

Wagner's Shakespeare: *Das Liebesverbot*, the Problem Comedy and the Carnavalesque

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This paper explores Wagner's early comedic opera, Das Liebesverbot. Though his 'mature comedy' Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg has been the focus of much scholarly attention, the composer's first and only other foray into the genre has been much less studied and often outright dismissed. While contemporary scholars have increasingly looked to Wagner's pre-Dutchman operas, they often read them purely in light of his later works; with this examination of his adaptation of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, I offer a consideration of the young composer's work in its own right. After considering issues of textual and cultural adaptation, this paper offers close readings of several passages of the opera, in tandem with parallel scenes from the original play-text, to show how Wagner's transformation of this not-quite-so-comedic comedy into an expression of the carnivalesque reveals an expansive and cosmopolitan artistic and political philosophy during a period during which he was greatly influenced by the authors of the Junges Deutschland movement. Such a reconsideration disrupts the standard conception of a composer who is still often considered, in his own words, the 'most German being'. Here, we see Wagner at arguably his most cosmopolitan, adapting the work of an English playwright he revered, altering the plot so that it ostensibly aligned with the ideological outlook of his German revolutionary colleagues, and setting it to music of a decidedly French and Italian flavour, all this in a way that still preserves many of the same, seemingly contradictory themes present in the original play.

Richard Wagner once declared Shakespeare the most profound author of all time.¹ In nearly 50 years of essaying, letter writing and personal conversation, not to mention his compositions, Shakespeare looms over all other figures in the composer's intellectual life, save perhaps for Beethoven: 'Beethoven melodies and Shakespeare scenes, these are everything to him', Cosima recorded in 1882.² Ten years earlier, she noted her husband making a similar pairing: 'no longer seeing such men as Shakespeare and Beethoven about, has made me melancholy throughout my life' (CD, I: 527; 23 August 1872). In his autobiography he likewise writes how 'in ecstatic dreams I met both of them, saw and spoke to them, and on awakening

¹ Richard Wagner, 'The Destiny of Opera', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. V, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896): 144. Subsequent citations from Wagner's collected works will be indicated directly in the text as PW followed by volume and page number.

² Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, vol. II, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dieter Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978): 834, entry dated 29 March 1882. Subsequent citations will appear in-text, abbreviated CD followed by volume, page number and date of entry.

found myself in tears'.³ While much has been made of the Wagner–Beethoven connection, far less has been written of Wagner's devotion to 'the greatest poet of all time' (*PW*, V: 144). English-language scholarship is particularly lacking in this regard, which is surprising given the centrality of both figures in their respective artistic fields, and given that of Wagner's mere 13 completed operas, one is in fact an adaptation of Shakespeare: *Das Liebesverbot* of 1836, the composer's version of *Measure for Measure*.

To be sure, both play and opera have been controversial from their own time onwards. Although the playwright is known for his ability to intermingle genres, *Measure for Measure's* mix of comedy and tragedy is extreme. To eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sensibilities, both in England and abroad, its bawdy humour was offensive, and it was often labelled one of his 'problem plays'.⁴ In the Germany of Wagner's youth, it was rarely, if ever, seen on the stage, and when it was it took a form barely resembling Shakespeare's. Of the hundreds of operatic Shakespeare adaptations, going as far back as the late seventeenth century, Wagner's remains the only extended musical setting of the play to-date.⁵ Regarding the opera itself, the composer was famously to abandon comedy as a genre after this work, returning to it only once, over 30 years later, with *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868).⁶ While this later comedy found its way into the canon, it, too, has been at the centre of both popular and critical scandal over the years. *Das Liebesverbot* is no less idiosyncratic, and those scholars who have engaged with it often toe a kind of Wagnerian party line: the piece was an aberration; it was a temporary straying from the more properly Germanic themes treated in *Die Feen* and returning after *Rienzi*; it misrepresented Shakespeare's original (one author even refers to it as a 'sin' against the playwright).⁷

In many ways, these authors confirm Nicholas Vazsonyi's assertion that 'even today, when we talk about Wagner, we adopt his language and use his imagery'.⁸ Gifting Ludwig II with the holograph score of *Das Liebesverbot* in 1866, for example, the composer made his 'guilt' over having composed such works known:

Ich irrte einst, und möcht' es nun verbüßen:	I once transgressed and now would fain atone:
Wie mach' ich mich der Jugendsünde frei?	But how can I cast off this youthful sin?
Ihr Werk leg' ich demütig dir zu Füßen,	I humbly lay its work before your feet

³ Richard Wagner, *My Life*, vol. I, n.t., (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911): 34. As above, subsequent in-text citations will be labeled *ML*, followed by volume and page number.

⁴ The term, first coined by F.S. Boas in 1896, will be discussed in more detail below.

⁵ Winton Dean, writing in 1965, 'know[s] of nearly 200' such adaptations, but his list is now more than 50 years out of date. Though dozens of Shakespearean operas have premiered since the time of Dean's writing, none have drawn on *Measure for Measure* as their source material. For Dean's overview of the topic, as well as an index of the adaptations, see Winton Dean, 'Shakespeare in the Opera House', *Shakespeare Survey* 18 (1965): 75–93.

⁶ Patrick McCreless, in *Wagner's Siegfried: Its Drama, History and Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), makes the case for seeing *Siegfried* as a comedy; however, the argument has also met with its detractors. Indicative criticism of McCreless's claims can be found for example in Michael Mitchell's review of the book, *Opera Quarterly* 1/3 (1983): 240–41.

⁷ Edgar Stel, 'Wagner and Shakespeare', *Musical Quarterly* 8/4 (1922): 498.

⁸ Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 2.

Daß deine Gnade ihm Erlöser sei.

That I may find redemption through
your grace.⁹

Cosima's diary provides us with all the adjectives we need to describe the opera as Wagner himself did: 'horrible', 'execrable' and 'disgusting' (CD, II: 263; 31 January 1879). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as we will see below, used the terms 'horrible' and 'disgusting' in describing Shakespeare's original as well. Robert Gutman, writing before the standard English-language edition of Cosima's diaries had been published, provides an alternate but no less flattering interpretation of the German: 'atrocious', 'abominable' and 'nauseating'. Falling in line with Wagner, he hastens to add that 'few would disagree' with such a judgement.¹⁰ Geoffrey Riggs, writing on the American premiere of the work in 1983, likewise offers a properly Wagnerian denunciation of its quality. He refers to the opera as 'inferior to its predecessor', *Die Feen*, whose quasi-mythological fairy-tale setting seemed more *echt Deutsch* to the reviewer. Part of the problem, he suggests, is that with *Das Liebesverbot* 'we can already detect the didactic musical insistences of chorus and orchestra together with other traces of fustian that point ahead to the grosser aesthetic of *Rienzi*'.¹¹ One can almost discern echoes of Hans Sachs, who at the end of *Die Meistersinger* warns of the corrupting influences of 'foreign mists and vanities' that threatened German art and German land alike.¹² If these arguments begin to sound similar, it may be because they were already well-rehearsed by the composer himself a century or so earlier.

Inasmuch as present-day Wagner scholarship has begun to turn to the composer's earlier works with a renewed sense of interest, the time for a more nuanced appraisal of *Das Liebesverbot* may be at hand. Authors such as David Trippett, Mary Ann Smart and Thomas Grey are among those leading the charge. Their work has shown, among other things, how Italian bel canto and French operatic traditions (both comic and tragic) helped shape the operas Wagner wrote in the 1830s, and how these traditions continued to impact later works as well.¹³ Yet scholars working on 'early Wagner' are still burdened with the responsibility of laying the general groundwork for more detailed reappraisals: many tend to treat the pre-*Dutchman* operas as a unit, resulting in surveys of works whose individual influences and musico-dramatic structures are often quite different from one another.¹⁴ Though I am admittedly generalizing somewhat – John

⁹ Quoted in Dieter Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, trans. Daphne Ellis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003): 25. The translation is also Borchmeyer's.

¹⁰ Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968): 55. The words Cosima cites her husband as using are *schauderhaft*, *scheußlich* and *ekelhaft* and can be found in *Die Tagebücher*, vol. II (1878–1883), ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mach (Munich: R. Piper and Co., 1977): 300.

¹¹ Geoffrey S. Riggs, 'The American Premiere of *Das Liebesverbot*', *Opera Journal* 16/3 (1983): 31.

¹² As the lines read in *Die Meistersinger*, 'welschen Dunst mit welschem Tand/sie pflanzen uns in deutsches Land./Was deutsch und echt, wüsst kein mehr . . .'

¹³ Thomas Grey, 'Musical Background and Influences', in *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992): 64–92; Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); David Trippett, *Wagner's Melodies: Aesthetics and Materialism in German Musical Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ For such stylistic overviews, see, for instance, the first chapter of Borchmeyer's *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*; Thomas Grey, 'Meister Richard's Apprenticeship: The Early

Deathridge's monograph on *Rienzi* serves as a prime counterexample – it remains true that there are lamentably few in-depth studies of the early operas in themselves, and none of *Das Liebesverbot* that really attempt to understand it on its own terms.

This paper seeks to place the opera not only within the context of those French and Italian influences Trippett and others have discerned, but also within the socio-political context of Vormärz revolutionism, and with regards to Shakespeare's original play-text. I begin by tracing the early reception histories of both the play and the opera, and consider how the issue of *Measure for Measure's* German translation(s) affected the composer's understanding of the work as he received it. I then offer close readings of several passages of *Das Liebesverbot* in tandem with parallel scenes from Shakespeare, highlighting Wagner's careful consideration in adapting a work that was to resonate with him throughout his life, his later repudiation of his own opera notwithstanding. Finally, I argue that *Das Liebesverbot* offers us a view of the composer's seldom-discussed relationship to the literary movement known as Young Germany, whose ideas factor heavily into the anti-German critiques Wagner was penning at the time and which are clearly related to a number of the liberties he took with Shakespeare's play. Coupled with the broader goal of highlighting Wagner's indebtedness to Shakespeare, such a reconsideration of this opera allows us to disrupt the standard conception of a composer who is still often considered, in his own words, the 'most German being', and 'the German spirit' personified.¹⁵ Here, on the contrary, we see Wagner at arguably his most cosmopolitan, adapting the work of an English playwright he revered, altering the plot so that it ostensibly aligned with the socio-political writings of his German revolutionary colleagues, and setting it to music of a decidedly French and Italian flavour. Reconsidering *Das Liebesverbot*, in short, allows us to paint a much different picture of the younger composer than the one typically encountered even in recent scholarship.

Problem Plays and Flawed Operas

In order to understand the adaptation, it may be useful to first summarize Shakespeare's plot. A tale of 'mortality and mercy in Vienna' (I.i.44), *Measure for Measure* begins when Duke Vincentio leaves his city in the hands of the puritanical deputy Angelo, with the more senior official Escalus as his aide.¹⁶ The young and otherwise upstanding nobleman Claudio becomes the first victim of Angelo's

Operas (1833–40)', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, ed. Thomas Grey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 18–46; and Yvonne Nilges, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent in Wagner's Juvenilia', in *Wagner Outside the Ring: Essays on the Operas, Their Performance and Their Connections with Other Arts*, ed. John Louis DiGaetani (Jefferson, NC: McFarlane, 2009): 13–22.

