The Gifted Orator: Classical and Musical Rhetoric Affinities in Mendelssohn's *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* Op. 60

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Abstract in English

Felix Mendelssohn maintained singular aesthetical views regarding music's degree of precision in efficaciously communicating thoughts in comparison to words. Primarily driven by the famous Souchay exchanges, scholarly interest thus far has approached Mendelssohn's peculiar perspectives on the word-music relationship by principally focusing on his Lieder. This research aims to contribute and broaden our understanding of Mendelssohn's texted music by identifying and suggesting Classical and music rhetorical affinities operating amidst his choral-orchestral repertoire. I begin this thesis by discussing Mendelssohn's verbal and non-verbal communicative style in his letters and demeanor, before also reevaluating his appreciation of words' inherent faculties, thus revealing a quest for '*le mot juste*'. Then, taking the cantata *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* Op. 60 as a case study, I identify within the compositional process and musical key relationships rhetorical principles suggesting the unfolding of an oration: a sensibility for appropriateness (*decorum*), a fondness for ceremonial music acting as a signature in Mendelssohn's output (*epideictic*), and an effort to equilibrate the three persuasive appeals to enhance eloquence (*ethos, pathos, logos*). Textually, the analysis of repetitions exposes various triadic rhetorical figures that increase emotional impact and memorability while musically, the cyclic and careful motivic declinations disclose a topical centrality that reinforces the discourse' essential ideas. Lastly, stemming from Mendelssohn's fondness for the supernatural, I address a few idiosyncratic pictorialism to help clarify possible visual significations bestowed upon these extra-musical gestures.

Abstract in French

Felix Mendelssohn soutenait des perspectives esthétiques singulières quant au degré de précision de la musique par rapport aux mots pour efficacement communiquer ses idées. Portés par la célèbre correspondance avec Souchay, l'intérêt des chercheurs jusqu'à présent s'est concentré sur ses lieder pour élucider l'unicité de sa position concernant la relation des mots avec la musique. Cette recherche vise à contribuer à l'approfondissement de notre compréhension de la musique vocale de Mendelssohn en identifiant et en suggérant différentes affinités rhétoriques classiques et musicales opérant au sein de son répertoire choral-orchestral. Je commence cette thèse en me penchant sur le style de communication verbal et non verbal de Mendelssohn dans ses écrits et ses échanges relationnels, avant de réévaluer son appréciation des facultés inhérentes des mots, révélant ainsi une quête du « mot juste ». Puis, prenant la cantate *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* op. 60 comme étude de cas, j'identifie dans le processus compositionnel et les relations musicales clés des principes rhétoriques suggérant le déploiement d'une oraison : une sensibilité à la pertinence contextuelle (*decorum*), un penchant pour la musique cérémonielle agissant comme une signature dans l'œuvre de Mendelssohn (épidictique), et un effort pour équilibrer les trois piliers de la persuasion afin d'améliorer l'éloquence (*ethos, pathos, logos*). L'analyse textuelle des répétitions met en évidence diverses figures rhétoriques triadiques qui augmentent l'impact émotionnel et la mémorabilité, tandis que, musicalement, les déclinaisons cycliques et motiviques soigneusement travaillées révèlent une centralité thématique qui renforce les idées essentielles du discours. Enfin, en raison de l'affection de Mendelssohn pour le surnaturel, j'aborde quelques pictorialismes idiosyncrasiques pour aider à clarifier de possibles significations visuelles accordées à ces gestes extramusicaux.

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Introduction

They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.[1] The famous words of the 126th Psalm, which the pastor and librettist Julius Schubring invited his friend Felix Mendelssohn to set to music on November 9, 1844,[2] mirrors in some sense the arduous process one must undertake to unearth precise particulars from the life of the composer. Anyone seriously dedicated to knowing the life and art of Mendelssohn would in all likelihood agree to qualify the process as both exacting and exhilarating. To begin with, the complexity of his posthumous 'controversy-plagued' critical reception paired with rapid aesthetic changes in the second half of the nineteenth century quickly led to the creation of detractors and apologists.[3] The polarization of Mendelssohn's heritage engendered many historical inaccuracies and clouded, if not delayed, what Benedict Taylor called 'the long Mendelssohn Renaissance'[4] in the ensuing twentieth century. The daunting amount of letters both sent and received, the vast number of sources and autographs (some institutionalized but many in private hands) and the required fluency in German, English and French are but a few examples of what awaits the Mendelssohn scholar.

Mais encore, there is the joy too. An inherent joy surfaces when accessing and discovering the depths of this multifaceted artist that "resists reduction to a single musical and historical phenomenon."[5] Admittedly, there is joy but also *viel vergnügen* (much pleasure) – to use a typically Mendelssohnian expression – in realizing that there is always yet one more stream to be considered when trying to 'assimilate' the confluences of his inner being. The fluvial analogy is deliberate; the rivers' kinetic energy aptly describes the moving and synergistic forces

[1] Psalm 126:4, King James version.
[2] See *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 4636 and notes.
[3] For a thorough survey of Mendelssohn's reception, see John Michael Cooper, "Mendelssohn Received" in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 233-250.
[4] Benedict Taylor, ed., *Mendelssohn* (Early Romantic Composers. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), xiii. Taylor refers here both to Carl Dahlhaus's rejection of the term and R. Larry Todd's suggestion of 'Mendelssohn Revival'.
[5] Cooper, "Mendelssohn Received", 250.

at play when trying to paint a definitive picture of the composer. The difficulty in acquiring a holistic viewpoint of Mendelssohn's art, particularly when it comes to his aesthetic convictions, partly originates from the composer's own dislike of *Schubfächer* (pigeon-holes) and strict categories to analyze art. Moreover, Mendelssohn was a 'practicing musician' hoping to be known as such, that is, through his compositions and performing activities. He resisted public written statements, critics, debates, manifesto, and maintained a certain animosity or suspicion towards aesthetes, which he qualified as a *höchst trockne Race* (sad and dry race).[6] Instead, Mendelssohn described to Zelter in 1830 the value of the artistic process only as "what has sprung from the deepest faith of the innermost soul", so that it could speak "from heart to heart."[7] Notwithstanding this first general claim, the reality is that Mendelssohn expressed himself abundantly and sometimes very precisely on what constituted, in his eyes, the tenets of sound aesthetic principles, but always in the private sphere of correspondence. It is precisely through his many letters that we can 'recollect' and 'gather' a portrait, particularly with the Souchay exchanges – known as the *Locus Classicus* – in which he famously declared: "What the music I love expresses to me is thoughts not too unclear for words, but rather too clear," to conclude with "the words remain ambiguous, but we all understand the music."[8]

Mendelssohn's distinctive position regarding music's communicative abilities compared to words has generated important interest, yet produced limited thorough scholarly investigations in its application (except for his *Lieder*). The famous letter to Souchay, which remains in my opinion insufficiently explained and contextualized amidst his whole corpus, seems to raise more questions than it answers despite its length. My goal with this research is not to solely focus on

[6] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* letter no. 383. Translation located in Eric Werner, "The Family Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library,* 65 (1960): 12.
[7] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* letter no. 383. Translation located in Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters*, ed. Gisella Selden-Goth (New York: Vienna House, 1973), 105-106.
[8] *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.3450. Quoted in full in chapter 2.2.

the *Locus Classicus*, but instead to bring light to a larger question stemming from it: How are we to understand what Felix Mendelssohn aimed to communicate through his music? If, according to Mendelssohn, music is immensely more precise than words, then what are the universal communicative capacities of music in his view that allowed him to 'speak' and be 'understood' clearly? Needless to say, amalgamated to this question lies the keyword of communication. Given the importance Mendelssohn bestowed upon connecting with his surroundings, I will investigate first the multiplicity of ways – both verbal and non-verbal – he used to share his 'inner self'. Through examining his correspondence, a required step for any Mendelssohn studies, we can better understand the salience of his exchanges with his friends and family, the care with which he fostered human connections. Just as important and revealing are the many memoirs published posthumously by his close friends, portraying unique and personalized points of view on Mendelssohn's behavior and demeanor radiating from his personality. Consequently, I will quote in many instances appropriate segments of these written communications to support arguments and propositions.

