in the Cobbling Song. Sachs's day of trial is thus his name day, Johannestag. The Prelude, which is involved in a larger operatic pattern of Prelude, Scene (exchange with David), and Aria [Wahn-monologue], 45 mediates between the late-night tumult of St. John's Eve and the "morning sun" of St. John's Day that will brighten Sachs's workshop; within the dramatic time span of the Prelude, the "Wach' auf" call of the chorale may mark a literal as well as figurative dawn. In correlation to the "morning prayer," the chorale supplies the sacred emblem of beatitude, while the Cobbling Song quotation finds Sachs in a posture of innocent supplication, his eyes turned upward—indeed, the original text of the Song quotation refers explicitly to the heavens. 46 David's playful motive in D major enters similarly to the "recognizably consoling phenomenon" in Beethoven's second movement. The stormy return of the main theme in op. 131's Finale matches the beginning of Sachs's diatribe in act III, sc. 4, when his desires are ultimately frustrated. 47 Finally, the composer, that all-controlling Spielmann, discloses his presence with the signature motive from Tristan und Isolde, a gesture that smacks of self-parody.

The self-reference brings to light an important aspect of Wagner's understanding of Beethoven's achievements and his own. Because

44Joseph Kerman notes that the phrase "nicht einen Wunsch!" is an allusion to Goethe's Faust. See his Beethoven Quartets [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967], p. 330.

44Darcy, "In Search of C Major," p. 4.
44As several scholars have observed, Wagner's predilection for F. G. Waldmüller's 1823 portrait of the deaf Beethoven with upturned, "hearing eyes" is reflected in the image of Beethoven that he presents in his 1870 essay on the composer. See Alessandra Comini, The Changing Image of Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking [New York: Rizzoli, 1987], p. 295, Kropfinger, Wagner and Beethoven, pp. 1–2; both are cited and discussed in K. M. Knittel, "Wagner, Deafness, and the Reception of Beethoven's Late Style," Journal of the American Musical Society 51 [1998], 49–82.
44Joseph Kerman calls attention to the "violence of [the Finale's] main theme, its pent-up emotion, its wilderness . . . angry, operatic gestural quality" [Beethoven Quartets, pp. 342–43]. If one accepts the hypothesis of op. 131 as a model for Die Meistersinger, then Wagner successfully realized his ambition to transfer Beethoven's quasi-operatic gestures into a suitable dramatic context.
op. 131 is most significant to Wagner as an autobiographical document, it receives its most elaborate interpretation not, as one might expect, in the Erläuterung dedicated to it, but in the “Beethoven” essay. According to Wagner’s hermeneutics, compositions represented counterparts to the composer’s innermost thoughts and moods. Die Meistersinger provides an example of these hermeneutics within his own œuvre. As we know from his correspondence, he identified strongly with the opera’s protagonist, the doubly talented “Schuster und Poet.”

In accordance with a biographical tradition dating from Wagner’s own lifetime, Die Meistersinger is a sort of Schlüsseloper, in which Sachs renounces his desire for Eva, just as Wagner renounced his passion for Mathilde Wesendonck. Sharing the experience of frustration, the various identities intermingling in these related programs—Beethoven, Sachs, Wagner—seem to blend together.

The qualities of the idealist are reflected in the three characteristics that underpin Wagner’s image of Beethoven: an introspective musical mind, religious faith and optimism, and an “emancipating tendency in his art.” The short biographical summary that immediately precedes the discussion of op. 131 in the “Beethoven” essay contextualizes these characteristics, which are thrown into sharp relief by the experience of frustration. Stifled by Jesuitical dogma in Vienna, Beethoven had to struggle to maintain his identity and values. Although he was himself baptized and raised as a Catholic, “the whole spirit of German Protestantism lived in him.” As a musician, Beethoven followed the example of J. S. Bach and embraced his “miraculous work” (Wunderwerk) as “the bible of his faith.” In the “magic book of the necromancer [Bach], who let the light of the macrocosm shine over the microcosm,” Beethoven came to understand the sacred power of music and became himself a saint (ein Heiliger). His sainthood was both a blessing and a curse; his visions of truth and beauty brought him into conflict with a fallen world. Within this world, optimism was a “mistake” that would “revenge itself through increased suffering and sensitivity to [this suffering].”