¹⁵ The comments come from Wagner's diary, entry dated 11 October 1865, wherein he asserts 'ich bin der deutscheste Mensch, ich bin der deutsche Geist'. In *Das braune Buch: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen 1865 bis 1882*, ed. Joachim Bergfeld (Munich: Piper, 1975): 76. Published in English as *The Diary of Richard Wagner: The Brown Book 1865–1882*, trans. George Bird (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 73.

¹⁶ All citations from the play come from *Measure for Measure*, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, ed. A.R. Braunmuller and Robert N. Watson (New York: Bloomsbury 2020). Where noted, I also rely on the comments of Second Series editor J.W. Lever (Methuen & Co., 1965; rpr. New York: Routledge, 1999).

crackdown on vice when he is sentenced to death for engaging in premarital sex with his fiancée. Lucio, a friend of Claudio's, successfully convinces nun-to-be Isabella to temporarily return to the secular world and plea for her brother's release. Angelo agrees to show mercy, but only if he is permitted to take her virginity. She consents to the arrangement after consulting with 'Friar Lodowick', the disguised duke who has in fact not left the city, and who proposes to resolve the issue with one of the 'bed trick' ploys popular in many other early modern comedies. By swapping Isabella for Angelo's own abandoned fiancée Mariana, he suggests, they will manage to get the regent to fulfil his marital obligations (common-law views at the time held consummation to be one way of satisfying a marriage contract) while simultaneously exposing his hypocrisy and demonstrating Claudio's sentence to be unjust.¹⁷

Vincenzio 'returns' to the city as Angelo attempts to renege on his promise (unaware that he has actually slept with the disguised Mariana). He hears Isabella's case and metes out judgement in the form of marriages for everyone. Claudio is freed and reunited with his fiancée, Angelo is forced to follow through on his proposal to Mariana, Lucio is to marry the prostitute he impregnated (a minor subplot) and, lastly, the Duke proposes to Isabella, whose curious silence at play's end leaves her fate in the hand of stage directors. Because none of the characters save Claudio is particularly pleased by these affairs, and Isabella herself seems ambivalent at best about the unexpected proposal, the ending has left audiences past and present somewhat baffled.

Measure for Measure has elicited a remarkably wide range of opinions since its earliest performances. In one of the first recorded comments on the work, John Dryden laments that it was 'so meanly written, that the comedy neither caused your mirth, nor the serious part your concernment'.¹⁸ Samuel Johnson, writing in 1765, found 'the light or comick part[s]' to be 'very natural and pleasing' but thought the 'grave scenes' to evince 'more labour than elegance'. Coleridge found it more thoroughly and profoundly disturbing. Its comic elements he called 'disgusting' and its serious ones 'horrible'; to use J.W. Lever's paraphrase, he considered it to be 'the most painful of Shakespeare's dramas'.¹⁹ The work is frequently grouped amongst the author's so-called 'problem plays', a term originally coined by F.S. Boas in *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (1896) to foreground the seemingly unsolvable moral problems featured in a number of the playwright's works written around 1600.

This early definition might strike us as surprising, considering that Shakespeare's works are frequently associated with these sorts of moral complications even among the general public, but there were particular issues regarding the plays' endings and overall moods that sat differently for Boas (and others) and which caused particular unease for early spectators. Besides *Measure for Measure*, the scholar included *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet* – this last 'distinguished from the others by its tragic ending, but ... akin to them in its general temper and atmosphere'. At the ends of these plays, Boas asserts,

¹⁷ On legal distinctions in common-law marriage contracts in Shakespeare's England, as well as their direct applicability to the scenario described above, see J.W. Lever's discussion in the Introduction to the play, lii–liv.

¹⁸ Dryden's comments, from his *Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age* (1672), are quoted in Rosalind Miles, *The Problem of Measure for Measure: A Historical Investigation* (London: Clarke, Doble & Brendon, 1976): 15.

¹⁹ Both Johnson and Coleridge are quoted in J.W. Lever, 'Introduction', lv–lvi.

'our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome'.²⁰ With *Measure for Measure* specifically, he cites its 'deeply reflective tone, its brooding sense of the pollution spread by lust in the single soul and in society at large and the shivering recoil of the man of phantasies from the mystery of the unknown hereafter' (all issues, moreover, shared with *Hamlet*). Along these lines, he suggests also that 'Claudio's gloomy meditations on death sound like an echo from the soliloquies of the Danish Prince' and that 'this wealth of philosophic thought, this concern with the deepest issues of life here and beyond the grave' give *Measure for Measure* 'a massive weight which the original framework of plot might well have seemed too slight to bear'.²¹

Later scholars have stressed similar issues. Richard Wheeler notes that the play 'open[s] onto psychological conditions central to tragedies contemporaneous with them' and Yvonne Nilges suggests that at times it offers even more 'radical' and 'disillusioned' reflections on death and the *theatrum mundi* topos than can be found in *Macbeth*.²² Writing more recently, E.L. Ridsen notes a tendency for the idea of the problem play to be linked with issues of genre classification, showing how critics will also use the term to 'indicate plays that defy easy categorization'.²³ Ridsen's monograph also raises other significant points. He argues that despite the ambiguous nature of the very term 'problem play', the concept remains useful since it points our attention to 'immediate interpretive difficulties' we experience in the course of studying certain plays. He suggests, furthermore, that it remains useful not only when we find a certain work 'elusive or difficult or because we must struggle to unpack its themes, but rather when we find difficulties in the play that inhibit us from understanding the generic clues that direct our emotional as well as intellectual responses'.²⁴ Notwithstanding its ambiguity, then, the idea of the problem play in fact resonates well with Wagner's adaptation and might well help explain the similar reactions its critics have had.

The issues begin with Wagner's radical alterations to the plot. The Duke, a central player in Shakespeare's original, is entirely absent from *Das Liebesverbot*. We are told instead of an unnamed king who returns to Palermo (Wagner moved the play

²⁰ Frederick S. Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors*, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1910): 345.

²¹ Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors*, 357.

²² Hugo F. Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies: Turn and Counter Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981): 13. Yvonne Nilges, *Richard Wagners Shakespeare* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007): 63. The *theatrum mundi* topos, a metaphorical concept which explains the world as if it were a theatre and people as merely actors within a divinely-authored drama, is perhaps best encapsulated by Jacques's famous 'all the world's a stage' speech in II.vii of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

²³ E.L. Ridsen, *Shakespeare and the Problem Play: Complex Forms, Crossed Genres and Moral Quandaries* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012): 2. Also indicative in this regard is Igor Shaitanov's discussion of the 'strange unbalanced form' of these works in his 'A Struggle of Genres, or a Dialogue: A Post-Bakhtinian View of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*', *Style* 42/4 (2015): 477–93. Regarding *Measure for Measure* specifically, he suggests that 'for almost four centuries [it] has frustrated all attempts to pigeonhole it within any existing genre taxonomy' (p. 482). Ronald R. Macdonald has asserted similarly that 'it is possible to speculate on the basis of *Measure for Measure* that Shakespeare was simply becoming impatient with comedy' in 'Measure for Measure: the Flesh Made Word', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 30/2 (Spring 1990): 265.

²⁴ Ridsen, *Shakespeare and the Problem Play*, 3, 6–7.

to Italy, for reasons discussed below) only during the closing bars of the opera: he takes no part in the prior stage action. As a result of this change, Isabella becomes much more central in plotting the downfall of the deputy, now the Viennese governor (*Stadthalter*) Friedrich. In addition to outlawing sexual licentiousness and revelry, however, Wagner's Friedrich decides to cancel the impending Carnival festivities, too, symptomatic as they are of the city's moral degeneracy. Meanwhile Lucio – now Luzio – takes on a more central role, appearing as a sort of revolutionary leader for the people. He champions Claudio's cause in a larger attempt to expose the flaws of imposing cold, puritanical (here standing in for a larger Germanic) bureaucracy upon the fiery, sensual (Italian) people. Isabella is still a devout novice at the nearby convent, where Mariana now also resides.²⁵ Her wooing of Friedrich plays out largely as in the original, with a few nods along the way to *Le nozze di Figaro*. Many of the lower-class characters are cut, remoulded and recast, as we shall see. In the absence of the true ruler, justice is carried out in the end not by the sovereign, but by the people, who collectively enjoin Friedrich and Mariana to wed, here played out amidst the resumed Carnival festivities. Although there was now no Duke to propose to Isabella, Wagner still felt that the leading lady was entitled to her own happy ending; he chose to couple her off with a pining Luzio.

His adaptation seems to have been doomed from the start. After only a single performance, for which the libretto had not been printed in time for audience members to follow along, it was cancelled shortly before curtain on day two (*ML*, I: 147–8). Several of the cast members got into a violent altercation backstage as the result of a love affair recently come to light, and there were only three audience members that day anyway, two of them Wagner's creditors, hoping to collect in wake of the opera's anticipated success. It then went unstaged for nearly a century, until 1923. It has enjoyed a modest amount of attention from performers recently – at least ten professional, staged productions in seven countries within the last decade or so²⁶ – but academic discussion remains scant, and largely focused on only two issues.²⁷ Some scholars look for early signs of the composer's

²⁵ In Shakespeare's original, Mariana is not explicitly identified as a nun; rather, she is described as living on a nearby farm owned by a different church (III.i.266)

²⁶ Excluding concert performances, recent commercial productions have been mounted by Glimmerglass Opera (New York, 2008); the Staatstheater Braunschweig (Braunschweig, 2009); Helikon Opera (Moscow, 2011); Oper Leipzig (Bayreuth, 2013); Cluj-Napoca Hungarian Opera (Romania, 2015); the Opéra National du Rhin (Strasbourg, 2016); and the Teatro Real (Madrid, 2016). San Francisco's Pocket Opera was to have included a production in their 2020/21 season, though it was cancelled as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. A production by the Leipzig Opera for the same season has since been rescheduled for 2022. The Teatro Real performance, staged by Kasper Holten, was released on DVD and Blu-ray in 2017 (catalogue number OA 7213 D) and is the first commercially available video recording of the work. The staging also travelled to Buenos Aires for performance at the Teatro Colón later in 2017.

²⁷ In many cases, authors do little more than acknowledge *Das Liebesverbot*'s existence. Barry Millington allots hardly more than a page to the opera in *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 43–4; a more recent article by Michael Halliwell passes over the opera in only two sentences; and of the five pages Roger Paulin devotes to connections between playwright and composer in his lengthy monograph on German Shakespeare reception history, the opera gets only one sentence. Even the most recent editors of the Arden edition of the play mention it only to say that its premiere performance 'resembled the Marx Brothers' farcical *Night at the Opera*' (p. 130). For Halliwell,

later techniques. The two leitmotifs that appear within the work (one for Friedrich's ban on love and the other for the Carnival) are frequently mentioned in this regard, as is the *Salve Regina Coeli* melody Wagner gives to Isabella in the opera's second scene. Associated with the 'Dresden Amen', the melody's later reappearance in *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal* was remarked upon even by Wagner himself.²⁸ Other writers critique the work along the lines applied to Wagner's other early operas, which are not deemed Wagnerian enough, often by dint of their clearer indebtedness to contemporary operatic practices and conventions when compared to the composer's later output. Alternatively, as a mere *adaptation* of a great work of (capital-L) 'Literature', it is inherently imperfect and therefore incomparable to the original. The latter attitude can be discerned in the reception histories of countless other operatic (and, later, filmic) adaptations of Shakespeare.