Thereupon, we will proceed to the context of the *Locus Classicus* in order to move closer to the underlying aesthetics, such as the referential-autonomous pendulum, but more importantly, to address Mendelssohn's convoluted relationship with words, particularly in regard to their interaction with emotions. Words' faculties, both in their possibilities and limitations, were subject to a specific treatment by the composer, particularly when paired with music. A much-needed literature review is presented and discussed on the aesthetics of his Lieder since, as mentioned, they encompass the bulk of the existing scholarly attention on Mendelssohn's triangle of words, music, and emotions.

Finally, and from key evidence, I will suggest a new angle to better appreciate Mendelssohn's communicative approach in his art and his life: that of a gifted orator. I will argue that from his unique and dedicated education drenched in the Greek and Roman authors, Mendelssohn gained access to classical rhetorical principles used by some of the world's greatest orators, namely Tacitus, Cicero, and Horace. The reading, memorization and German translation of these authors inevitably shaped his worldview and his approach to art, but more consequentially, the acquiring of maxims on which to conduct his compositional approach. His use of decorum, of the three persuasion appeals and of the epideictic style are but a few examples that shed light on his communicative modus operandi, or what Botstein termed 'The Mendelssohnian Project'.[9] It goes without saying that the theory does not always match the practice, and so my aim is not to 'fit' Mendelssohn's aesthetic into rhetorical boxes, but rather, to observe rhetorical principles at play emanating from his approach to art.

In the second part, based on an understanding of Mendelssohn's rhetorically inclined aesthetics, we will look at the enactment of his oration, his *logos*; made of words but especially of tones, topics, figures, melodies and musical sentences, in one of his most descriptive works: the cantata *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* Op. 60. Using the funnel method, we will proceed from the general to the specific, somewhat mirroring a textual zoom. After qualifying larger classical rhetorical concepts at play, we will move in closer to the musico-poetic relationships, thus revealing many rhetorical gestures and devices, to finally discuss different extra-musical pictorialisms. In the analysis, priority will be given to motivic cyclical elements, referential images, and gestures in relation to Mendelssohn's own musical language and idiosyncrasies.

[9] Leon Botstein, "The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation: Reconstructing the Career of Felix Mendelssohn," in *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 32-37.

Part I – Communication, aesthetics, rhetoric

"That is what I think of any art and ask of it: it takes anyone away with it into its own kingdom and shows one human the other's innermost thoughts and feelings, and makes clear to him how someone else's soul looks. Words cannot do this as strikingly as colours or music."[10]

Chapter 1. – Mendelssohn as Communicator

"Motto: Laugh at me as much as you want, I am writing *again*… for I must tell you how heavenly my trip yesterday was."[11]

Felix Mendelssohn was a conspicuously skilled communicator. In a multiplicity of ways and never lacking in detail, craft, and eloquence, he relentlessly aimed to share his thoughts, experiences, and the richness of his 'inner self' with the different relationships he fostered. The intensity of his relational nature elicited in him the need to intently engage in meaningful exchanges throughout his life. Mendelssohn knew that the act of communicating was not a one-way street, for he took as much pleasure in formulating his messages as from the response they elicited in its receivers. A cursory glance at the written documents could initially suggest that Mendelssohn was only concerned with the verbal and written modes of interpersonal communication. However, upon considering the whole of his correspondence and the memoirs of his close friends, it becomes self-evident that such a posture would completely forgo other sides of his personality. Mendelssohn also made regular and abundant use of non-verbal channels of transmission, which he manifested with his animated bodily expression and gestures, his fondness for the visual arts, and unequivocally, his music. In fact, my intent is to demonstrate that Mendelssohn knew very well the possibilities, but even more, the limitations inherent to

[10] *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 353. Located in Benedict Taylor, ed. *Rethinking Mendelssohn* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 322.
[11] *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 301. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of German quotations are by Claude Routhier. Emphasis is mine.

each mode of communication. Sometimes, words were the obvious choice to voice a message, an idea or feeling, and other times a sketch or drawing worked best, and in countless other occasions, music proved to be the most precise of choices.

1.1. Communicating *cum verbis* (with words)

1.1.1. Mendelssohn and his correspondence

Through words – *verba* – one can assuredly enter the gateway of Mendelssohn's art, life, and personality, and thus acquire a more holistic perspective of the man. According to Felix's younger brother Paul Mendelssohn, being familiar with the correspondence held a promise that was not insignificant: "that of understanding his brother's music better and more precisely."[12] Beyond creating a 'paper memorial', Paul believed that by knowing Felix's epistolary private world, the public could now have access to the brother that he knew, and thus "acquire a more definite idea of his individuality."[13] Within the safeguard of intimate settings, Paul, the family, and close friends knew Felix as someone loquacious and demonstrative both orally and in writing; so much so that many accounts even speak of a small lisp appearing when Felix got very animated or had witticisms to share.[14]

To proclaim that Felix Mendelssohn was 'preoccupied' with the written word is an understatement. Between 1816 and 1847, Mendelssohn penned close to 5000 letters and received

[12] Wilhelm Seidl and Helmut Loos, *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Sämtliche Briefe in 12 Bänden Sämtliche Briefe* (Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag & Co. KG, 2009), 11.
[13] Paul Mendelssohn wrote to several newspapers to collect as many original letters as possible in 1860, hoping that by releasing at first the letters from Felix's Grand Tour (1830-1832), the public could acquire for themselves a better portrait of the man. He said in the preface: "Those who were personally acquainted with Mendelssohn, and who wish once more to realize him as he was when in life, - and those also who would be glad to acquire a more definite idea of his individuality than can be found in the general inferences deduced from his musical creations, - will not lay down these letters dissatisfied. Along with this particular source of interest, they offer a more universal one, as they prove how admirably Mendelssohn's superior nature, and perceptions of Art, mutually pervaded and regulated each other." Paul Mendelssohn Bartholdy, ed. Trans. Lady Wallace. *Letters from Italy and Switzerland*. 2nd ed. (London, 1874. 1rst ed. London, 1862), v-vi.
[14] Clive Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014), 9-10.

a staggering amount of 7000 letters that he collected and kept in green-bound volumes (for the most part, these are surprisingly still unpublished).[15] The long-awaited complete letters authored by the composer (released in 2009) testify in writing of a man that was seriously committed to verbal intercourse. To this, with all due prudence related to the accuracy of secondary sources and the need to contextualize the somewhat overzealous praising tone, we must add the many memoirs posthumously published by his friends: of note the actor Eduard Devrient,[16] the diplomat Carl Klingemann,[17] the theologian Julius Schubring,[18] the violinist Ferdinand David,[19] the pianist Ignaz Moscheles,[20] and the conductor Ferdinand Hiller.[21]

The enactment of exchanging information through writing was a tradition strongly rooted within the Mendelssohn household, even somewhat of a 'cult',[22] and must be understood within the sociable culture of *Biedermeier* in Berlin, which "was conducive to means of communication."[23] This fascination also extended to the many relatives of the family dispersed in Europe (Paris, Vienna, Stockholm) and can be observed in the precious guarding of letters from previous generations.[24] When on a trip, the depth of details given by Felix to his family testifies to the expectations from which they originate: from an early age, all four children

[15] These 'Green books', in twenty-seven volumes, and many other artifacts of the composer (such as a piece of hair) are held at the Bodleian Archives of Oxford University and are entitled The M. Deneke-Mendelssohn Collection.
[16] Eduard Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me* (London: Richard Bentley, 1869).
[17] Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Karl Klingemann, *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys Briefwechsel Mit Karl Klingemann* (Essen: Baedeker, 1909).
[18] Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and Julius Schubring, *Briefwechsel Zwischen Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Und Julius Schubring: [z]ugleich Ein Beitrag Zur Geschichte Und Theorie Des Oratoriums* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1892).
[19] Julius Eckardt, *Ferdinand David Und Die Familie Mendelssohn-Bartholdy* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1888).
[20] Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Ignaz Moscheles, Charlotte Moscheles, and Felix Moscheles, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles; Translated from the Originals in His Possession, and Edited by Felix Moscheles* (Boston: Ticknor, 1888).
[21] Ferdinand Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, Trans. M. E. von Glehn. (London, 1874). Trans. of *Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy: Briefe und Erinnerungen*, (Cologne, 1874).
[22] Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Rudolf Elvers, and Craig Tomlinson, *Felix Mendelssohn, a Life in Letters* (1St U.S.ed. New York: From International Pub. Corp, 1986), xi.
[23] *Sämtliche Briefe*, 13.
[24] Tomlinson and Elvers, *Felix Mendelssohn, a Life in Letters*, xi.