Disillusioned, the saint will “always fall from the paradise of his inner harmony back into the hell of the horribly dissonant (disharmonisch) existence, a situation which he may again and at last resolve harmoniously (sich harmonisch aufzulösen) as an artist.” This general description of the saintly predicament flows into the discussion of op. 131, a work of musical literature (Tondichtung) that, for Wagner, depicts Beethoven’s inner life according to the paradigm of disillusionment.

This narrative, in conjunction with certain musical features, relates the act III Prelude to the Beethovenian legacy. The first movement of the String Quartet and Wagner’s Prelude both pay homage to Bach by appropriating eighteenth-century polyphonic textures. The evangelical outburst of the chorale illustrates the “macrocosm”—the milieu of an enlightened, Lutheran Volk—shining forth its G-major redemption on the darker counterpoint of the G-minor “microcosm.” The disillusionment of the saint and his concomitant increase in suffering have three possible musical representations in the Prelude: in the dissonant clash as the idealistic vision of the Cobbler’s Song meets the all-too-human sexual desire represented in the contrapuntal fantasy; in the “agony” chord that estranges the chorale from the renewed Klageruf; and in the suppression of the chorale from the reprise section. Although the abrupt move from the chorale to the dissonant harmonization of the Klageruf in the reprise perfectly realizes the saint’s fall from paradise into the “disharmonisches Dasein” of the mortal world, the consonant resolution (note the wordplay in harmonisch sich aufzulösen; Auflösung also refers to a resolution in music) of this dilemma does not seem to form part of the Prelude. While the self-parodic quotation of Tristan, the final station of the opera’s op. 131-derived “Architektonik,” spotlights the artifice of the

49 “Der Irrtum des Optimisten rächt sich nun durch Verstärkung dieser Leiden und seiner Empfindlichkeit dagegen” (RWGS, VIII, 179).
50 “So fällt er aus dem Paradiese seiner inneren Harmonie immer in die Hölle des furchtbar disharmonischen Daseins zurück, welches er wiederum nur als Künstler endlich harmonisch sich aufzulösen weiß” (ibid.).
artist (Künstler), it is too dissonant and inconclusive to resolve the painful vision of humankind’s falleness as expressed in the Klageruf.

Large-scale tonal design may solve the problem of consonant resolution in the Prelude. The “search for C major,” which Warren Darcy proposes as the overarching tonal narrative for Die Meistersinger, involves the G-major Prelude musically and programmatically. The Prelude-as-structural-dominant receives local and global resolutions. It is locally resolved to C major at the end of the Wahn-monologue. Here, Sachs seizes on a solution to end the social disunity in Nuremberg—he will use his ingenuity as an artist “to steer madness with finesse” (Wahn fein zu lenken). The Prelude’s structural dominant is resolved at the end of the opera, by which point Sachs has squelched his individual desires and successfully engineered social unity.

An alternative response denies that the opera ever resolves the pessimistic vision of the Prelude. Wherever the Klageruf reappears in act III, it helps sustain the negative valuation of the world contained in the Prelude. Its consistent appearance after the C-major Prize Song expresses skepticism toward musical and programmatic Auflösung in general. Sachs’s last word, the admonition “Hab’ Acht!”, broadens this skepticism into a communal value. According to this perspective, the concept of Wahn, associated since the beginning of act III with the Klageruf, is an integral aspect of reality toward which the only proper attitude is resignation. Whether appearing in the form of deception, cruelty, inconstancy, lust, or some other vice, Wahn is the engine behind all human affairs. This Schopenhauerian insight, lying at the core of Die Meistersinger, may have prohibited Wagner from silencing the Klageruf, the sound of suffering.