Wagner's classification of *Das Liebesverbot* as a '*Große komische Oper*' suggests a different perspective. On its face, it may seem to leave little doubt as to the composer's classification of his work, but it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the designation more carefully. After all, with only one exception, Wagner assigns each of his completed operatic projects a classification that is at least marginally different from each of the others.²⁹ Considering also the central role that titling or naming serves within the plots of many of the works themselves (*Lohengrin*, *Siegfried* and *Parsifal* most obviously), it is clear that finding the proper nomenclature for things is important to Wagner. Indeed, he addresses the question of genre naming explicitly in his essay 'On the name "Musikdrama"' (1872), where he reacts negatively to the term as it had come to be applied to his works. His latter-day ambivalence on the question of genre is summed up rather well when he asserts that

The stupendous works of their Aeschylus the Athenians called not dramas, but left them with the holy name of their descent: 'tragedies', sacrificial chants in celebration of the god inspiring them. Happy they, to have to puzzle out no name for them! They had the most unheard-of artwork, and – left it nameless. But there came the great critics, the redoubtable reporters; abstract ideas were found, and where these ran short came words for word's sake. The good Polonius edifies us with a handsome list of them in 'Hamlet.' (PW, V: 302)

He adds on the following page the by-now famous line about gladly wishing he could refer to his works as 'deeds of music made visible' (*ersichtlich gewordene Thaten der Musik*) but 'that would have been quite an art-philosophical title, fit to grace the catalogue of the future Polonii of our art-struck courts'.³⁰ The references

see "'Blow, Winds, and Crack your Cheeks!'" Shakespeare and Wagner', *Context* 39 (2014): 5; for Paulin, see *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany 1682–1914: Native Literature and Foreign Genius* (New York: Georg Olms, 2003): 428.

²⁸ For an instance of Wagner's referencing the connection between the music as it appears in *Das Liebesverbot* and again in *Tannhäuser*, see CD, II: 263; 31 January 1879.

²⁹ *Die Feen* and *Tannhäuser* share the *große romantische Oper* designation, while *Rienzi* is dubbed a *große tragische Oper*. *Der fliegende Holländer* becomes simply a *romantische Oper*, while *Tristan und Isolde* is described as a *Handlung* ('action'). Following this, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is listed as a *komische Oper* in early drafts and a *große komische Oper* for later revisions only to wind up an *Oper* in the printed libretto. The *Ring* cycle is collectively designated as a *Bühnenfestspiel* ('stage-festival-play') and *Parsifal*, lastly, is designated as a *Bühnenweihfestspiel* ('festival-play for the consecration of the stage').

³⁰ Though Ellis's translation is somewhat obtuse, the original German is not much better: 'Das wäre den nun ein recht kunstphilosophischer Titel gewesen, und hätte gut in die

here to Polonius, who speaks of 'tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited' (and more besides if we look to the Folio edition of the play), signals Wagner's sympathy for Shakespeare's skewering of those who might be pedantic about questions of classification.³¹

But if a later ambivalence about genre points towards what Lydia Goehr describes as Wagner's encouragement 'to cease thinking about names and titles as merely descriptive or classificatory and to start thinking about them as pointing towards an unnameable ideal of a form of art that was preferably left unnamed', we are less likely to find such a logic in the pre-Dresden period of the composer's life.³² Indeed, even with the work which was to follow *Das Liebesverbot*, Wagner admits that 'as far as my *Rienzi* I had it only in my mind to write an "opera"'. He suggests, in his 'Communication to My Friends' (1851), that he was opting in his first three pieces to focus on 'ready-made stories ... as had already been fashioned with deliberate attention to artistic form' (*PW*, I: 362). It is of course also important to bear in mind the composer's penchant for self-fashioning. Such retrospective explanations of his earlier working methods were not uncommon at the time, when Wagner was already trying to distance himself from his earlier compositional practices and was thus somewhat revisionist in nature when compared with writings closer in time to his work on the opera such as his 'Autobiographical Sketch' written a decade prior. Still, given Wagner's distaste for German opera at the time of his work on *Das Liebesverbot*, it is likely that the *Große komische Oper* designation was a nod to the French and Italian traditions rather than German comedic opera. The language of his librettos notwithstanding, Wagner's early works are saturated with references to both French *grand opéra* and *opéra-comique*, as Thomas Grey has persuasively argued. With *Das Liebesverbot* in particular, Grey sees a 'more a *semiseria* work than a comic one, and of distinctly "grand" proportions at that'. The 'sunny, southern "local colour" of the choral-ensemble tableaux, *chœurs dansés* and ballet movements' point to such influences, he suggests.³³ As noted above, however, the 'ready-made' form of *Measure for Measure* was already questionable in its own time, and *Das Liebesverbot* did not do much to resolve matters. For the time being, it is perhaps best to see the designations of Wagner's first three works as nods to their 'necessary dependence upon inherited conventions and recognizable idioms', in Alessandra Campana's words, even if their unique classifications by the composer point towards the operatic equivalent of Friedrich Schlegel's assertion that 'every poem is its own genre'.³⁴

Register der künftigen Poloniusse unserer kunstsinnigen Höffe gepaßt', in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 9 (Leipzig: E.W. Fritsch, 1873): 364.

³¹ The lines appear on II.ii.334–336 in the Revised Edition of the Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016). The Folio also includes 'tragic-historical' and 'tragic-comical-historical-pastoral'.

³² Lydia Goehr, 'From Opera to Music Drama: Nominal Loss, Titular Gain', in *Richard Wagner and His World*, ed. Thomas Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009): 66.

³³ Thomas Grey, 'Richard Wagner and the Legacy of French Grand Opera', in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 323. Emphasis in original.

³⁴ Alessandra Campana, 'Genre and Poetics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 213–14. The Schlegel appears in Campana, too. For more on questions of operatic genre classification,

Shakespeare in Translation

If these tendencies towards genre dissatisfaction and reform begin to hint at another connection between playwright and composer, we should also bear in mind that Wagner's experiences with Shakespeare were fundamentally shaped by issues of translation – in some cases, fairly free translation. In his 'Autobiographical Sketch' of 1843, Wagner writes of his youthful determination to 'become a poet'. He recounts trying to learn English 'so as to gain an accurate knowledge of Shakespeare' and, while he admits to soon setting that language aside, Shakespeare still 'remained [his] exemplar' (*PW*, I: 4).³⁵ Telling here is his confession of 'leaving English to one side'. The composer was never to master the playwright's native language, despite his dreams of doing so: even later in life Cosima was still writing in her diary about her husband's 'frustrating afternoon ... spent trying to read Shakespeare in English' that prompted him, with a characteristically dismissive attitude, to assert that 'Italian was undoubtedly more suited to Dante's genius' than English was to Shakespeare's anyway (*CD*, I: 942; 31 October 1882). Of course, the idea of a 'German Shakespeare' representing an improvement upon the original was not unique to Wagner's thinking or solely the product of a bruised ego; the publication of the so-called Schlegel–Tieck translations of the playwright's corpus spurred authors and critics alike to champion the idea of a 'German Shakespeare' for well over a century thereafter.³⁶ Indeed, Hermann Ulrici, whose work on Shakespeare Wagner owned, once wrote of attempts to Germanicize (*verdeutschten*) the playwright as an effort 'to do our utmost to make sure that he becomes more and more what he already is: a German poet, in the truest and fullest sense of the word'.³⁷ Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that, as Yvonne Nilges puts it, Wagner's 'lifelong fascination with Shakespeare' inevitably runs parallel with an equally 'long-lasting dependence on second-hand sources'.³⁸ Much as his tenuous grasp of Middle High German resulted in his reading works like *Parzifal* and the *Nibelungenlied* in modern German 'translations', Wagner's understanding of Shakespeare was

see also Thomas Grey, 'Opera and Music Drama', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 371–423.

³⁵ As is well documented by Wagner and others, the composer's uncle, noted philologist Adolf Wagner, was a prime source in introducing Shakespeare to his young nephew. Adolf, a friend of Ludwig Tieck's, was himself a noted translator and was in fact working on a German-language edition of Anna Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Political, and Historical* (New York: Saunders and Otley, 1832) at the time Richard was setting to work on *Das Liebesverbot*.

³⁶ Werner Habicht, for instance, has called scholarly and critical attempts to link Shakespeare and Germany a 'nationalistic topos' that continued at least through World War II. For more, see 'The Romanticism of the Schlegel–Tieck Shakespeare and the History of Nineteenth-Century German Shakespeare Translation', in *European Shakespeares: Translating Shakespeare in the Romantic Age*, ed. Dirk Delabastita and Lieven D'hulst (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1993): 47.

³⁷ 'wir wollen ihn *verdeutschten*, verdeutschen im weitesten und tiefsten Sinne des Worts, d.h., wir wollen nach Kräften dazu beitragen, dass er das, was er bereits ist, ein *deutscher* Dichter, immer mehr im wahrsten und vollsten Sinne des Worts *werde*'. Hermann Ulrici, 'Jahresbericht', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 2 (1867): 3. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ 'sein lebenslange Shakespeare-Fazination als auch für die nicht minder lang währende Abhängigkeit von Quellen zweiter Hand'. Nilges, *Shakespeares Wagner*, 61–2.

similarly mediated through the act of translation rather than through a direct engagement with the English-language works themselves.

Though Wagner owned the Schlegel–Tieck translations of Shakespeare's plays, Nilges suggests that the composer acquired the 1839 second edition of *Measure for Measure* rather than the 1831 original and thus it was not the source he consulted in preparation for *Das Liebesverbot*.³⁹ Several other translations of the play existed at the time, however, including Christoph Martin Wieland's *Maaß für Maaß* (1763), Friedrich Ludwig Schröder's similarly named translation from 1777 (published 1790), and Johann Joachim Eschenburg's *Gleiches mit Gleichem*, published the following year.⁴⁰ As Simon Williams notes, the play in Schröder's translation enjoyed a brief run of success on the German stage – running for six performances in Hamburg the year it was published – but afterwards it by and large disappeared from the repertoire, 'not to appear in Germany again, at least as a recognizably Shakespearean play, until well into the nineteenth century'.⁴¹ Despite Williams's claim elsewhere that the edition is 'relatively faithful to the original', Schröder's version is still somewhat of a radical translation, with numerous cuts and copious modifications throughout (Mistress Overdone's character is cut entirely, for example).⁴² The title page in fact lists the play much like a libretto might: *nach Shakespear [sic] von Schröder*, signalling that Shakespeare was more a point of departure than basis for a strict translation. Thus, despite Wagner's recounting of the many Shakespeare plays he saw from an early age thanks to his sister Rosalie's work with the Dresden Court Theatre (*ML*, I: 43–4), *Measure for Measure* would only have been familiar to him in print.

Nilges sees particular resonances between Wagner's opera and Wieland's translation, and suggests that version as the basis for *Das Liebesverbot*. Wieland's choice to designate Pompey as 'Harlequin' in speech-prefixes and his subsequent characterization of the bawd along the lines of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition clearly resonated with Wagner, as when the composer draws upon those same concepts in inventing Brighella, based on another stock character typical in *commedia* scenarios. A fixation on the play's lighter side might also account for Wieland's unique designation of the play as a *Lustspiel* (comedy) in his translation's subtitle – it was the only edition of the play so labelled at the time Wagner wrote his opera – and could have proven early justification for the composer's choosing to focus on those aspects of the play rather than the more serious ones. Certainly, young Wagner's interest in the *commedia* is well documented. *Die Feen* (1833), the composer's only other completed stage work at the time, was based on Carlo

³⁹ Nilges, *Shakespeares Wagner*, 60–61. For the Shakespearean contents of Wagner's library, see Curt von Westernhagen, *Richard Wagners Dresdener Bibliothek 1842–1849: Neue Dokumente zur Geschichte seines Schaffens* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1966): 103. The Richard Wagner Museum at Bayreuth also maintains digital listings for the Dresden and Wahnfried libraries on their website: www.wagnermuseum.de/en/national-archives/departments/.