(Fanny, Felix, Rebecka and Paul) were "constantly pressed to record their experiences in writing."[25] For instance, in the opening phrase of this letter from April 21st, 1829, we can easily sense how he was still duly 'reporting for duty' at twenty years old: "Dearest Father and dearest Beckchen, having just arrived safely in London, I want to send you word of my arrival before doing anything else."[26] To be sure, not writing was not an option. This partly explains why a very large number of letters, some more than others depending on the addressee, begin with apologies for not responding sooner: "It is a long time since I have written to you, and I fear you may have been anxious on my account. You must not be angry with me, for it was really no fault of mine, and I have been not a little annoyed about it."[27] Although corresponding for Mendelssohn may have started as an imperative within the realms of domestic customs, it quickly changed to become a way of life, a sure outlet that allowed his yearnings for communicating his observations and feelings to be satisfied: "I have just received your welcome letter, written on Ascension Day. I cannot help myself, but *must still write* to you from this place."[28]

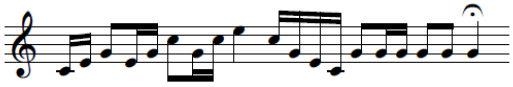
The intensity of Mendelssohn's epistolary relationship with his friends mirrored that of his family. Many of his lifelong friends he encountered at the family headquarters in Berlin; the famous residence – referred as 3 Leipzigerstraße – that was a hub, almost a *passage obligé* for some of Prussia's finest political, intellectual, and musical minds of the time. This is also where, starting in 1822, the Mendelssohn family held regular Sunday musicales (*Sonntagsmusik*), in which Felix played and met some of the companions with whom he kept close contact until the

[25] Ibid., xiv.
[26] Ibid., 58.
[27] Letter from Munich, June 6, 1830. See *Sämtliche Briefe,* letter no. 305. Located in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters from Italy and Switzerland*, 10.
[28] Letter from Weimar, May 25, 1830. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters from Italy and Switzerland,* 7. Emphasis mine. See *Sämtliche Briefe,* letter no. 302.

end of his life.[29] His close friend, the composer, pianist, and conductor Ferdinand Hiller, provides an insightful tribute to Mendelssohn's epistolary habits:

> "His correspondence really took up most of his time, and the number of letters he must have written is incredible. But it was a pleasure to him to be in such general requisition, and he never complained of it. Everything he did he strove to do in the most perfect manner possible, down to the smallest details, and it was the same with his correspondence. It was delightful to see the care and evident satisfaction with which he would fold and seal his letters. Anyhow, he could always feel sure of their giving pleasure."[30]

However, it should be clarified that corresponding with his friends could not replace the effectiveness and superiority of real-life conversation; it was a 'temporary substitute', a necessary intermediary to strengthen the relational bond until they could be reunited again, and preferably so on a *Sopha* (couch),[31] or in front of 'a cheerful blazing fire'.[32] The perceptible joy in the opening lines of his letter to Ignaz Moscheles on September 26th,1832, will serve as a strong case to illustrate this point. When Felix learned of his friends' upcoming visit, he exclaimed:

> Tromba in d. 
> Dear Moscheles!
> That's a flourish of trumpets joyfully announcing that you have at last consented to come. It is too delightful to think that we are going to see you and have you here; and what spirits the bare thought puts me in, I need not say. A few lines are enough for to-day; all that is good, the very best, is to come in a fortnight. *Tromba da capo*.[33]

Discussing at length the extensive content of Mendelssohn's correspondence goes beyond the current mandate of this essay. However, a few remarks must be made regarding the peculiarities of Mendelssohn's verbal communicative style. Of note, there are two 'fascinating

[29] Peter Jameson Mercer-Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14.
[30] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, 169. Also mentioned in Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 39.
[31] Seidl, *Sämtliche Briefe*, 7.
[32] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, 32.
[33] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, 42-43. See *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 305.

and arresting' traits that Mendelssohn exudes in his verbal manners, both orally and in writing, that are somewhat unknown from today's public at large: his mercuriality and sense of humour.[34] Mendelssohn's swift capacity to intertwine different subjects or to change mood without warning is nothing short of astonishing and displays signs of a 'buzzing mind'. Ferdinant Hiller provides again a revealing example:

> One peculiarity of his, which I have already alluded to, was his way of suddenly jumping to something very comic or very serious in the midst of a quiet conversation. One afternoon when we were lounging about in the promenades, he turned upon me all at once with the question: Do you believe in the progress of humanity? How? In what way do mean? I said, with some surprise. Well, he answered, I don't speak of machines, and railways, and all those things, but I ask if you think that mankind becomes better and more remarkable as time goes on? I do not now remember what conclusion we came to.[35]

The singularity of his volatile temperament, often leading to a clever style drenched in humour, is all the more present in his correspondence.[36] Eric Werner positions this comical trait amidst his family lineage: "a magnificent sense of humor and of self-detachment, inherited from his father and grandfather Mendelssohn, fairly radiates from most of his letters…"[37] This is particularly true when Mendelssohn writes to his close entourage: free from certain expectations of public countenance, the uninhibited Mendelssohn surfaces, witty, and imaginable even with a smirky smile. For instance, in the span of a single letter to his sister Rebecka from Paris[38] (written

[34] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 3. Eduard Devrient also mentions in his memoirs (while condoning it) that Mendelssohn's mercurial personality also arose from his propensity to briskly take offense at a comment: "A casual remark, a stupid jest, that he often accepted from me with perfect good temper, would sometimes suddenly cause him to drop his lids, look at me askance, and ask doubtfully: What do you mean by that?" See Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me*, 69.
[35] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, 174-175.
[36] The sheer amount of humour in his letters is greatly underrated. It is surprising that it has attracted practically no scholarly attention. When in good spirits, Mendelssohn is particularly amusing; even bordering Berlioz' well-known subtle and witty humour style.
[37] Werner, "The Family Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," 19.
[38] Mendelssohn held very different relationships with each of his sisters. Because of their strong musical affinities and her age difference, Fanny remained somewhat the 'older wiser sister' on musical matters, a close confidant and a counselor to Felix until her death. Rebecka was very close to Felix also; they studied Greek together with Droysen, travelled to Hamburg together, stayed confined together when they caught the measles, etc. The difference in the

intermittently on three days - December 20th, 23rd, 24th of 1831), the mercurial Felix goes through – or rather jumps through – no less than twenty-four different subjects frequently oscillating from a humorous to a serious tone. He opens the letter by slightly mocking French politics, but quickly moves on to the lack of heating in his apartment, competing piano merchants for *la médaille d'or*, switches to the solemn subject of humility and his dilemma of getting a lithography or not, the ugliness of Maurice Schlesinger's daughter's braids, concerts in which he improvised and easily combined three different musical subjects, different touching recollections with their father in Paris, and to conclude, scoffing at the Saint-Simonians.[39]

1.1.2. Epistolary versus musical style

Curiously, the two above-mentioned personality traits (mercurial and humoristic) are hardly typical qualities that one would readily ascribe to Mendelssohn's music; with the plausible exception of works in which we find his famous scherzo style.[40] If we accept the definition of mercurial as an unpredictable instability of moods, we could then surmise an evident dichotomy of communicative styles from the verbal to the musical. By and large, Mendelssohn's music instead displays an affirmation of character and moods that are exposed successively, heightening the sense of form. Mendelssohn's reverence for normative conventions in relation to a musical genre (such as using sonata form in his chamber music and symphonies) would prevent him from exposing too many and too disparate musical elements: "Mendelssohn's compositional procedures are characterised by a precise feeling for musical genres, for their distinctions and traditions, and for the stylistic peaks pertinent to them."[41] To be sure,

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letters' tone makes it very apparent; Felix is much lighter and more casual with Rebecka, and somewhat more formal and serious with Fanny.