Thomas Grey has drawn attention to the “disruptive fanfares” in the slow movements of Beethoven’s Fifth and Ninth Symphonies that anticipate the “momentous” arrival of their final movements, a proleptic technique linking Beethoven’s work with Wagner’s. In Die Meistersinger, however, the “red thread” under examination traces not a positive but a negative trajectory within a narrative of frustration. Even after this narrative reaches its terminus with the Tristan quotation, the Klageruf continues to appear in a deliberate deferral of “consonant resolution.” The act III Prelude, in which the redemption of the “Wach’ auf” gesture is subsequently negated by the renewed Klageruf, embodies the act’s large-scale narrative design and exploits its specific technique of leitmotivic deferral. If the Overture sports the grin of comedy, the Prelude rotates the dramatic mask to expose the satiric grimace of tragedy. As the emblem for disillusionment and resignation, the Prelude represents the concise philosophical statement of the opera.

III

If the allusion to op. 131’s first movement accounts well for the texture of the A and C sections in the Prelude, the best compositional precedent for the difference between the A and B sections is Berlioz’s Harold en Italie. In the introduction to the first movement of this symphony, a G-minor fugue begins slowly in the low strings, eventually yielding to Harold’s idyllic G-major idée fixe. A passage in the “Open Letter to Liszt” proves Wagner’s direct knowledge of this work. Liszt’s contemporaneous tract, “Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie” (1855), exalts it as an exemplar for program musicians. To pay homage to Berlioz in the act III Prelude, a piece composed in 1862 at the height of New German rhetorical fervor, strongly allies Wagner with this aesthetic school.

Liszt’s “Berlioz” essay represents a manifesto for this school, which valued the invention of new forms according to a literary

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51In contrast, the irrant in Tristan, the so-called Sehnsuchtsmotiv, appears in the very last measures of that opera as if resolved with a plagal cadence in B major.

52Compare Michael Tanner’s assessment that the Klageruf’s “expressive burden is just that—a burden. The fact that Sachs responds over and over again to the Prize song with pain suggests that he finds in it, for all his admiration, something of a promise which he knows cannot be fulfilled” (Tanner, “Wagner and Sachs,” p. 96).


54Über Franz Liszts symphonische Dichtungen,” GSD, V, 194.
impulse rather than composing abstract *Tonspiele*—an aesthetic priority conveyed in the coinage, “symphonic poem.” Accordingly, he spends more time discussing the introduction to the first movement’s sonata form, a section often reserved for compositional experimentation, than the sonata form itself.\(^5\) The main attraction of Berlioz’s introduction for Liszt was its careful design of diametrical contrast, a feature that would not have escaped the attention of the composer of the act III Prelude.

Not only compositional details but also genealogy of form interrelate New German aesthetics and the act III Prelude. A musical genre enjoined to dramatic purpose, the overture is invoked by both Wagner and Liszt as the predecessor to program music. Furthermore, the Prelude’s dual responsibility—to introduce dramatic action and simultaneously serve as an autonomous concert piece—transforms it into a case study for aesthetics in mid- to late-nineteenth-century classical music. Grey’s “aesthetic schizophrenia” and Dahlhaus’s “twofold truth” describe the tensions gripping composition at this time.\(^6\) The imperative to unfold music organically from within opposed the imperative to represent an externally imposed narrative. These two compositional approaches, the “esoteric” and the “exoteric” respectively, were loosely correlated with specific sectors of the audience—the connoisseurs and the masses. In the “Berlioz” essay, Liszt espouses typical New German values by upholding the “exoteric” approach. The “berufener Musiker” (musician by calling) and “dichtender Symphonist” (poeticizing symphonist) distinguish themselves from the “mere,” “specific,” and “professional musician” by allowing the idea to give birth to the musical work. Moreover, an intimacy between composers and their compositions is assumed. When the composer does not “speak to

people either of his pains or joys, nor of his renunciation or desire, he remains indifferent to the masses and interests only those contemporaries who are able to judge his skill.”\(^5\)