⁴⁰ See Appendix for a list of German *Measure for Measure* translations during the time period in question.

⁴¹ Simon Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, Vol. 1: 1586–1914 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 84. As Williams notes in a footnote on the same page, the play was best known to German audiences in an 'almost unrecognizable adaptation entitled *Gerechtigkeit und Rache* (*Justice and Revenge*), by the minor playwright W.H. Brömel'.

⁴² Simon Williams, 'Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot*: From Shakespeare to the Well-Made Play', *Opera Quarterly* 3/4 (1985–86): 56.

Gozzi's *La Donna Serpente* (1762), for instance, and Gozzi was a rigorous promoter and defender of the artform. Several of Wagner's later prose works endorse the form, too.⁴³

David Trippett considers Nilges's proposition unfounded, countering that since the translation 'is neither contained in [Wagner's] libraries nor mentioned in his correspondence, the circumstantial evidence must render the claim unsubstantiated'; he proposes instead the Schlegel–Tieck translation as Wagner's primary source.⁴⁴ In fact, *none* of the extant Shakespeare translations in Wagner's libraries can be dated back to the period during which he was working on *Das Liebesverbot*: the 1851–52 Schlegel–Tieck editions currently a part of Wagner's Dresden library collection postdate the time period in which the composer sold off that library's contents to Heinrich Brockhaus in 1849.⁴⁵ In light of such an incomplete picture of Wagner's personal effects, Nilges's assessment should not be dismissed quite so readily, especially since the rigorous attention paid to metre in the Schlegel–Tieck edition (as opposed to the freer prose translation offered in Wieland) was, at least later in life, frequently lambasted by Wagner himself.⁴⁶ And it should also be remembered that, while Wagner was to praise Schlegel's work as a translator, he was critical of others whose work appeared in those volumes, including Tieck and Hermann Ulrici (who, with the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, edited a later 1867 edition of the collection, also owned by Wagner). Wolf Graf von Baudissin, who was actually the translator of *Measure for Measure* in the Schlegel–Tieck collections, is left unremarked upon. As we cannot know whether or not Wagner was aware of the particular translator behind this edition's version of the play, it would be problematic to state definitively whether or not he had found it wanting. The question must admittedly remain open, then, with further studies being needed.

⁴³ A diary entry from Cosima notes Wagner's assertion that Gozzi's ideas '[correspond] entirely with R's ideas of the theatre', and that he champions Gozzi's preference for improvisatory theatre over 'the more literary outlook' of Carlo Goldoni's plays, *CD*, I: 541; 13 October 1872. Among his later writings, *German Art and German Politics* (1867) and *On Actors and Singers* (1872) demonstrate Wagner's continued interest in the traditions of *commedia dell'arte* performance by tying the idea of improvisatory theatre to the 'artwork of the future'. Dieter Borchmeyer has also argued that these traditions carry over to *Die Meistersinger*. He singles out the 'stock repertory of characters and motives' in the work's second act and argues for the indebtedness of Sixtus Beckmesser's characterization to that of the *dottore* who appears in many *commedia* scenarios. For more see *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, 198, as well as his earlier *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 271, p. 407.

⁴⁴ David Trippett, 'Individuation as Worship: Wagner and Shakespeare', in *Berlioz, Verdi, Wagner, Britten: Great Shakespeareans*, Vol. 11, ed. Daniel Albright (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012): 147–8.

⁴⁵ Trippett ('Individuation as Worship', 219n62) suggests that Brockhaus, eager to 'maintain the integrity of the collection' re-purchased a later edition of the plays, which had 'somehow been detached from the library', but admits that 'for the moment no proof has come to light' to definitively prove such an assertion.

⁴⁶ By the time Wagner was writing *Opera and Drama* (1851) he had grown to find the iamb distasteful compared to his newfound compositional preference for *Versmelodie*. He calls the iamb a 'a five-footed monster [*funffüßiges Ungeheuer*] to our eyes and—sadly—to our ears', as 'offensive to our feeling', and as a 'clattering trot [that] must ultimately rob [the hearer] of the last shred of sense and understanding', *PW*: II, 242; German ed.: IV, 328–9.

The Act II courtroom scene (and its analogue in Wagner's opera) best demonstrates how these works interrogate the idea of law and order within broader religious and ethical debates of the time. Though the play's (and the opera's) central characters do not participate in the proceedings directly, nearly all of the important secondary characters appear therein to speak to matters of law and justice, sexual and moral corruption, political and personal responsibilities, and other topics besides. The scene features an authority figure (Escalus in Shakespeare, Brighella in Wagner) interrogating the perpetrators against the city's new laws. By giving voice to those who have transgressed against the sexual, moral and legal codes of Angelo's Vienna (or Friedrich's Palermo), as well as to the authorities responsible for enacting and enforcing those codes, Shakespeare and Wagner thematize explicitly the broader debates and ideological questions that preoccupy the main storylines of Isabella, Angelo, Marianna and the Duke. Wieland's version of the courtroom scene also provides a perfect example to support Nilges's abovementioned claims about Wagner's source material.⁴⁷

There are in fact many similarities between Wieland's text and Wagner's opera aside from the shared allusions to the *commedia dell'arte* tradition discussed above. In both cases, translator and composer alike evidence a distaste for Shakespeare's bawdier humour, for example. 'Whenever he picks up unmistakable sexual overtones in puns, dialogues or even whole passages of what he calls "disgusting immorality"', Norbert Greiner asserts, 'the translator usually takes a radically simple line – he just leaves them out.'⁴⁸ Wieland's handling of the second-act courtroom scene omits mention of Pompey's 'bum', for example, in line with what Roger Paulin terms the translator's tendency to simply leave out instances of 'gross coarseness'.⁴⁹ Pompey's subsequent description of Mistress Overdone having nine husbands and being 'overdone by the last' (II.i.194) is similarly modified by Wieland, who opts rather to mistranslate; the Clown instead says that 'Overdone was the last'.⁵⁰

Wagner, too, decided to significantly modify the courtroom scene, substituting instead a confrontation between Brighella, who essentially replaces Escalus in the operatic version of the story, and two newly invented characters.⁵¹ The first is Pontio Pilato,

⁴⁷ Of note, she also offers a reading of *Die Meistersinger* in light of Wieland's translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, significantly entitled *Ein Johannis Nachts-Traum* (rather than the more usual *Ein Sommernachtstraum*), and sees a fundamental connection between Shakespeare and Wagner in this instance as well.

⁴⁸ Norbert Breiner, 'The Comic Matrix of Early German Shakespeare Translation', in *European Shakespeares*, 207.

⁴⁹ Paulin, *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany*, 114.

⁵⁰ 'Overdon war die letzte.' References to the German translation are from Christoph Martin Wieland, trans., *Maaß für Maaß: oder Wie einer mißt, so wird ihm wieder gemessen*, ed. Hans and Johanna Radspieler (Zurich: Haffmans, 1993); here II.iii, p. 36. Wieland's translation is entirely in prose, and scene divisions conform to the eighteenth-century (English) editions of Alexander Pope and William Warburton. In the absence of line numbers, subsequent references will be given as page numbers and appear in-text. It may also be worth noting that several other editions at the time opted to translate this line similarly, including Baudissin in the Schlegel–Tieck collection. At least two different translators (Voß and Spina) retain the wordplay however, and Schlegel, in an 1818 modification of Eschenburg's translation, adds a footnote explaining the joke, too. See Appendix for further bibliographic details on these editions.

⁵¹ In a chart comparing Shakespeare's and Wagner's cast of characters, Trippett suggests that Brighella is a substitution for Elbow; see Trippett, 'Individuation as Workshop', 143. Edgar Istel argues the same in 'Wagner and Shakespeare', 499. Even if some of Elbow's

more or less the Wagnerian equivalent to Pompey. After the officer Brighella interrogates the bawd, he turns to Dorella, a character similar to Mistress Overdone but who serves in the composer's scenario as a love interest for him. In Shakespeare's original, the confrontation between Escalus and Pompey runs as follows:

Esc. Come you hither to me, Master Tapster. What's your name, Master Tapster?

Pom. Pompey.

Esc. What else?

Pom. Bum, sir

Esc. Troth, and your bum is the greatest thing about you, so that in the beastliest sense, you are Pompey the Great. Pompey, you are partly a bawd, Pompey, howsoever you colour it in being a tapster, are you not? Come, tell me true, it shall be the better for you.

Pom. Truly sir, I am a poor fellow that would live.

Esc. How would you live, Pompey? By being a bawd? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? Is it a lawful trade?

Pom. If the law would allow it, sir.

Esc. But the law will not allow it, Pompey, nor it shall not be allowed in Vienna.

Pom. Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city? shall not be allowed in Vienna.

Esc. No, Pompey.

Pom. Truly, sir, in my poor opinion, then they will to't then. If your worship will take order for the drabs and the knaves, you need not to fear the bawds. (II.i.203–225)

Which becomes in Wagner:

B. Your name, fellow. Quick!

P. P. I'll tell you with pleasure. My name's Pontius Pilate.

B. Pontius Pilatus! You'll die on the cross

P. P. Signor, you can change my name. It's the name my parents gave me, but I don't want it to annoy you. It's a name that arouses much hatred, it's my duty to clear it.

B. And is this how you clear it? By running a filthy liquor store and brothel? They say you let couples stay all night long.⁵²

duties seem to fall to Brighella in *Das Liebesverbot*, this scene clearly demonstrates that he serves as a substitute for Escalus, too.

⁵² The translation is the one offered on the Opus Arte Blu-ray disc (see n26). The original German, as it appears in the score (No. 5, pp. 157–60), is as follows:

B. Dein Nahme, Bursche, nenn' ihn schnell.

P. P. Recht gern! Glaubst mir, fürwahr, recht gern: Pontio Pilato heiße ich!

B. Pontius Pilatus? Fürchterlich! Der Tod am Kreuze treffe dich!

P. P. Signor, ach ihr verwechselt mich, ihr verwechselt mich! Wenn mich die Eltern so genannt, darf euch dies nicht inkommodieren weil dieser Name so verhaßt, so sollt' ich ihn purifizieren!

B. Purifizieren durch solchen Wandel, durch schnöden Sauf- und Liebeshandel? Auf dir ruht gräßlicher Verdacht, du schlossest Eh'n für eine Nacht!

The coarseness of the joke is smoothed over, unlike in the Schlegel–Tieck edition but much like in Wieland (where Escalus does not even ask the bawd about his last name), and the subsequent details of the city's licentiousness are curtailed, as they are throughout.⁵³ Whereas Pompey does not receive his reprieve and take his exit for another thirty-plus lines in *Measure for Measure*, Wagner's Pontio Pilato is quickly sentenced to banishment and is summarily dismissed. Though Schlegel was to demonstrate a keen understanding of the comic characters and subplots in Shakespeare's plays, both Wieland and Wagner were either ambivalent or downright hostile to them.