[39] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no. 482.

[40] Benedict Taylor recognizes a certain 'mercurial deftness' in the scherzo of Mendelssohn's Octet Op.20. See Benedict Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time, and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 53.

[41] Carl Dahlhaus, "Two Essays from *Das Problem Mendelssohn* (1974)," in *Mendelssohn*, ed. Benedict Taylor, 5.

Mendelssohn can present musically different characters and moods; not too quickly, however, and not competing at the cellular level (such as a sentence in a letter). Instead, they are given enough time to be understood and felt deeply, as in a complete movement, in order to enhance their intelligibility. The 'Italian' symphony Op.90 is an obvious case in point: it displays four very different movements stylistically (the opening lively, jolly, even sunny first movement in sonata form, the processional and austere second movement, the graceful minuet and trio and the fiery closing saltarello), each embodying a precise 'mood' or 'feeling' from his travels in the country. This dichotomy of verbal and musical language demonstrates a difference in approach that is pertinent to each mode of communication: the verbal, particularly in private settings, gives way to a large variety of subjects, moods and ideas quickly intertwined, whereas with the musical, moods are defined, elaborated, and secured within the contingencies of the form.

As identified by John Michael Cooper and Douglass Seaton, there is another salient feature of Mendelssohn's verbal communicative approach that has in this case a strong musical analog: the different personas he used according to the addressee.[42] The 'varying epistolary personas' Mendelssohn adopts are bound and knitted to the nature of the relationship's fabric; they are contingent on the varying degree of closeness, and the current social role he held in the interaction with the recipient. For instance, Felix 'the son', who writes with reverence to his father Abraham, adopts a very different persona than Felix 'the brother', 'the friend', or 'the composer' when exchanging letters with admirers or publishers. In a similar way, Seaton suggests that Mendelssohn's compositional personas are determined by the social private-public axis in which he interacted and for which he wrote. This entails, for instance, that the compositional personas used in his art songs, which are along the more private sphere of salon

[42] Douglass Seaton, "The Problem of the Lyric Persona in Mendelssohn's Songs," in *Mendelssohn*, ed. Benedict Taylor, 81-82.

and domestic music, are different from the personas used in his choral or symphonic works, crafted along the expectations of the larger public spheres. Mendelssohn was particularly adroit in contextualizing his compositional personas, or writing style, within specific genre-related aesthetics, a subject I will develop more in chapter 3.4. (on Decorum).

1.2. – Communicating *sine verbis* (without words)

1.2.1. Communicating with demeanor

In a like manner, Mendelssohn was keenly aware of non-verbal communication's potency for expression, but also to convey meaning and validation to an emotion. Many of his friends' memoirs testify to the ease with which they could perceive if he approved of something or not in his demeanor, whether he was pleased or irritated about a given situation. His 'wordless' gestural behavior 'spoke' loudly, so much in fact, that Mendelssohn could not conceal his inner thoughts: "his head was much thrown back, especially when playing; it was always easy to see whether he was pleased or otherwise when any new music was going on, by his nods and shakes of the head."[43] George Grove's 1880 article on Mendelssohn (included also in Sebastian Hensel's memoirs),[44] written from the recollections of the composer's close collaborators, corroborates this conduct: "His laugh was hearty and frequent; and when especially amused he would quite double up with laughter, and shake his hand from the wrist to emphasize his merriment. He would nod his head violently when thoroughly agreeing, so that the hair came down over his face

[43] Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me*, 66.
[44] Sebastian Hensel, *The Mendelssohn Family, (1729-1847) from Letters and Journals*, trans. by Karl Klingemann (New York: Harper & Bros, 1881), 340.

– in fact his body was almost as expressive as his face."[45] Perhaps the most vivid examples come from Mendelssohn's gestures of disapproval. Hiller provides another interesting account:

> "I had just completed my first three Trios, and the very warm and friendly interest which he took in them was often a great help to me. When he liked a thing he liked it with his whole heart, but if it did not please him, he would sometimes use the most singular language. One day when I had been playing him some composition of mine, long since destroyed, he threw himself down on the floor and rolled about all over the room. Happily there was a carpet![46]

Many accounts also speak of the intensity and entrancing effect of Mendelssohn's gaze, and how his eyes "literally sparkled with pleasure."[47] Grove described them "as expressive a pair of eyes as were ever set in a human being's head. They could also sparkle with rage like a tiger's."[48] Devrient too relates of his "large, expressive dark eyes, with drooping lids, and a peculiar, veiled glance through the lashes; this, however, sometimes flashed distrust or anger, sometimes happy dreaming and expectancy."[49]

1.2.2. Communicating as conductor

Such eloquent physical characteristics naturally came in handy for Mendelssohn's work as a conductor. From different accounts relating his work on the podium, we can assert his awareness of the non-verbal communication possibilities and limitations. One should be reminded that the art of conducting, in its essence, is a musical act that wholly relies on specific bodily gestures to convey information. There is simply no choice: unless in a rehearsal situation, words are useless, gestures alone can speak. And so the effectiveness of the movements, their precision, cohesion, and eloquence, is all the more crucial. They can enable 'a physical speech', a 'real-time narrative' in which the efficiency relies in turn on the musicians' capacity to 'decode' the implied

[45] George Grove, "Mendelssohn-Barthold, Jakob Ludwig Felix," *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians: (A.d. 1450-1880),* ed. George Grove, Vol. II: 294.
[46] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, 31-32. Also mentioned in Brown. *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 19.
[47] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, 187.
[48] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 6.
[49] Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me*, 65-66.

message and adjust their playing accordingly. Jose Antonio Bowen revealed salient information about Mendelssohn's career as conductor, his innovations (such as the standardization of the baton), and key testimonies on his style, bodily and facial gestures. Of note, the account and description from the singer Wilhelm Adolf Lampadius, who sang numerous times under Mendelssohn, speaks volumes:

> "But Mendelssohn conducted not only with his *bâton*, but with his whole body. At the outset, when he took his place at the music stand, solemn earnestness. You could see at a glance that the temple of music was a holy place to him. As soon as he had given the first beat, his face lighted up, every feature was aflame, and the play of countenance was the best commentary on the piece. Often the spectator could anticipate from his face what was to come. The fortes and crescendos he accompanied with an energetic play of features and the most forcible action; while the decrescendos and pianos he used to modulate with a motion of both hands, till they slowly sank to almost perfect silence. He glanced at the most distant performers, when they should strike in, and often designated the instant when they should pause, by a characteristic movement of the hand, which will not be forgotten by those who ever saw it." [50]

Despite the obvious subjective and overpraising overtones, this report reveals a few important details: Mendelssohn sometimes beat time, other times he did not; he was also engaged gesturally in other signals such as dynamics. He immersed his whole body into conducting, every 'feature aflame', and aimed to communicate more than mere tempo indications. The intensity of his commitment to the task could help explain why, at the end of his life in 1846, he conceded to his friend Moscheles that: "all this conducting and performing often fatigues me greatly."[51] Lampadius' description also denotes the use of the face and left hand for entrances and cut offs, which are 'routine work' for the modern-day conductor, yet were an important innovation for the time according to Bowen: "This is the earliest evidence of a conductor using his left hand for

[50] Wilhelm Adolf Lampadius, *Life of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy*, Ed. and trans. W.L. Gage (New York, 1865) 172-173. Mentioned in Jose Antonio Bowen, "The Conductor and the Score: A History of the Relationship Between Interpreter and Text in the Generation of Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and Wagner," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1994, vol I., 168.
[51] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, 267.

cues or dynamics, or in fact for doing anything (with either hand or body) other than beat time."[52] Lastly, the fact that Mendelssohn sometimes stopped beating time altogether points to the possibility of gestures interfering with music's own discourse. It indicates a hierarchy of means to allow a higher clarity of communication. Devrient mentions several conversations with Mendelssohn on that subject, in which they both agreed that "surely the aim of every conductor should be to influence without obtruding himself."[53] Through skillful gestures, conducting held for Mendelssohn the capacity to convey clear musical signals, and consequently help physically render the internal spirit of a work, should it require it.