As testimony to contemporary aesthetic debates, the Prelude foregrounds the conflict between the esoteric and the exoteric in the dichotomy represented by the A and the B sections. Wagner describes fugal counterpoint, which exists in the A section, as “the artificial play of art with itself, the mathematics of feeling, the mechanical rhythm of egoistic harmony.”\(^5\) An opaque texture and overly regulated compositional process made counterpoint into the very image of a socially alienated art that “exists for itself alone.”\(^5\) In contrast, the chorale is the music of a unified multitude, specifically the German *Volk* of the Lutheran Reformation. Partly due to the generality of Liszt’s terms, felicitous coincidences arise between the Prelude’s content and the esoteric message of the program composer: the “pains and joys” of the first A section and both B sections, respectively, yield to the “desire” and “renunciation” of the C section and the reprise section.

In the Prelude, esotericism is present in a more positive form as a *Kunst des Übergangs*. The permutation of one theme into another (for example, the *Klageruf* into A’s fugal subject or C’s canonic motive into the *Eva* motive) and the seamless interweaving of musical sections (for example, B with C) shape the music into an organically unfolding event.\(^6\)

\(^{57}\)“Das er aber zu den Menschen weder von seinen Schmerzen und Freuden, noch von seinem Entsehnen und Begehren spricht, so bleibt er den Massen gleichgültig und interessirt nur die Zeitgenossen, die seine Fertigkeit zu beurteilen im Stande sind” (Liszt, “Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie,” pp. 48–49).

\(^{58}\)“Das künstliche Mitsichselbstspielen der Kunst, die Mathematik des Gefühls, der mechanische Rhythmus der egoistischen Harmonie” (“Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft,” GSD, X, 95).

\(^{59}\)“In seiner Erfindung gefiel sich die abstrakte Tonkunst dermassen, dass sie sich einzig und allein als absolute, für sich bestehende Kunst ausgab” (ibid., p. 95).


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artwork that results from combining such esotericism and exotericism is a “a sequence of soul-states” (eine Folge von Seelenzuständen)—a concept of music popularized by A. B. Marx’s study of Beethoven and widely promoted by the New Germans.\textsuperscript{61} In this formulation, the esoteric (the recognizable soul-states) and the esoteric (the musician’s careful layout and ordering of these states) merge symbiotically to form a Gesamtaesthetik designed to appeal to connoisseur and pedestrian tastes alike.\textsuperscript{62} In Die Meistersinger, the facility to move between socially differentiated strata finds its embodiment in the great individual of Hans Sachs, who is both Cobbler and Poet. The Prelude is not only a portrait of Sachs’s inner life but also a paean to the breadth and depth of any great individual who, to borrow a phrase from early Nietzsche, can “organize Chaos” and juxtapose antipodes. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the great individual behind the Prelude (Wagner) is, from one perspective, the great individual of the Prelude.

A biblical metaphor in Liszt’s “Berlioz” tract further expands the significance of dichotomies in the Prelude. Midway through the essay, Liszt compares reactionary composers to the “Pharisees of the Old Testament,” who cleave to “the Letter of the Law, even at the risk of killing its Spirit.” In an 1849 libretto draft for an opera entitled “Jesus of Nazareth,” Wagner cites the same biblical verse. Thirteen years later, Wagner’s juxtaposition in the Prelude of an arcane fugal texture and a sacred polyphony in free chorale style would set this conflict in tones.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{61}Compare Liszt, “Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie,” p. 34.
\textsuperscript{62}With a metaphor that Thomas Mann enjoyed to quote, Nietzsche described the simultaneous appeal of Wagner’s music to high- and lowbrow audiences as its “double vision” (doppelte Optik).
\textsuperscript{63}In Wagner’s German, the reference to Romans 7:6 reads “im neuen Wesen des Geistes und nicht im alten Wesen des Buchstaben” (“Jesus von Nazareth,” RWGS, VI, 239). Compare this reference to a modern English edition of this verse: “But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit” (The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, ed. Wayne A. Meeks [1st edn. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993], p. 2125).