In the case of Wieland, Simon Williams explains the edits as a product of the cultural prudishness of the times: eighteenth-century audiences were 'generally squeamish' when confronted with 'any material that was in the slightest degree specific about sexual matters'.⁵⁴ Wieland's translation bears this assertion out, with references to bawding, licentiousness and brothels frequently censored out of the text with only a hint of the meaning remaining. Within the courtroom scene, for instance, a self-redacted catchall term, *H** Haus* stands in place for Shakespeare's more varied references to 'common houses' and 'bawd's houses', while talk of bawding as a profession becomes *H** Wirth* or *H** Wirtschaft* – the omitted word in all cases being *Hure* ('wench', 'prostitute', 'whore'). Other words and phrases are also altered to be less sexually suggestive.⁵⁵

Over the course of Wieland's courtroom scene, prostitution is explicitly named only twice in the text. The first instance occurs where Elbow speaks of his wife, who, 'if she had been a woman cardinally given, might have been accused in fornication, adultery and all uncleanness' at Overdone's brothel (II.i.75–77). The translator retains an uncensored reference to *Hurerey, Ehebruch, und alle Unreinigkeit* (p. 31), though perhaps because of the line's biblical allusions: the same 'works of flesh' are given in Galatians 5:19, where Luther's bible translates 'adultery, fornication and uncleanness' with the exact same words. The second instance corresponds to Pompey's earlier-quoted interview with Escalus, where he suggests the magistrate, taking orders from 'drabs and knaves', need not fear 'bawds', either; the term in Wieland becomes *die Kuppler und Kupplerinnen* ('pimps and whores', p. 39). Elsewhere in the play, Wieland simply declares

⁵³ In the Schlegel–Tieck edition, Pompey (Pompejus) suggests his last name is *Pumphose* ('bloomers', 'knickers'). The joke then runs similar to the original, with Escalus suggesting 'An erurer Pumphose habt ihr frielich etwas Großes, und so wäret ihr, wo von hosen die Rede ist, Pompejus der Große' (You really have something great about [or 'big in'] your knickers, and so, as far as pants are concerned, you truly are Pompey the Great). In Wieland's translation, after 'Harlequin' identifies himself as Pompey, lines 12–15 of the original are simply omitted. Escalus responds with the next sentence in line 16, asking immediately about the bawd's profession ('ihr seyd ein Stück von einem H** Wirth, ob ihr es gleich hinter dem Bierzapfer verstecken wollt. Seyd ihr's nicht?').

⁵⁴ Williams, *Shakespeare on the German Stage*, 84.

⁵⁵ Similar emendations substitute 'bath-house' (*Badhaus*, p. 30) for the more erotically-tinged 'hot-house' in Shakespeare's original (II.i.64), and another shifted pun references not 'China dishes' (a play on woman being a 'fine piece of China', as Lever glosses in the Arden Second Series edition, line 93), but porcelain (*Porcellan-Teller*, p. 32) without further elaboration on the joke. Baudissin's translation of the play is the only German edition at the time that I have come across to retain the direct reference to 'China-Dishes' in the text.

Pompey's vulgar wordplay untranslatable.⁵⁶ As the case of Wagner's opera makes clear, such sentiments were also in evidence during the following century.

In a diary entry, Cosima reports on her husband's reading of *Much Ado About Nothing*, noting that the constables' scene was read 'with less enjoyment, on account of the verbal jokes' (CD, II: 474; 7 May 1880), and Margaret Inwood in her monograph mentions Wagner's 'tut-tutting' at other times about similar parts in other Shakespeare plays, 'remarking what a pity it was that the great man should have been reduced to such a level by the low tastes of his audiences'.⁵⁷ Wagner's assumptions about Shakespeare's alienation from his own bawdy humour once again resonates with Wieland's sentiments: the translator's commentary on another emended scene of low-class revelry in *Henry IV, Part 1* suggests that 'one must be an Englishman, see these scenes acted by Englishmen, and have a good amount of punch [wine] to the head to enjoy' Falstaff's antics.⁵⁸ In an earlier translation of *King Lear*, he even omitted a line of the Fool's because of its reference to a codpiece, declaring it something 'so miserable that the translator cannot bring himself to savour it'. He does not demure quite as much in *Measure for Measure*, but the term is still partially redacted there, too.⁵⁹

Though Wagner's similarly prudish remarks would come much later in his life, the composer's aversion to such comedy remains surprising given his stated aims in creating *Das Liebesverbot*. As we will see in more detail below, Wagner explains in his 'Autobiographical Sketch' that he sought to 'rob [the play] of its prevailing earnestness' and have 'free and frank physicalism [*Sinnlichkeit*]' gain, 'of its own sheer strength, the victory over Puritanical hypocrisy' (PW, I: 10). But perhaps Wagner's embrace of physicalism and rejection of low humour are less contradictory than they appear. Even the toned-down version Wagner presented to his audiences was still deemed offensive by some. As Trippett notes, a colleague of the composer's in Leipzig refused to stage it at that city's Stadttheater 'solely on account of its indecency', and some of Wagner's wordplay – especially coming from the saintly Isabella – 'proved unpalatable to a more conservatively minded social stratum'.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ One instance, a pun on virginity and hanging (Pompey, asked to be a hangman, remarks on being able to take a maiden's head, but not a woman's), is listed in a footnote as wordplay that cannot be translated (*einem Wortspiel, das sich nicht übersezen läßt*), and, in another instance, as 'completely incomprehensible' (*ganz unverständlich*) and nothing but 'a worn-out fabric of silly puns' (*ein abgeschmacktes Gewebe von albernen Wortspielen bleibt*). The second comment, in reference to Pompey's lines in IV.ii.32–38, corresponds to a moment in IV.v in Wieland's translation, appearing there on p. 96. The first comment, punning on maiden's heads and woman's heads, corresponds to a moment earlier in the scene (IV.ii.3–5, p. 94 in Wieland's translation).

⁵⁷ Margaret Inwood, *The Influence of Shakespeare on Richard Wagner* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 1999): 17.

⁵⁸ 'Mann muß ein Engländern seyn, diese Scenen von Engländern spielen sehen, und eine gute Portion Pounsch dazu im Kopfe haben, um den Geschmack daran zu finden.' Quoted in F.W. Meisnest, 'Wieland's Translation of Shakespeare', *Modern Language Review* 9/1 (Jan. 1914): 18. The German lines in question correspond to IV.ii.454–467 in the Arden, Third Series, edition of the play, ed. David Scot Kastan (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002).

⁵⁹ 'Der Narr sagt hier etwas so elends, daß der Übersezer sich nicht überwinden kan, es herzusezen.' Quoted in Wieland, trans., *Maaß für Maaß*, 164. In *Measure for Measure*, Lucio's protestation over taking the life of a man over the 'rebellion of a codpiece' (III.i.78) becomes 'der Empörung eines H*s*nlazes' (III.vi; p. 81).

⁶⁰ Trippett, 'Individuation as Worship', 146.

Nevertheless, as Brian Morris suggests, the composer's decision to omit 'almost everything that has to do with prostitution' (another trait shared with the Wieland edition, we might add) demonstrates that Wagner's 'idea of free and uncloaked sensualism does not include total sexual license; his ideal society was not a permissive society' and contained 'a deep residual puritanism' of its own.⁶¹ Chris Walton similarly argues the opera 'isn't really a paean to free love and unbridled sex in the southern sun' but a plea for monogamy. The characters all 'have a past that they want to put behind them' he suggests, and the ending offers a 'new start for everyone'.⁶² Thus we can begin to see how Wagner, through Wieland, was able to take this problem play and turn it into an expression of liberation and subversion of contemporary German sexual mores, offering audiences a carnivalesque atmosphere of humour and revelry while at the same time still evincing an ethos of modesty and monogamy.

In tracing the affinities between Wieland's *Maaß für Maaß* and Wagner's opera, one other character is also worth bearing in mind: Lucio. As opposed to the coarse 'Fantastic' who speaks of 'purchas[ing] many diseases' (L.ii.45) under the roof of 'Madam Mitigation' (which is to say, at Mistress Overdone's brothel), Wieland describes him as a 'Libertine' in his *dramatis personae* listing. In his autobiography, Wagner similarly characterizes his Luzio as a 'young Nobleman and scape-grace' (*junger Edelmann und jowalier Wüstling*) (ML, I: 114; German ed., I: 122). In *Das Liebesverbot*, he falls in love with Isabella at first sight and repeatedly proposes to her. She accepts him by the end of the opera, but only after testing him; à la *Figaro*, Luzio is kept in the dark over the Isabella/Mariana 'bed trick' and is distraught at the possibility that she is actually willing to sleep with the regent to free her brother. This lovesick Luzio is a far cry from Shakespeare's Lucio who, upon receiving the news that he is to be wed to Kate Keepdown (with whom he had conceived a child), begs for mercy. He insists that 'marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death, whipping and hanging' (V.i.520). But the downplayed vulgarity and coarseness in Wieland's translation resulted in a more sympathetic reading of the character than in Shakespeare's original. Indeed, this final act of protestation against marrying the 'punk' is omitted in the German translation of the play altogether! The softer characterization is already suggested by the more ambivalent classification of Lucio as a 'Libertine' from the very start of the play. By Wieland's time, Nilges asserts, this term came to carry additional connotations of a 'free spirited' person.⁶³ It is this mischievous but ultimately harmless figure rather than the bawdy 'Fantastic' of Shakespeare's play that appears in Wagner. With these medial shifts in mind, let us now consider the opera itself in more detail.

⁶¹ [Brian Robert] Morris, Lord of Castlemorris, 'Shakespeare, Wagner, and *Measure for Measure*', in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essay on Literary and Culture Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000): 118.

⁶² These comments appear in the accompanying booklet for the Opus Arte video release of the opera, pp. 7–8.

⁶³ 'Vgl. die schon zu Wielands Zeiten gebräuchlichen, miteinander konkurrierenden zwei Lesarten für „Libertin“: „Wüstling“ auf der einen, aber auch bereits—aufwertend—„Freigeist“ auf der andern Seite.' Nilges, *Shakespeares Wagner*, 63n 25.

Courtroom and Carnival: Authority in *Das Liebesverbot*

We earlier observed the contrast between Wagner's Lucio and Shakespeare's Lucio, noting Wieland's modified characterization as a possible source for the composer's own adjustments. I have likewise commented upon a portion of Shakespeare's second-act courtroom scene (the fifth number in Wagner's first act) for the purposes of analysing the subsequent removal of the coarse jokes and malapropisms uttered by Shakespeare's lower-class characters. But the second portion of Wagner's version of the scene – Brighella's confrontation with Dorella – is also worth further scrutiny. Just as Shakespeare's courtroom scene provided a forum for the work's secondary characters to discourse upon matters of moral, sexual and legal interest to the playwright, Wagner's version of the courtroom scene situates his own preoccupation with Young German ideologies and his more general anti-authoritarian leanings. Here, Wagner taps into the play's underlying carnivalesque atmosphere as a way of promoting his version of the 'free and frank' sexuality espoused by his literary contemporaries.