1.2.3. Communicating with visual arts

It would certainly not be an exaggeration to assert that Mendelssohn maintained a lifelong fascination with visual arts: "anyone familiar with Mendelssohn's letters, which are frequently illustrated with sketches and drawings, readily knows just how significant the visual (as opposed to dramatic) arts were for him."[54] From a young age, he and his siblings received instruction in drawing from the Berlin Professor Johann Gottlob Samuel Rösel,[55] focusing "almost entirely on landscape and, to a lesser extant, architecture."[56] During the family's travels to Germany and Switzerland (1822), he regularly jotted down his different experiences and the sceneries encountered in his sketchbook.[57] Mendelssohn continued this habit during his following European Grand Tour (1829-1832), particularly in his family's correspondence, "which is filled with both drawings and vivid descriptions of nature, architecture, and people."[58]

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[52] Bowen, "The Conductor and Score", 169.
[53] Devrient, *My recollections*, 60.
[54] R. Larry Todd, "On the Visual in Mendelssohn's Music", in *Mendelssohn Essays*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Routledge, 2008), 84.
[55] Ibid., 81.
[56] Peter Jameson Mercer-Taylor, *The Life of Mendelssohn* (Musical Lives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43.
[57] Brown, *A portrait of Mendelssohn*, 47.
[58] Botstein, "The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation: Reconstructing the Career of Felix Mendelssohn", 26.

When words could hardly describe a given situation or scene, Mendelssohn would add a sketch to render the object described clearer. His favorite setting was that of drawing the view, almost 'a picture', from his window at the inn (of note, his Switzerland diary of August 1831).[59] Just months prior in Italy (1830), he met with famous visual artists Peter Cornelius and the Nazarene painters, and in Rome, he traveled to Naples with Eduard Bendemann and Theodor Hildebrandt and visited many art galleries.[60] Beginning with his tenure in Düsseldorf (1833), Mendelssohn suggested the use of *tableaux vivants* for a festival celebrating a visit by the crown prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia.[61] The combined art form – familiar to Mendelssohn from his upbringing in Berlin – used music, poetry, and painting, creating an artistic *fête* which he described extensively to Rebecka and said: "The effect of the whole was wonderfully fine."[62] Also in Düsseldorf, he writes to Devrient the following year that he's taking painting lessons with Johann Wilhelm Schirmer to improve his sense of depth using purple in learning how to paint sunlight.[63] Throughout his life, Mendelssohn aimed to improve his skills using pencil, pen-and-ink and watercolour techniques, devoting his creative energies to capture the essence of nature, particularly of alpine sceneries and trees.

But why was Mendelssohn so invested in the visual arts? Evidence shows that painting was more than a mere pastime or subsidiary interest. Beyond developing a craftsmanship that was seen in cultured European society as "evidence of one's general *Ausbildung*,"[64] visual arts for Mendelssohn held further possibilities: they had the faculty – both for observers and creators – to convey intrinsic meaning without the help of words, and to give access to the world of

[59] Examples can be found in *Sämtliche Briefe,* no. 450, 451, 454, 458.
[60] Todd, "On the Visual in Mendelssohn's Music", 82, 84.
[61] John Michael Cooper, "'And the Effect of the Whole was Indescribably Beautiful:' Music and *tableaux vivants* in Early Nineteenth-century Germany," in *Literary and Musical Notes*, ed. Geoffrey C. Orth, (Berne: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 1995), 17.
[62] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 8-14.
[63] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 47-48.
[64] Todd, "On the Visual in Mendelssohn's Music", 82.

inwardness, one's innermost feelings. At the end of his life, Mendelssohn summed up very succinctly part of his 'painting credo' in a letter (February 22nd, 1847) to his nephew Sebastian Hensel, who considered following in his father's footsteps in becoming a professional painter:

> "If, however, you intend to adopt painting as a profession, you cannot too soon accustom yourself to study the *meaning* of a work of art with more earnestness and zeal than its mere *form*, - that is, in other words (as a painter is so fortunate as to be able to select visible nature herself for his substance), to contemplate and to study nature most lovingly, most closely, most innately and inwardly, all your life long."[65]

For 'Mendelssohn the observer', painting offered (especially in reference to the reverential essence of nature) the possibility to grasp ideals, emotions and meanings that went beyond the matter at sight. In other words, the careful act of thoroughly observing nature held the promise of arousing inwardly meaningful and noble emotions that could be sympathetically felt and that constituted the primary stimulus of the painter. For 'Mendelssohn the creator', painting also provided the chance to communicate the substance of these specific moods and emotions while acting as an outlet for them. For instance, during his imbroglio with the Prussian government in 1843 to "agree on satisfactory conditions for his position as Generalmusikdirecktor,"[66] Mendelssohn turned his frustrations to the canvas and said to his brother Paul: "I have not been able to work during these days. To make up for this, I have done the 'Jungfrau' for you in Indian ink; the mountain I think is excellent, but I have again utterly destroyed the pines in the foreground."[67]

Interestingly, on many occasions, painting often commenced where music writing came to a halt, or vice versa. Felix wrote to Paul in February 1840: "Latterly I have become quite tired

[65] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 380.
[66] Brown, *A portrait of Mendelssohn*, 48.
[67] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 306.

of music, and think I must take to painting once more,"[68] and again in 1843: "And now I am writing music once more instead of painting fir-trees."[69] At times, it is almost as if the intensity and pervasiveness of certain emotions in Mendelssohn could only find a voice in his drawings. Two emotionally contrasting examples will briefly serve as illustrations. In the summer of 1836, Felix goes to Frankfurt am Main to replace his sick colleague Nohann Nepomuk Schelbe and to conduct the Cäcilienverein. During these six weeks, he meets Cécile Jeanrenaud (Souchay),[70] also a talented drawing artist, and quickly develops feelings for her: it was "their common enthusiasm for the pictorial arts that seems to have provided Felix for the perfect pretext for his courtship."[71] Letters from Felix to his family during the summer of 1836 documents this quickly evolving relationship; so much so, that by the end of July, he declares in a letter to his sister Rebecka not only to be *entsetzlich verliebt* (dreadfully in love), but more importantly he divulges the effects of his emotional state: "Such is my mood now the whole day; I can neither compose nor write letters, nor play the piano; the utmost I can do is to sketch a little."[72] The second compelling example is poles apart emotionally. On May 14th, 1847, while rehearsing the opening chorus from Felix' *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* for her *Sonntagsmusik*, Fanny suffered an unexpected stroke, fell unconscious and died a few hours later the same day.[73] The terrible news, reaching Felix in Frankfurt, shattered him completely: "he had lost his Minerva, his Thomaskantor with the dark eyebrows."[74] A few days later, on June 3rd, 1847, Felix opens up about his sorrow to his close friend Klingemann and writes, "the blow was so heavy and

[68] Ibid., 180.
[69] Ibid., 308.
[70] Felix became engaged to Cécile on September 9th, 1836, and married the following year on March 28th, 1837.
[71] Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Cécile Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and Peter Ward Jones, *The Mendelssohns on Honeymoon: The 1837 Diary of Felix and Cécile Mendelssohn Bartholdy Together with Letters to Their Families* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xv.
[72] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 108. For the complete letter, see *Sämtliche Briefe,* no. 1392.
[73] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no. 5767.
[74] R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 557.

unexpected that ever since, I have walked to and fro as only half awake in a dream," and describes his dire emotional state: "Until now, I cannot at all think about work or music without feeling the greatest emptiness and desolation in my mind and in my heart."[75] Unable to work, Felix leaves with his family for the resort of Baden-Baden in the Black Forest,[76] where once more, he seeks solace in painting.[77] Mendelssohn continued his grieving the following two months in Switzerland and produced "a series of thirteen water-colours as well as the usual pencil sketches."[78]

Drawing and painting may have started simply as an educational discipline within the Mendelssohn household; yet it quickly became for Felix a sure companion to help illustrate what words could not in his travels, a medium to access nature's innermost essence and beauty, and the only channel to convey certain emotions that could not otherwise be expressed through words or music.