The Spirit of the Law, Liszt continues, is embodied in the Love of the New Testament, which inspires progressive artists to strive toward the Infinite (das Unendliche), the Ideal, and the Beautiful.\textsuperscript{64} Wagner’s “Open Letter” on Liszt’s symphonic poems, written in the period between the publication of Liszt’s “Berlioz” essay and the composition of the act III Prelude, transposes this dichotomy from the realm of production to the sphere of reception. The charge of incomprehensible formlessness leveled at Liszt’s newest compositions by the “embittered guardians” of tradition is nullified by the testimony of a more enlightened audience that experiences, during the performance of the new artwork, a “sudden elevation from its habitual mode of perception.”\textsuperscript{65} Whereas the traditionalists are paralyzed by their fear of the New, an enlightened few are able to overcome the alienation estranging artwork from recipient by adopting an attitude of Love toward the artist. In Wagner’s essay, Love allows listeners an empathetic insight into the mysterious workings of the individual artist, enabling them to view the work through the eyes of its creator and thereby to grasp its significance. In Die Meistersinger, one may recognize at least three correlatives to Wagner’s theory of reception: the eruption of the chorale at m. 16 of the act III Prelude, jolting listeners out of their habitual modes of perception; the dramatic idea behind the chorale, the love for Sachs that inspires the people of Nuremberg to perform a spontaneous celebration of their cultural hero; the empathetic gesture whereby the Folk honors Sachs by performing his own composition, the “Wach’ auf!” chorale. In singing both his

\textsuperscript{64}“Leider müssen wir eingestehen, dass zwischen den berufenen und den professionellen Musikern ein heimlich loderner, aber unvernünfticher Streit besteht. Die letzteren halten sich, wie die Pharisäer des alten Bundes, an den Buchstaben des Gesetzes, selbst auf die Gefahr hin seinen Geist zu tödten. Sie sind ohne Verständnis für die im neuen Testament geöffnete Liebe, für den Durst nach dem Unendlichen, für den Traum von einem Ideal, für das Streben nach dem Poetischschönen unter allen Formen” [Liszt, “Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie,” p. 59].
\textsuperscript{65}“Sie wissen, dass dies meine gute Meinung über das Publikum bestätigte, von dem wir allerdings nichts andres, als eine plötzliche Erhebung aus seinem gewohnten Anschauungswesen verlangen dürfen” (“Über Franz Liszts symphonische Dichtungen,” GSD, V, 196).
music and his poetry, the Folk not only participates in the artwork but completes it through its realization.

Sachs’s poem “Die Wittemberg’sche Nachtigall,” on which the “Wach’ auf” chorale is based, might have stimulated Wagner to represent biblical programs in the Prelude. In the poem, the song of the nightingale [Martin Luther] awakens the sheep [the faithful congregation] from their slumber and leads them out from the clutches of the wolves [the Roman clergy] into safe pastures.\(^6\) So too does the cry of “Wach’ auf!” initiate the movement in the Prelude from the dark fugal music of the “Pharisees” to the luminous Lutheran chorale, which will be sung on the pastures of Nuremberg. Moreover, just as the dominant-tonic cadence setting the resurrection formula “Wach’ auf!” simultaneously launches the love-suffused chorale and terminates the esoteric fugue, so too does the Jesus of Wagner’s libretto at once launch a new sacred era and annihilate the “wise and learned men” with the simple truth that “God is love.”\(^6\)

Liszt’s biblical metaphor also interacts with plot elements within the opera. The bass fugal texture harks back to an act I scene in which the Guild members form a critical jury. After Beckmesser lists the various improprieties of Walther’s Spring Song, the Guild members chime in slowly and softly with a fugal subject beneath the phrase, “Man ward nicht klug” (We did not understand it), confirming Beckmesser’s negative verdict. The mandarin Mastersingers, whose myopic adherence to outmoded laws threatens them with cultural irrelevance, resemble Liszt’s Pharisees, a similarly exclusive association whose meager wisdom lies in “self-opinionated squabbling and sterile, pointless inquiries into the subtleties of the rules.”\(^6\)