After Brighella sentences Pontio Pilato to banishment, the police bring in Dorella, the next offender against Friedrich's ban, here expanded beyond Angelo's original prohibition in *Measure for Measure* to include all sorts of licentiousness and merry-making, including, most importantly, the impending Carnival festivities. Dorella, it should be noted, contains traces of Mistress Overdone's character, despite persistent scholarly claims to the contrary.⁶⁴ Though she is not actually the proprietress of the shop in the opera (Wagner allots ownership to Danieli, a bass role he invents) she does work there, and Brighella suggests that she 'goes around everywhere seducing men' and ignoring the ban on 'love, carnival and wine' imposed upon the city of Palermo by the German regent. In what is likely a nod to Overdone – 'a bawd of eleven years' continuance' (III.i.454) with nine previous husbands to her name – Dorella begins trying to seduce the captain of the watch in an attempt to escape punishment. This scene is entirely fabricated by the composer; the brothel owner hardly factors into the story at all after the first act in Shakespeare. Yet the duet is clever, encapsulating many of the issues of the play within miniature and also serving as a bit of foreshadowing for the similar 'higher class' confrontation between Friedrich and Isabella shortly thereafter.⁶⁵

During this confrontation in *Measure for Measure* Isabella tries Christian and, later, moralist and humanist arguments against the regent to persuade him to let her brother go, though these tactics are likely not what Claudio had originally envisioned. 'Acquaint her with the danger of my state', he asks of Lucio,

Implore her, in my voice that she make friends
To the strict deputy; bid herself assay him.
I have great hope in that, for in her youth

⁶⁴ Williams suggests that Dorella has 'no Shakespearean counterpart' in 'Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot*', 59. Trippett and Istel also suggest as much. For their references, see n47 above.

⁶⁵ Though Shakespeare chose not to adapt the scene, a similarly flirtatious courtroom moment does in fact show up in *Promos and Cassandra*, a 1578 play by George Whetstone that served as the most prominent source material for *Measure for Measure*. There, the courtesan Lamia flirts with Phallax, the deputy character attempting to prosecute her alleged misdeeds. The Arden Third Series editors similarly remark upon the 'nice thematic echo from the main plot' (p. 102) Whetstone sets up in his play by including such a scene.

There is a prone and speechless dialect
 Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art
 When she will play with reason and discourse,
 And well she can persuade. (I.ii.175–181)

In his gloss, Lever proposes that Claudio is getting at an 'application of psychology to the art of rhetoric', but here his earlier point that the words *prone*, *move* and *play* all suggest sexual provocation seems more accurate. Certainly Lucio himself understands his friend's suggestions to imply that sexual advances, rather than rhetorical or psychological tactics, would be effective. When he fulfils his promise and asks Isabella to intercede for her brother, he prompts her to

Go to Lord Angelo,
 And let him learn to know when maidens sue,
 Men give like gods, but when they weep and kneel,
 All their petitions are as freely theirs
 As they themselves would owe them. (I.iv.79–83)

The many asides he makes during Isabella's actual entreaty with Angelo drive the point home all the more, especially his 'Ay, touch him: there's the vein' (II.ii.74) and 'O, to him, to him, wench! He will relent, He's coming: I perceive't' (127–128). Though Isabella does not choose to take the sensual approach in Shakespeare, it is significant that her Wagnerian counterpart is more inclined to do so, perhaps in part thanks to Dorella's influences. Wagner justifies her presence in the opera by explaining that she was once in service to Isabella. After the latter vowed to enter the convent, Dorella seeks new employment in the 'wine house'. Along these lines, it is suggestive to see the 'prosperous art' and the 'prone and speechless' dialects 'such as move men' are shown in Wagner's opera first by Isabella's (former) servant in advance of the novice's entrance. Dorella captures not only the essence of that carnivalesque, 'free and frank' sensuality Wagner saw at the centre of his adaptation, but also suggests that Isabella has learned a thing or two from her worldly servant. If this exchange calls to mind Despina's role in *Così fan tutte*, it would not be the only Mozartean reference the duet evokes. Much like 'Là ci darem la mano' in *Don Giovanni*, the seducer offers their would-be lover an enticing melody too catchy to pass up, and the seduction's success is proved musically when Dorella gets Brighella to sing to her tune, as can be seen in [Example 1](#).

This moment also points towards another strategy Wagner may have seen as latent in Shakespeare and magnified to extreme proportions: the theme of the carnival. As James Brophy has demonstrated, carnival festivities played an important role in the development of a 'political public sphere' in the early Vormärz period; state authorities were becoming increasingly concerned with the 'free-thinking attitude that mocked social conventions' and often took measures to censor aspects of carnival revelry.⁶⁶ Prussian officials forbade masking during public carnivals in small towns and villages in the late 1820s, for instance, and in 1834 – only two years before the premiere of Wagner's opera – a more extensive attempt to curtail carnival festivities severely cut down the number of officially sanctioned festivals, with a greater degree of censorship and correspondingly higher police presence accompanying those which did occur.⁶⁷ The ban on Carnival in *Das Liebesverbot* was more

⁶⁶ James M. Brophy, 'Carnival and Citizenship: The Politics of Culture in the Prussian Rhineland, 1823–1848', *Journal of Social History* 30/4 (1997): 880.

⁶⁷ Brophy, 'Carnival and Citizenship', 885–6.

Più vivace
13 Dorella

Nun ist's ganz um ihn ge - sche.hen, wie um sei - ne Rich - ter -

Brighella

Nun ist's ganz um mich ge - sche.hen, da - hin ist die Rich - ter -

Do.

pflicht, wie's ihm nun auch mag er - ge.hen, er denkt nicht mehr, er denkt

B.

pflicht, denn wer die - sen Schalk ge - se.hen, der denkt nicht mehr, der denkt

Ex. 1 We know the seduction has succeeded when the victim begins singing to the seducer's tune. Dorella makes her victory a bit more obvious than Don Giovanni does. Reproduced from Otto Singer's piano-vocal score (Weisbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1922): 178

than just a timely coincidence, then. The contemporaneous real-world clampdown on such activities in fact served as the perfect context for Wagner to 'uncover the sinfulness of hypocrisy and the unnaturalness of such cruel moral censure' (*ML*: I, 102). The opera thus served to drive home to his opera-going audience his own impression of Germany as both politically and morally repressive.

In the opera's courtroom scene, we see Dorella, a servant, completely get the better of the authority figure – a device certainly not unheard of in the comic genre (spoken or operatic), but significant in light of the other topsy-turvy, carnivalesque features of *Das Liebesverbot* and, to an extent, in the original play. What's more, Brighella himself can be seen to evince a carnivalesque role reversal, as his *commedia dell'arte* namesake was in fact the cunning and lusty tavern owner in many scenarios. Here, then, is a sort of double role reversal: the clever *commedia* character is elevated in *Das Liebesverbot* to a position of authority, only to be brought down once again by a woman who evinces those same tendencies his earlier counterpart tended to display in the Italian tradition. The literal staging of the carnival at the close of the opera offers of course the clearest example of revelry and role reversal. But Shakespeare's original, set in Vienna rather than Palermo, provides no equivalent scene, either at the end of the play or anywhere else. Indeed, as one scholar asserts, no one, 'not even those who find no problems with this problem play' would 'fault the finale of *Measure for Measure* on grounds of excessive festivity'.⁶⁸ Still, this is not to say that the idea of the carnivalesque is absent from the work.

Das Liebesverbot and the Carnavalesque

In his classic study of the topic, Bakhtin notes a 'temporary suspension ... of hierarchical rank created during carnival time' as a 'special type of communication

⁶⁸ Macdonald, 'Measure for Measure: The Flesh Made Word', 266.

impossible in everyday life'. This suspension of rank leads to the 'creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating them from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times'.⁶⁹ The phrase 'frank and free' resonates with similar words used by Wagner to describe the mood he sought to depict in this opera, as we have seen above.⁷⁰ In fact, Wagner draws much of his inspiration for the opera's carnivalesque atmosphere from subtler allusions in Shakespeare's original.

The Duke, speaking to a friar early in the play, remarks upon the degenerate state of Vienna in language that repeatedly references the overthrown hierarchies of law and order:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for this fourteen years we have let slip,
Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave
That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,
Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch
Only to stick it in their children's sight
For terror, not to use, in time the rod
More mocked than feared; so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
And liberty plucks justice by the nose,
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum. (I.iii.19–31)

Because Vincentio has given his people 'too much scope' (I.iii.35), he admits, society has been completely overturned. Lucio gets at something similar in the following scene, too, when he insists that 'use and liberty' have 'for long run by the hideous law/as mice by lions' (I.iv.62–64). Kenneth Gross thus hits the mark when he suggests that the rituals of law in the play acquire the colouring of 'a slightly frenetic, vengeful carnival'.⁷¹

Bakhtin, who numbered Shakespeare amongst those Renaissance writers who made use of such themes, speaks of characters being degraded, brought down to earth and 'turn[ing] their subject into flesh' during the revelry of Carnival.⁷² This degradation is precisely what Lucio attempts to inflict on Vincentio, who in turn tries to distance his image from the 'fleshmonger' (V.i.332) he is painted as by the Fantastic. Earlier in the play, Lucio suggests that if the (supposedly) absent Duke were still around, he would have 'paid for the nursing of a thousand' bastards 'ere he would have hanged a man for the getting' of one hundred. 'He had some feeling of the sport', Lucio claims: 'he knew the service, and that instructed him to mercy' (III.ii.379–383). Vincentio (as 'Lodowick') replies, astonished, insisting that he had 'never heard the absent Duke much detected for women' (384–385). As a character who consciously attempts to distance himself from the action of world around him – 'I have ever loved the life

⁶⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1968): 10.

⁷⁰ The original phrase is 'freie, offene Sinnlichkeit', in Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (Leipzig, 1888): I, 10.

⁷¹ Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 74.

⁷² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 20.

removed' (I.iii.8) – the Duke is repeatedly reminded of his corporeal essence and all-too-human desires by way of Lucio, who, if Mistress Overdone is to be believed, had himself fathered a baby born on the eve of the previous years' Carnival.⁷³

Richard Wheeler comments of the Duke that his actions 'pose problems regarding his place in the play that the comic design provides no coherent way of addressing'.⁷⁴ Perhaps anticipating such criticism of this sort, or at least feeling the same way on an intuitive level, Wagner decides to excise Vincentio from the stage altogether. Though doing so may have resolved one problem of how to deal with some of the heavier aspects of this ostensible comedy (recall that he spoke of 'robbing [the play] of its complete earnestness' in his 'Autobiographical Sketch'), the fact remains that the work does still often touch upon 'psychological conditions' that might be 'more central to tragedies', to return to an earlier point of Wheeler's about problem plays and *Measure for Measure* specifically. Friedrich's self-interrogation in Act II presents us with a glimpse of the regent's desires – a nexus of the sacred, sexual and criminal passions – that, when coupled with his stated inclination to redemption through death at the end of the opera, would seem to anticipate the characterization of many of his later dramatic heroes (the Dutchman, Kundry and others) rather than fitting with the themes Wagner seemed to espouse elsewhere in his *große komische Oper*.⁷⁵ Indeed, Friedrich's characterization in Act II also calls to mind the 'deeply reflective tone' and 'brooding sense of the pollution spread by lust in the single soul' Boas discerned in Shakespeare's text and cited as one of the reasons for its designation as a problem play in the first place.⁷⁶ The seeming disconnect between the young composer's desire to promote 'free and frank' sensuality (in line with his friends and colleagues who were associated with the broader Young Germany movement) and his desire to excise much of the bawdier merry-making and licentiousness of the original also offers another connection between the idea of the problem play and Wagner's own presentation of conflicting impulses and mixed moods throughout.