Chapter 2. – *Das wahre Mendelssohn-Problem*

2.1. "Least of all perhaps, aesthetics"

What about music? At this junction, turning to 'Mendelssohn the composer', while circling back to the initial objective of this research seems appropriate and necessary: how are we to understand what Mendelssohn aims to communicate through his music? Or, said differently, but more broadly, what were the universal communicative capacities of music according to Mendelssohn? Did he express himself on the matter or have a credo to abide by? In order for us

[75] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no. 5767.
[76] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 558.
[77] In fact, Mendelssohn writes to his nephew that he wished they could grieve and paint together. See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no. 5770.
[78] Brown, *A portrait of Mendelssohn,* 53.

to understand Mendelssohn's views on the communicative powers of music, we must first address the particulars of his aesthetics.

Mendelssohn's viewpoints on artistic matters must be gleaned from various personal letters, written over the span of his life, for "he refused to go public with anything else than music."[79] Felix's reluctance to discuss his set of beliefs publicly can first be situated amid the influence of his 'musically conservative' father, Abraham Mendelssohn, who played an active role in the development of his children's musical education. In fact, most decisions, such as the choice of Felix's composition teacher Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832), piano teacher Ludwig Berger (1777-1839), singing in the Sing-Akademie, hosting the 'Sunday musicales', travelling to Paris in 1825 – then the center of contemporary music – to be evaluated by the austere Cherubini, can all be attributed to Abraham.[80] The omnipresence of Abrahams's shadow on "Felix's upbringing in general, and the role in the formation of his ethical outlook in particular, can scarcely be overrated."[81] For instance, Abraham 'made it a law' for Felix to beware of the 'time-wasting' public statements in journals and newspapers since he believed they could not help him personally or artistically, and also because he wished that his son would come to be known as 'a practicing musician'.[82] When the assessor and admirer Eduard Otto teased Felix about a possible infringement of this particular 'law', Mendelssohn replied vehemently:

> "A parenthetical remark here: it is only your jest when you mention in your letter that I have made an exception to my father's rule never to write publicly, or could I do so? Believe me, God willing, it shall not occur in my entire life that I knowingly deviate from my father's principles, and especially not from this one, which I would have imposed upon myself if he had not done so first. However, I do not comprehend the entire passage of your letter, including the allusion to Greek letters, and therefore assume it to be a jest. Consequently, I withdraw my earnest objection – all the better."[83]

[79] Seidl, *Sämtliche Briefe,* 7.
[80] Thomas Christian Schmidt[-Beste], *Die äesthetischen Grundlagen der Instrumentalmusik Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys* (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1996), 23-36.
[81] Brown, *A portrait of Mendelssohn*, 61.
[82] Schmidt[-Beste], *Die äesthetischen Grundlagen der Instrumentalmusik Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys,* 201-202.
[83] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.3133.

Accordingly, the obedient Felix also developed a life-long animosity towards music critics, particularly those who were non-composers. He qualified them as a "sad and dry race" for they were lazy and "living off upon the fortune of others."[84] When invited by Jacob Nöggerath to write for his journal (*Gemeinnützige und unterhaltende Rheinische Provinzial-Blätter*), he kindly answered:

> Your Excellency, I have received your kind invitation to contribute to the provincial journals you are publishing, and I ask you to accept my sincerest thanks for the trust you have placed in me. However, I would not be able to justify the same, as I have never written in public journals until now, and because I wish only to appear publicly in music; therefore, I believe I may not deviate from this intention now either, and hope that you will excuse me for the aforementioned reason.[85]

Underlying this refusal is Mendelssohn's dislike of empty or pretentious conversation about art. Any discussion "bordering on aesthetics" made him feel "dumb and dejected [betrübt und stumm]."[86] To Moscheles, he writes: "As for Immerman [theater director], with whom I used to be on friendly terms, he is completely immersed in theatrical business, Uechtritz [assessor] in aesthetics, and Grabbe [poet] in the bottle, - three things I don't much care for, least of all perhaps aesthetics."[87] For Mendelssohn, to put it simply, the 'proof was in the pudding'; the truth resided in the artistic practice, not the talking about it. Observations had to be made from experience and grounded in concrete evidence. Somewhat in a joking tone, he admonished his sister Rebecka in a letter on January 2nd, 1835: "A philosopher, however, I am just as little as you, and if you call me one and imply you "do not understand us," I shall bring a lawsuit against

[84] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.1061.
[85] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.851.
[86] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.681. I located the quote in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 1-2.
[87] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 1089. Also located in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, 127-128.

you to Justice of the Peace Jungblut. What the devil, and me a philosopher? Or even an aesthetician – I am getting more and more indignant over these churls."[88]

2.2. The *Locus Classicus*

The doubtfulness Mendelssohn maintained towards philosophical discussions' ability to produce anything tangible did not mean that he, himself, did not have strong convictions on art and music. In fact, his letters are filled with allusions – often hidden in 'reworkings and correction instructions' to friends or publishers – criticisms, but also encouragements to young composers in which we decipher, not a worldview or credo, but 'individual considerations' pointing to a larger 'musical view'.[89] Despite being dispersed among the correspondence, Friedhelm Krummacher brilliantly noticed that "it is precisely the spontaneity of these personal remarks, which were not intended for the public, that makes them credible."[90] This also explains why the illustrious letter Mendelssohn wrote to his distant relative Marc André Souchay Jr. on October 15th, 1842, undoubtedly emerges as 'outstanding' from the rest of his correspondence.[91] Rightly referred to as the composer's *Locus Classicus*, the oft-cited letter presents, in a rare depth, the tenets of what keenly sound like an aesthetic credo. The immediate context of the letter concerns Mendelssohn's *Lieder Ohne Worte* (Op.19b, 30, 38, 53), which are textless piano miniatures containing pronounced lyrical content strongly reminiscent of *Lieder **Mit** Worte*, an 'accessible'

[88] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.1060. I located the quote in Werner, "The Family Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy", 11. Justice of the Peace Jungblut: it is unclear whom FMB refers to. It might be Mr. Jungbluth, second violinist of the Düsseldorfer Musikverein in 1834 (See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 1060, note 34).
[89] The most extensive attempt to reconstruct Mendelssohn's 'musical view' from the correspondence was made by Thomas Schmidt[-Beste], *Die äesthetischen Grundlagen der Instrumentalmusik Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys* (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1996). My thanks to Dr. John Michael Cooper for pointing to me this crucial resource.
[90] Friedhelm Krummacher, *Mendelssohn, Der Komponist: Studien Zur Kammermusik Für Streicher* (München: W. Fink, 1978), 61.
[91] Marc André Souchay Jr. was from Lübeck (1824-1880) and was Cécile Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's cousin.

musical genre closely associated with the intimacy of domestic music. Despite being textless,[92] their obvious similarities to art songs and growing popularity with middle-class dilletantes, paired with the fact that four of the twenty-four Lieder published in 1842 also contained descriptive titles (two *Gondellieder, Duetto* and *Volkslied*), make it hardly surprising admirers saw in them the possibility of missing words that had to be 'recaptured' from the essence of the music.[93] As is well established by Michael Cooper, the chronology of Mendelssohn's responses to these different lyric suggestions as 'extramusical interpretations' began somewhat permissively; since he allowed – if not encouraged – them as individual initiatives to be kept for private settings.[94] However, following the unapproved publication of six Lieder with texts presented as the composer's own by the editor Karl Christern in 1841, and the growing number of questionable poetic interpretations bordering on over-sentimentality by aspirant poets, Mendelssohn's unease seemingly grew in equal measure. Finally, upon receiving from his former student Marc André Souchay tentative titles to several of his Lieder in a letter on October 12th, 1842, Mendelssohn replied three days later:

> "There is so much spoken about music, and yet so little is said. I believe that words are entirely insufficient for that, and if I should find that they were sufficient, then I would write no more music. People usually complain that music is so ambiguous; that what they should think of when they hear it is so unclear, whereas everyone understands words. But for me it is just the opposite, and not just with entire discourses, but also with individual words—these, too, seem to me so ambiguous, so unclear, so misleading in comparison to good music, which fills one's soul with a thousand things better than words. —What the music I love expresses to me is thoughts not too unclear for words, but rather too clear. I therefore find in all attempts to put these thoughts into words something correct, but also always something insufficient [and] not universal; and this is also how I feel about your [suggestions]. But this is not your fault, but rather the fault of the words, which simply cannot do any better. If you ask me what I was thinking of in them, then I will say: just the song as it stands there. And if I had even one certain word or certain words in mind for one or another of these songs, I could not divulge them to anyone, because the same word never means

[92] R. Larry Todd reported at least one case of a *Lied Ohne Worte* to which text was subsequently added: *Herbstlied* in F-sharp minor Op.63 (words by Karl Klingemann). See R. Larry Todd, "'Gerade das Lied wie es dasteht': On Text and Meaning in Mendelssohn's Lieder ohne Worte", in *Musical Humanism and Its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca*, eds. Nancy Kovaleff Baker and Barbara Russano Harming (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1992), 355–79.
[93] Ibid., 356.
[94] See John Michael Cooper, "Words without Songs? Of Texts, Titles, and Mendelssohn's Lieder ohne Worte," In *Musik als Text? Bericht über den internationalen Kongreß der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, Freiburg im Breisgau 1993*, Hermann Danuser and Tobias Plebuch, eds., Vol. 2 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), 341–46.