The subject of the contrapuntal “criticism” in the Prelude, however, is not Walther’s Song but Sachs’s signature Klageruf. The juxtaposition of the Klageruf with its critical reception (the fugal exposition) evokes a scene from the Gospel of John. When asked by the Pharisees’ messengers who John is, he responds, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness” (John 1:23). As Wagner indicates in the libretto, John the Baptist is Sachs’s typological partner on the opera’s plane of biblical metaphor; in the Prelude, John’s vox clamantis in deserto becomes Sachs’s Klageruf.

Interpreting the Prelude’s fugal exposition as a representation of dissonant “squabbling” leads one to imagine a more general significance for counterpoint in Die Meistersinger, a project outlined and proposed by Ludwig Finscher over thirty years ago.\(^6\) The act II riot, itself an amplified version of the act I melee in the Guild,\(^7\) presents counterpoint as noise, the aural equivalent of the ensuing violence onstage. The juxtaposition of the act II riot and the Prelude invites the listener to interpret the fugal texture as a sublimation of the preceding violence—the Guild’s hostility differing only in degree, not in kind, from the hostility of the Nuremberg citizenry. Ludwig Finscher’s description of the contrapuntal episodes in the Prelude as “meditative” may extend this interpretation further in two ways.\(^7\) One might understand the Prelude to unfold Sachs’s thoughts, and the fugal exposition may represent his meditation on the Guild; its extremely slow tempo simulates his intense scrutiny of the Guild’s discourse and tenets. If the Prelude is both a cornerstone within Wagner’s “most perfect masterpiece” and a general testament to artistic achievement (as suggested by its involvement with Beethoven’s legacy and New German aes-

\(^{6}\)For a description of the poem, see Warrack, Richard Wagner, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, pp. 55–56.


\(^{6}\)Ihre Weisheit besteht in rechthaberischem Streiten, in sterilen müßigen Untersuchungen über Subtilitäten der Regel” [Liszt, “Berlioz und seine Harold-Symphonie,” p. 59]. In a related programmatic context, subterranean contrapuntal texture may represent intrigue, as in Verdi’s Un ballo in maschera. One might also wish to compare the Guild to the Knights of the Grail in Parsifal, an elite, male group shackled to tradition and threatened by superannuation.


\(^{6}\)Groos remarks that “the same Nuremberg citizens who seem so united in their chorale profession of faith are capable of the personal antagonisms that set them against each other in the contrapuntal riot at the end of act II—a public escalation of the fragility already revealed within the guild of the Mastersingers at the end of act I” (Groos, “Constructing Nuremberg,” p. 23).

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thetics), then the fugal exposition may represent the composer’s meditation on his own craft. The slightly vagrant tonality of both the fugal exposition and the contrapuntal fantasy in the Prelude hints at the danger implicit in all tonal counterpoint. Just as the individual egos of the Mastersingers spawn dissension within the Guild, the independence of melodic lines threatens to destroy the coherence of a harmonic context. While showcasing compositional skill, tonal counterpoint is nevertheless an act that coerces potentially disparate elements (“voices”) into regulated matrices. Once one glimpses the disconcerting alternative to such regulation, however arbitrary it may seem, in the unstable and nameless harmonies of Tristan, one better grasps the import of what Dahlhaus has called “second diatonicism” in Die Meistersinger—a tonal dialect whose degree of chromaticism exposes the diatonic element as artificial without disrupting its regulatory function. The price of social harmony, for people as well as tones, is self-abnegation. To ward off the temptations of a desocializing Wahn and resign oneself to this reality, the Prelude tells us, is as great a challenge as any facing the individual.


73 Dahlhaus, Nineteenth-Century Music, p. 205.