But since the Duke is the prime mover of much of the action – especially from the third act onwards – his excision meant that the composer had to significantly alter the plot structure for his opera, which would in turn effect the characterization of Isabella relative to her Shakespearean counterpart and alter some of the very themes of the play itself. Isabella, already a central character in Shakespeare's original, now gains an even more prominent role, becoming the active force for change in *Das Liebesverbot*. Wagner is very explicit about this in his 'Communication to My Friends', admitting that the character of Isabella was his primary interest in the play. He goes on to praise her 'chaste soul', her 'entrancing warmth of colour' and declares her a 'superb woman' (*PW*, I: 295). Wagner's Isabella effects change not so much through her saintly virtue (though some of that remains), but through an aggressiveness that might outmatch some of Shakespeare's most ambitious

⁷³ The Arden editors, citing François Laroque, note Overdone's comment at III.i.459–460 suggesting that the baby will be (or was) fifteen months old on 1 May (the feast of Saints Philip and James), hence 'he must have been born at Candlemas, on the eve of Carnival, and may have been conceived in the course of the nocturnal escapades of May Day two years earlier'.

⁷⁴ Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies*, 13.

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that Friedrich's desire to be killed according to his own laws is in accord with Shakespeare's Angelo, who, at the end of the play, asserts 'I crave death more willingly than mercy./ 'Tis my deserving and I do entreat it' (V.i.476–777).

⁷⁶ Boas, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors*, 357.

female characters, especially those in the comedies (Beatrice, Rosalind and Katherine come to mind). After discovering Friedrich's plan to have her brother executed, she exclaims 'Ah, the rogue, the scoundrel! God give me strength to destroy him!'⁷⁷ While Cosima recorded her husband's thoughts on Isabella being 'divine' in the play (CD, II: 472; 3 May 1880), this seems rather far from Wagner's characterization of her in the opera. It is she, not the Duke, who devises the so-called 'bed trick', here augmented into a *Figaro*-esque double-duty deception, both on the lecherous authority figure who shirks his marital obligations for a chance at bedding a virgin, and on her other (by now earnest) suitor Luzio, for whom she admits to having feelings but whose doubting of her fidelity makes her want to teach him a lesson, too.

This all plays out, of course, in the massed crowd scenes of Wagner's carnival. The extensive final scene of Wagner's opera, accounting for nearly twenty percent of the score, begins with music that is by now familiar. It first appears in the overture and, as remarked upon earlier, serves as an indicator of the banned carnival and its festivities throughout the work (see Ex. 2).

For Brian Morris, Wagner's crowd scene represents the composer's 'most important addition' to Shakespeare's original. 'The citizens and the people of Palermo of all classes', as well as serving a more traditional choral function, 'represent the voices of democratic good sense, and high spirits, and happiness, and resistance to all forms of tyranny.' He also points out that Wagner makes Luzio the 'ring-leader and inciter of the people's revolt', emerging later as 'the people's leader'.⁷⁸ Wagner was to comment on this change himself, underscoring its socio-political implications in his later 'Communication to My Friends':

Shakespeare disentangles the resulting situation by means of the public return of the Duke, who had hitherto observed events from under a disguise: his decision is an earnest one, and grounded on the judge's maxim, 'measure for measure'. I, on the other hand, unloosed the knot without the Prince's aid, by means of a revolution. ... I also made the Stateholder, a puritanical German, forbid a projected carnival; while a madcap youngster, in love with Isabella, incites the populace to mask, and keep their weapons ready. (PW, I: 295)

Comments such as these underscore the Young German propensities which underlie some of the changes to Shakespeare's story: the effects of the July Revolution were still strongly felt amongst progressive Germans of the time, and, in Gail Finney's words 'revolution' was the 'catchword of the day'.⁷⁹ Along these lines, the Duke's marriage proposal at the end of *Measure for Measure* is removed, with Wagner inserting the more democratically approved suitor for Isabella. Though it may be tempting to discern parallels with *Die Meistersinger* here – the carnival scene serving as a precursor to the *völkish* ideology Wagner would showcase in his later comedy – such an interpretation would be anachronistic and misguided. Indeed, it was precisely his *disillusionment* with Germanic propensities – musical, cultural and otherwise – that he was seeking to foreground in this youthful opera.

⁷⁷ 'Ha, der Abscheul'che, der Verruchte! Gott gibt mir Kraft ihn zu vernichten!', No. 4, p. 144.

⁷⁸ Morris, 'Shakespeare, Wagner, and *Measure for Measure*', 117–18.

⁷⁹ Gail Finney, 'Revolution, Resignation, Realism (1830–1890)', in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. Hellen Watanabe-O'Kelley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 272.

The image shows three systems of musical notation. The first system consists of a piano accompaniment with a first ending bracket over the first four measures, marked with a forte (ff) dynamic. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and includes a vocal line with a forte (ff) dynamic and the instruction 'Pos. Str. Cl. Fag.'. The third system shows the piano accompaniment with a decrescendo (dim.) dynamic marking.

Ex. 2 The 'carnival' motive is immediately followed by the 'ban on love' motive when it first appears in the overture (p. 2 of the piano-vocal score)

Though Wagner gets at this anti-German topic in several of his earliest published writings, all appearing in print around the time he was working on *Das Liebesverbot*, none better raises the issue than his 1834 essay 'On German Opera'. Its opening is worth quoting at length.

When we talk of German Music, and especially when we listen to talk about it, the same confusion of ideas always appears to prevail as in the conception of freedom by those old-German black-frosted demagogues who curled their noses at the results of modern reforms abroad with just as much contempt as our Teutomanic music-savants now shrug their shoulders. By all means, we have a field of music which belongs to us by right, – and that is Instrumental-music; – but a German Opera we have not, and for the selfsame reason that we own no national Drama. We are too intellectual and much too learned, to create warm human figures. Mozart could do it; but it was the beauty of Italian Song, that he breathed into his human beings. Since the time when we began to despise that beauty again, we have departed more and more from the path which Mozart struck for the weal of our dramatic music. Weber never understood the management of Song, and Spohr wellnigh as little. But Song, after all, is the organ whereby a man may musically express himself; and so long as it is not fully developed, he is wanting in true speech. In this respect the Italians have an immeasurable advantage over us; vocal beauty with them is a second nature, and their creations are just as sensuously warm as poor, for the rest, in individual import. (*PW*, VIII: 55)

He returns to the idea in his 'Autobiographical Sketch' in the following decade. Describing the impetus for *Das Liebesverbot*, he writes of his budding worldliness and how he began around this time to turn away from provincialisms:

I was then twenty-one years of age, inclined to take life and the world on their pleasant side. 'Ardinghello' (by Heine) and 'Das Junge Europa' (by H. Laube) tingled through my every limb; while Germany appeared in my eyes a very tiny portion of the earth. I had emerged from abstract Mysticism, and I learnt a love for Matter. Beauty of material and brilliancy of wit were lordly things to me: as regards my beloved music, I found them both among the Frenchmen and Italians. I forsook my model, Beethoven... (PW, I: 9)

He continues, suggesting in a passage cited earlier that, when it came to his opera, he 'robbed [*Measure for Measure*] of its prevailing earnestness, and thus remoulded it after the pattern of *Das Junge Europa*; free and frank physicalism gained, of its own sheer strength, the victory over Puritanical hypocrisy' (PW, I: 10). Later still, in *My Life*, Wagner explains his desire to juxtapose the ebullient Italian disposition with the cold iciness of German Puritanism once again: 'I transferred the theme from the fabulous city of Vienna to the capital of sunny Sicily, in which a German viceroy, indignant at the inconceivably loose morals of the people, attempts to introduce a puritanical reform, and comes miserably to grief over it' (I: 109).

It is worth pausing to dwell on the details of what may have motivated Wagner's thinking. Heinrich Laube, a close friend of the composer's and one of the authors Wagner explicitly names as a source, was a member of the *Junges Deutschland* literary movement, a group of young writers active in the early 1830s whose work, calling for an 'emancipation of the flesh' along with broader-scale socio-sexual and political freedoms, became so incendiary that the Bundestag issued an edict banning their writings on 10 December 1835. Other writers named in the ban included Heinrich Heine, Karl Gutzkow, Ludolf Wienbarg and Theodor Mundt. As Marilyn Chapin Massey summarizes, they were charged with being 'anti-Christian, immoral and subversive to the state', and many of those who did not flee to France (like Heine) inevitably served time in prison.⁸⁰ Wienbarg was the one who coined the phrase 'junges Deutschland' in his writing, giving name to the movement, but Gutzkow, whose novel *Wally, der Zweiflerin* (1835) was the tipping point that prompted the ban, is often considered as its leader. Heine and Ludwig Börne were seen as chief sources of inspiration for the group, along with the writings of French political theorist Henri de Saint-Simon.

The explicitly French influences of Saint-Simonianism on these writers, as well as on Wagner, was considerable, and the movement's aforementioned desire for an 'emancipation of the flesh' – a concept Heine imported from French writing into Germany – was one of the key elements prompting German authorities to balk at the foreign (especially French republican) influences increasingly holding sway within Vormärz Germany. Another attempt at banning carnival activities in the mid-1840s stemmed from the fact that many liberal, politically minded youths were using the guise of carnival revelry as a means to disseminate their viewpoints to a broader audience. In an anonymous pamphlet published the same year as *Das Liebesverbot*, another author critical of the movement laments that 'a foreign morality now threatens German morality, which is the foundation of German freedom'. The tract further complains of 'the hysterical propagandizing of French virtue', which, if left unchecked, would mean the 'moral suicide of

⁸⁰ Marilyn Chapin Massey, 'The Literature of Young Germany and D. F. Strauss's *Life of Jesus*', *Journal of Religion* 59/3 (1979): 301.

Germany'.⁸¹ Though such comments would seem prophetic of the xenophobia expressed in Hans Sachs's closing monologue in *Die Meistersinger* (commented on above), Wagner was of course busily fighting against what he perceived to be narrow-minded German provincialism of this sort in *Das Liebesverbot*.

Wagner's championing of 'free and frank sensuality' and his critique of 'Puritan hypocrisy' should thus be read in the context of the broader Young Germany movement. I have already remarked upon his close ties with Laube, with whom he had also collaborated on an abandoned opera libretto and other projects. But Mundt's attack on German prudishness, evident in his *Charaktere und Situationen* (1837), Wienbarg's advocacy of greater sexual freedoms in his *Ästhetische Fieldzüge* (the same 1834 volume wherein he coined the term 'junges Deutschland'), and the call for sexual and political emancipation evident in Gutzkow's *Wally* are also all of a piece with Wagner's outlook at the time. He had already met Heine and Börne at this point, and his own writings and Cosima's diaries testify to his knowledge of the work of Gutzkow and others; indeed, Laube helped introduce him into this circle of writers in Dresden the following decade as well.⁸² The composer's own pro-Italian writings of the time, critical of German music-making as prudish and unmelodic, should thus be read with these other authors in mind.