> the same things to different people, for only the song can mean the same thing, say the same thing, arouse the same feelings in one person as in another—a feeling which is not, however, expressed by the same words.—Resignation, melancholy, praise of God, a par force hunt: one person does not think of these in the same way as someone else. Resignation is for one person what melancholy is for another; a third person can't get a clear sense of either. Indeed, if one were by nature an enthusiastic hunter, for him the par force hunt and the praise of God could be pretty much the same thing, and for him the sound of horns would truly be the proper way to praise God. We [on the other hand] would hear nothing but the par force hunt, and however much we were to debate with him about it we would get absolutely nowhere. The words remain ambiguous, but we all understand the music. Will you accept this as my answer to your question? It is in any case the only one I know how to give—although these, too, are just ambiguous words."[95]

2.3. Referentialist or autonomist?

Understandably, the number of explanations this letter generated – which Carl Dahlhaus prophetically ascribed in 1988 as 'insufficiently interpreted'[96] – is now probably proportional to the sum of Mendelssohn scholars. This fact alone might suffice to explain Mendelssohn's reluctance to publish such a statement. Yet, it remains a critical testimony regarding the inherent aesthetic underpinnings at play within the composer's mind. Of note, within this letter lies the fundamental question of musical reference: whether music's essence does or does not rely on external factors or upon associations (such as texts, a narrative, events, ideas, emotions, etc.) to exist and be meaningful. Said differently, and with terms Mendelssohn would have probably abhorred: should music be autonomous or referential? The question, which inspired heated philosophical debates and the publications of dozen of books on musical aesthetics during the 1830s and 1840s, was particularly relevant to composers from the nineteenth century's first half who grappled with new referential genres that were programmatic in nature.[97] Both Friedhelm Krummacher and R. Larry Todd see in Mendelssohn's letter, in which he truly denies the referential possibility of underlying words, a desire to move towards the autonomous aesthetic of *l'art pour l'art*. For Todd, this *Locus Classicus* generally reads as "a vindication of music as an

[95] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.3450. I took John Michael Cooper's translations, located in John Michael Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns: Mendelssohn's Song Aesthetic, with an Unpublished Cycle (1830)," *Journal of Musicological Research* 21 (4) (2002): 291. A copy of the original (held in private hands) can be seen here.
[96] Carl Dahlhaus, *Klassische Und Romantische Musikästhetik* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1988), 141.
[97] For an overview of this question, particularly in the works of Schumann, see Leon Plantinga, *Schumann As Critic*, (Da Capo Press Music Reprint Series, New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 111-134.

absolute, independent art, one that responds not to the meanings and pattern of words, but to the syntax of an autonomous language of sound – one, therefore, that ultimately does not depend upon texts of programmatic ideas for its validity."[98] Krummacher goes a little further, by labelling the letter "a catechism for the aesthetic autonomy of instrumental music", and by situating the debate within the ongoing paradigm change at the turn of the nineteenth century, in which composers moved away from the "long-undisputed supremacy of vocal music" and towards a "new supremacy of instrumental music."[99] Conversely, and upon considering the whole of Mendelssohn's corpus, Frederick Niecks judiciously states that the composer's concert overtures rather point to the 'referential' side of the pole; their clear programmatic inclinations ergo representing for autonomists "an extremely inconvenient fact."[100] Somewhat more nuanced, Judith Silber Ballan argues that the majority of Mendelssohn's programmatic works (such as the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage* Overture and the 'Reformation' symphony) were only 'a stage' of his musical development since these works were conceived under the spell of the proselytizing A.B. Marx[101] – an avowed believer in the referential possibilities of programmatic music – between 1826 and 1830, while their friendship was at its zenith.[102]

And so, where does Mendelssohn stand exactly? Should we surmise from the *Locus Classicus* and from his corpus that he was an autonomist that simply dared youthful adventures

[98] Todd, "'Gerade das Lied wie es dasteht': On Text and Meaning in Mendelssohn's Lieder ohne Worte," 355.
[99] Jon W. Finson and R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn and Schumann: Essays on Their Music and Its Context* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984), 72-73.
[100] Frederick Niecks, *Programme Music in the Last Four Centuries: A Contribution to the History of Musical Expression* (New York: Haskell House, 1969), 164.
[101] The critic, theorist and author Adolf Bernhard Marx (1795-1866) was the founder of the *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1824. He published in 1828 *Ueber Malerei in der Tonkunst*, a short polemical monograph written in defense of music's inherent and natural tendency towards exterior associations, realisable through techniques such as tone painting.
[102] Judith Silber Ballan, "Marxian programmatic music: a stage in Mendelssohn's musical development" in *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 141-161.

in programmatic music? One of the difficulties in elucidating this thorny question is the fact that Mendelssohn's first aim was not to attest to an aesthetic's validity; it was instead to provide, through music, a meaning that was universal given the words' inability to do so: "The words remain ambiguous, but *we all* understand the music".[103] And because significance is always contingent upon associations, whether from outside or from within its subject, consequently all music conveying meaning – texted or not – could be qualified as 'referential'. Said differently, taking away the words might help to circumvent unwanted semantic interferences, but the remaining textless music still needs to 'refer' to established historical conventions in order to provide meaning and be understood. Therefore, it seems that tackling the debate on the autonomous-referential pendulum might simply be a moot point and not helpful.

On one side, it is certainly true that Mendelssohn conceived most of his *Lieder Ohne Worte* as 'just the song as it stands there'; that is, as autotelic, complete in themselves, and to be understood as purely instrumental piano pieces free from the help of word associations to enhance their meaning. However, it is also true that Mendelssohn soon realized in his career that providing musical intelligibility through solely instrumental means was no easy task either. For instance, the fact that Breitkopf und Härtel prodded Mendelssohn to provide 'a programme' to help clarify the ideas behind the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture for its publication (which he reluctantly did) [104] or the inability of the 'Reformation' Symphony to render a clear narrative unassisted by texted explanations in order not to lead to 'various conjectures' (which it did

[103] Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns," 291.
[104] Mendelssohn conceded: "To set forth the ideas for the composition in the programme is not possible for me, for this succession of ideas *is* my overture. But the piece is closely tied to the play, and so perhaps it might be rather appropriate to indicate the principal events of the drama for the public, so that the Shakespeare can be recalled, and some idea of the play received." I located the quote in R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn, the Hebrides and Other Overtures: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, the Hebrides (fingal's Cave) of Cambridge Music Handbooks* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 72.

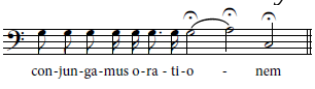
nonetheless),[105] both of these experiences certainly compelled Mendelssohn to reconsider music's capabilities in portraying specific historical scenes, events, or characters. Given that Mendelssohn qualified music as "infinitely more precise" than words, while recognising its portrayal and objective limitations, seemingly a better question at this point could be to ask: what can music really be precise at? And even more importantly, given the purely instrumental context of the discussion thus far, how do we frame textless music's avowed precision amidst Mendelssohn's colossal texted vocal repertoire? To each their own properties: before delving into Mendelssohn's possible musical representation of ideas (to which the case study in Part II is devoted), I must further clarify Mendelssohn's relationship with words.