Rather than taking this carnival setting as a prototype for the *Festwiese*-like nationalism on display in *Die Meistersinger*, then, it would be more appropriate to see a direct connection to the ideas of the carnivalesque discussed above. Bakhtin insists that 'because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images closely resemble certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle'. He is quick to qualify this claim, noting that it is not a 'spectacle seen by the people', however: they 'live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people'.⁸³ Though the opera and its carnival scene are of course spectacle for audience members, it is clear that all of Wagner's characters embrace sensuality and the carnivalesque. Indeed, the whole of Palermo seems to weigh in on Friedrich's hypocrisy, offering a more democratic (not to mention festive) leniency than Shakespeare's Duke. As Friedrich prepares to be condemned by his own laws ('so richtet mich nach meinem eigenen Gesetz'), the crowd responds by declining and pardoning him, as well as all the other would-be revellers: 'No, we'll show greater mercy than you! ... We'll set the prisoners free.'⁸⁴ After the regent's reconciliation with Mariana, Brighella is pardoned for his own hypocrisy and allowed to propose to Dorella; together with Luzio and Isabella, the couples lead the carnival procession to greet the otherwise absent King who is about to return as the opera closes. Again, as with Wieland's translation of the play, there seems to be a prevailing conservative slant to Wagner's ending. Despite the overt endorsement of 'free' sexuality and revelry, everyone is here contentedly paired off in orderly fashion and into a seemingly monogamous relationship – a far cry from the ambiguous reactions at best offered by the Duke's forced couplings and own marriage proposal at the

⁸¹ Cited in Paul Lawrence Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question: Revolutionary Antisemitism from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990): 178.

⁸² For references to Gutzkow and others, see, for example, *ML*, I: 388–92; *CD*, I: 492 (entry for 1 June 1872); *PW*, I: xvii, 5, 9, 46, 174, 222; VI: 89, 133, 139.

⁸³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7.

⁸⁴ 'Nein, das Gesetz ist aufgehoben! Wir wollen gnäd'ger sein als du!', 'Kommt, die Gefang'nen zu befrei'n', No. 11, p. 575–8.

end of the play, and of the pimping and bawding so endemic to Shakespeare's Vienna writ large.

Others have also been quick to discern a longer-lasting influence of the *Junges Deutschland* worldview on the composer's later musical output. Paul Lawrence Rose claims that *Rienzi* marks 'the high point' of this phase in Wagner's career, 'when his revolutionism was at its most universal and least German'.⁸⁵ Dieter Borchmeyer, by contrast, sees parallels between the shared ideological underpinnings of *Das Liebesverbot* and *Tannhäuser*. He speaks of Wolfram's 'ethos of renunciation' triumphing over Young Germany's 'cult of Eros' and claims the opera represents many of their ideologies at their most unadulterated.⁸⁶ James Garratt likewise sees *Tannhäuser* as indebted to the movement owing to its 'all-pervasive conflict of the sensual and spiritual realms'. Much like the exiled or imprisoned writers Wagner was reading, so too does the titular hero of this work 'return to society with a message of liberation' only to find himself 'banished and disgraced'.⁸⁷ Mary Cicora suggests an influence that was longer lasting still, seeing in the *Ring* cycle 'an amalgam of the world-views' of Young Germany and the earlier Romantics, and Borchmeyer even offers comparisons with *Parsifal*, pushing the connections yet further.⁸⁸ That said, the literary trope of pitting spirituality against sensuality also has a long lineage, from the medieval romances that would serve as the basis for some of Wagner's later operas through to the writings of the young Nietzsche that had initially impressed the composer. While it may thus be an oversimplification to suggest that the trope's presence in Wagner's mature music-dramas evinces a clearly continuous line of influence on the part of the Young German ideologues mentioned above, it can at the very least serve as a reminder that the theme, which manifested itself in so many of his compositions, found expression in *Das Liebesverbot* too, despite his later decision to renounce the work as too dissimilar to his subsequent endeavours.

A Cosmopolitan Score

But to speak of the aftershocks of *Das Liebesverbot* within the composer's *œuvre* is to paint only part of the picture. Though I have commented on the socio-political mores of Vormärz Germany that helped shape Wagner's outlook at the time, the question of the opera's musical influences has come less to the fore thus far. The opera's scoring and dramaturgy contribute just as much to the overall cosmopolitan flair on offer here. In much the same way as the scholars cited above have been able to discern a vast array of *Liebesverbot*-isms in later Wagner, so too have they found a diverse assortment of musical precedents the young composer seemed to be drawing on in writing the score. Their analyses and conclusions have been quite varied. While there are occasional instances wherein a direct influence or imitation seems clear – compare the overture of Hérold's *Zampa* (1831) with that

⁸⁵ Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 36.

⁸⁶ Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, 146, 125.

⁸⁷ James Garratt, *Music, Culture and Social Reform in the Age of Wagner* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 49.

⁸⁸ Mary A. Cicora, *Wagner's Ring and German Drama: Comparative Studies in Mythology and History in Drama* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999): 36. For Borchmeyer see again *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, 146.

of *Das Liebesverbot*, for instance – most other connections are harder to pin down. Indeed, when looked at comparatively, one begins to get the feeling that Wagner was drawing less on specific sources and that the score reflects more of an absorption or amalgamation of larger trends within the bel canto tradition and those of *grand opéra* and *opéra-comique*, as well as a number of home-grown idioms discussed below.

Auber's operas are frequent points of comparison, as is the Meyerbeer of *Robert le Diable*, though these are not necessarily separate from the more Italian-leaning propensities of the score, such as the Rossinian coloratura of Isabella and Mariana's Act I duet and the cantabile-cabaletta form that follows Friedrich's *scena* in the second half of the work. Friedrich's number in particular seems an equal mix of Donizetti and Auber, for example. Bellini is another candidate others have discerned in the *Liebesverbot* score, likely owing to how extensively the composer had been praising his works during the 1830s. However, the much higher frequency of dissonances in the score, when compared with those in the Italian composer's operas Wagner was known to admire, argues against such a reading. Indeed, Friedrich Lippmann insists that the chromaticism to be found Friedrich's aria surpasses even Donizetti's and Auber's more adventurous moments, suggesting Alphonse's aria in *La muette di Portici* as a point of comparison.⁸⁹ Hans Engel likewise pushes against seeing too much Bellini in Wagner's work. Similarly drawing comparisons with *La muette*, he notes parallels between the French opera's third-act market chorus and Wagner's carnival scene, discussed above, but he also suggests a coarser and harsher number of dissonances than those to be found in the French opera.⁹⁰

Alfred Einstein reminds us that German traits remain, too, despite Wagner's renunciation of them at the time ... but then again, the 'Marschner-like melody' he discerns in the motive associated with Friedrich's ban on love should also be considered in light of the fact that the governor represented that element of German prudishness that was to be vanquished by the end of the opera in order that Italian sensuality may triumph.⁹¹ Still, while Wagner insists that his youthful enthusiasm for Beethoven and Weber could not be found in his score (*PW*, VII: 8), the spectres of both composers remain. Surely the second act, opening in a prison with a captive tenor musing on his fate, owes a debt to the famous second act of *Fidelio*, which begins similarly. Danna Behne also points towards parallels between the opening scene in Wagner's opera, with its raucous laughter in defiance of the carnival ban, to that of the derisive laughter that greets Max early on in *Der Freischütz*.⁹² It may be hard to reconcile the anti-German stance Wagner took towards operatic compositions at this time with his seemingly contradictory desire to embrace a more cosmopolitan outlook on life. Despite these echoes of

⁸⁹ Friedrich Lippmann, 'Die Feen und Das Liebesverbot, oder Die Wagnerisierung diverser Vorbilder', in *Wagnerliteratur–Wagnerforschung: Bericht über das Wagner-Symposium München 1983*, ed. Carl Dahlhaus and Egon Voss (Mainz: Schott, 1985): 42–3.

⁹⁰ Hans Engel, 'Über Richard Wagners Oper "Das Liebesverbot"', in *Festschrift Friedrich Blume zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Anna Amalie Abert and Wilhelm Pfannkuch (New York: Bärenreiter Kassel, 1963): 85.

⁹¹ Alfred Einstein, 'Richard Wagners "Das Liebesverbot": Zur Aufführung am Münchner National-Theater (24 März 1923)', in *Nationale und universal Musik. Neue Essays* (Zurich: Pan, 1958): 85.

⁹² Danna Behne, 'Wagner's *Das Liebesverbot*' (MA thesis, North Texas State University, 1973): 81.

his predecessors within the score and dramaturgy of the work, I would suggest that the cosmopolitanism Wagner embraced at this time *did* allow for Germanic influences, though they are more easily discerned in the ideological realm (the *Junges Deutschland* authors discussed above, for example) than the musical, where France and Italy reign supreme.

A number of authors have already helped elucidate the Franco-Italian strains running through the opera. Thomas Grey, for instance, discerns aspects of Auber's *La muette di Portici* and *Fra Diavolo*, as well as Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*, and also draws the same comparison between *La muette's* market chorus and Wagner's carnival scene as Engel did. He also highlights the Rossinian coloratura and chromaticism remarked upon by Lippmann. Where he differs, however, is in favouring the Bellinian connection denied by the German scholars, seeing in Wagner's 'tendency to linger on the third degree, approached from the lower fifth or from above by appoggiatura' a distinct line of influence from the Italian composer to the German one.⁹³ Writing elsewhere, he continues this line of argument, suggesting that *Das Liebesverbot* represented a synthesis of 'Bellinian lyricism' with 'the taught rhythmic energy of post-Rossinian choruses' and the 'supple, discreetly accompanied *parlando* dialogue of Auber's comedies'.⁹⁴ Given the connection to Young German socio-political ideas *Tannhäuser* shares with *Das Liebesverbot*, commented on earlier, Grey's discerning of shared musico-dramatic forms between the two solidifies the link between these operas even further. If musical, dramaturgical, literary and philosophical ties all link Wagner's early, 'anti-German' opera with one more popularly seen as *echt-Deutsch*, it suggests the composer's penchant for the cosmopolitan was indeed harder to shake off than he would have us believe. Perhaps he simply got better at integrating those themes and structures into the service of Germanic myth and legend.

Of course, *Das Liebesverbot* need not attract our attention solely because of the fact that the worldview underpinning its conception proved more enduring than traditional readings of early Wagner suggest, or that its musical influences demonstrate a more cosmopolitan Wagner than the *deutsche Meister* has come to represent within the popular imagination. His clever transformation of *Measure for Measure* into a carnivalesque opera that endorses sexual freedom and licentiousness while simultaneously stifling coarser revelry and promiscuity is in itself a notable feat, especially when coupled with his retention of the original's 'deeply reflective tone' and 'brooding sense of pollution spread by lust' in the character of Friedrich. In so doing, Wagner is able to highlight many of the same, seemingly contradictory impulses and themes audiences past and present have discerned in Shakespeare's play. As I have noted above, this Wagner-Shakespeare connection has remained comparatively understudied, despite the composer's continued interest in this play and others even in his final years; pushing this line of inquiry further can also help unsettle the predominantly Nordic and/or Germanic focus on the composer's literary borrowings.⁹⁵ The socio-political, musical and dramatic influences shaping this opera all clearly continued to preoccupy Wagner throughout his career; a more nuanced look at this early work thus helps to further the goal

⁹³ Thomas Grey, 'Musical Background and Influences', in *The Wagner Compendium*, ed. Barry Millington (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992): 71.

⁹⁴ Grey, 'Meister Richard's Apprenticeship', 29.

⁹⁵ For Wagner's continued interest in *Measure for Measure*, as well as other Shakespeare plays, see for instance Cosima's diary entries from 29–30 April and 3 May 1880, CD, II: 471–3.

of re-evaluating his relationship to foreign operatic, literary and political movements, as well as our understanding of his sexual politics and perceived progressivism; it also helps further unsettle his own self-crafted image as *das deutscheste Mensch, der deutsche Geist*.

Supplementary material

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479409822000015>