2.4. *Da kann ich Dir nicht beschreiben* (I can't describe you)

As a starting point, I would like to argue that for Mendelssohn, the semantic possibilities inherent to words would ultimately result in abating the underlying strength and precision of a given thought or feeling. In other words, emotions find poor delegates in words, and consequently find themselves diminished: 'resignation is for one person what melancholy is for another'. Frequently, within the surge of a strong emotion in his letters, there rises a refrain along these lines: "I can't describe you". A few excerpts will help contextualize this claim. When, in March 1837, the newlywed Félix tries describing to his mother-in-law the depth of his joy during the honeymoon's first days, he writes: "Oh, dear Mama, *I cannot put into words* these two blissful days; I'll attempt to do so verbally when we meet again, as it cannot be conveyed in

[105] Mendelssohn wrote to his friend Julius Rietz on February 11, 1838, that he clearly considered his unpublished 'Reformation' symphony a failure, that he "would rather see it burnt". See *Sämtliche Briefe,* no.1894 and also John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi, eds., *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 131.

writing."[106] Three months into his marriage, he confirms to his mother the state of his marital bliss: "I simply *cannot describe* how each new day with Cécile fills me with happiness, how her charming character becomes increasingly benevolent and invigorating to me; there is indeed something inexhaustible about such genuine inner goodness."[107] Or in 1831, when writing to Goethe in Weimar of his prior trip in Italy during The Grand Tour, he says: "The impact, which this heavenly country had on me from the very first moment, is *indescribable*."[108] Also, during his 1842 stay in London, during which he was famously given two interviews with Queen Victoria and Albert,[109] he writes to his mother: "Eight days as splendid as those just spent here, with such dear friends under a warm, blue sky, are a rare gift. *Words cannot fully describe* the extent of the warmth and kindness with which the people here have welcomed us."[110] The refrain also appears within the context of negative emotions. We can discern from Mendelssohn's unfavored and critical reaction to sacred liturgical music in Rome, when writing to his teacher Zelter in June 1831, an indescribable feeling of displeasure:

> "*I cannot describe to you* how outlandish this transition from A to C is; 
>
> especially when, after the bass, a soprano enters, starting on a D and now making precisely the same descent from E to G. Then an alto in her pitch, and so forth. They sang three different sections, always alternating with the Canto fermo. They deliver the Canto fermo entirely without regard to word and meaning, exemplified by the phrase, "He would have been better off not ever being born," sung with great fortissimo and monotony.[111]

[106] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 1617. Emphasis mine.
[107] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 1659. Emphasis mine.
[108] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 407. Emphasis mine.
[109] Mercer-Taylor, *The Life of Mendelssohn*, 172.
[110] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 3540. Emphasis mine.
[111] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 432. Emphasis mine.

In contrast, music for Mendelssohn had the wondrous ability not to dampen or diminish the strength of an emotion.[112] Music, 'which fills one's soul with a thousand things', could articulate what words – regardless of how much he tried – could simply not provide. The expectations he had towards successfully conveying the potency of his *Gemüt* (disposition of mind, soul and heart), rendering a *Stimmung* (mood), a *Gefühl* or *Empfindung* (sentiment, feeling), translating his *Eindruck* (impression), could not be contented with words' ambiguous offer. To this list, which permeates his correspondence, we could also add his extensive use of the word *gedanken* (thoughts), which Dahlhaus reminds us that: "*Il ne faut pas nécessairement se laisser troubler par le fait que Mendelssohn parle d'abord d'« idées », puis de « sentiments », car il entend manifestement par « idée » une représentation dont l'objet est avant tout un sentiment*."[113] Leon Botstein explains music's superiority in relation to words because of the universal "intuitive emotional 'aptitude' in human feelings and senses… that music unleashes and satisfies."[114] Interestingly, Mendelssohn's reluctance to convey a thought (emotion) through words also finds an echo in a familiar Bible verse he must have known intimately, given his use of the Epistle to the Romans in *Paulus*' libretto outline:[115] "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for

[112] It should be noted that the word 'emotion', from the French 'émotion' is a rather modern construct. It encapsulates what used to be referred to until the nineteenth century (by theologians especially) as 'appetites' or 'passions' on the one side, and 'affections', or 'sentiments' on the other. Thomas Brown, theorist, philosopher, and professor at the University of Edinburgh, subsumed them all under emotions in 1820. This explains the absence of the term in Mendelssohn's letter, and his use instead of *Gemüt*, *Gefühl*, *Stimmung*, etc. For a condensed history of the term, see Thomas Dixon, "'Emotion': The History of a Keyword in Crisis," *Emotion Review: Journal of the International Society for Research on Emotion* 4, no. 4 (2012): 338–44.

[113] Carl Dahlhaus, *L'Esthétique musicale classique et romantique: De Kant à Wagner*, Trans. Clémence Couturier-Heinrich (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2019), 159-164, point no.7.

[114] Leon Botstein, "Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation: The Origins of Felix Mendelssohn's Aesthetic Outlook," in *The Mendelssohn Companion*, ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 18.

[115] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 645. Mendelssohn suggested to Schubring on December 22nd, 1832, that he use Romans 8:35, 9:2-3, 10:1-4, 15:31 for the libretto. Ultimately, the final libretto used Rom. 7:25 (no.21), 11:33 (No.22) and 10:15,18 (No.26).

us with groanings *too deep for words*."[116] Mendelssohn's 'inner world', both affective and spiritual, could remain true (to the Spirit or to him) when unassociated with words. The only way to satisfactorily communicate his *seelenzustände* (*état d'âme,* 'inner self') entailed a serious and unremitting dedication to composition, in which 'the heart alone, and genuine feeling' could be heard. This is what Mendelssohn confirms to a young composer and violinist, Carl Eckert, that he met in Leipzig:

> "So, for your sake, I have only one wish, that you may bring to light what exists within you, in your nature and feelings, which none save yourself can know or possess. In your works, go deeper into your inmost being, and let them bear a distinct stamp; let criticism and intellect rule as much as you please in all outward questions and forms, but in all inner and original thought, the heart alone, and genuine feeling. So, work daily, hourly, and unremittingly, - there you never can attain entire mastery or perfection; no man ever yet did, and therefore it is the highest vocation of life."[117]

In the wake of this, I would like to suggest a second contentious claim: Mendelssohn did not despise or doubt words (commonly referred by some scholars as *Sprachskepsis*),[118] rather, he simply found them wanting and inefficient in certain roles. In fact, he cultivated a continuing complicity with words and languages, beneath which lay a quest for '*le mot juste*', presuming it could be found. Mendelssohn's high expectations towards his own literacy and literature in general (as can be observed in the numerous libretto refusals for an opera that he received) derives in part from the linguistic proficiency he developed at an early age, but also from his peculiar family surroundings. Felix's mother, Lea, "spoke and read French, English, Italian, and – secretly – Homer, in the original language."[119] His father, Abraham, the Francophile banker, fond of the French opera, began his career in "cosmopolitan Paris, as a bookkeeper."[120] Felix, the polyglot who could converse in English, French, German and Italian, began studying Greek at

[116] Romans 8:26, English Standard Version. Emphasis mine.
[117] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn,* 259. Also see *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 3417.
[118] See Schmidt[-Beste], *Die äesthetischen Grundlagen der Instrumentalmusik Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdys*, 196-200, and also Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns," 282-296.
[119] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 17.
[120] Ibid.

the age of nine, had six hours of Latin per week at the age of twelve,[121] and by sixteen, translated Terence's first comedy *Andria* and Horace's famous *Ars poetica* from the original Latin into German.[122] Mendelssohn's devotion for languages and literature can also be recognized in the contents of his late 1844 library, filled with Greek and Roman classics in their original language -- a stark contrast with his titles of musical interest amounting to a meagre ten percent of the collection.[123] His "fine feeling for the written word"[124] cannot be disregarded; the library also contained foreign-language dictionaries and grammars, thus pointing to the fact that "Mendelssohn was intent on reading his literature in the original language when possible."[125] In a similar manner, his frequent and detailed exchanges with the English chemist, librettist and translator William Bartholomew (while working on providing an English version of *Elijah*) portray someone overly concerned with '*le mot juste*': Mendelssohn proceeding through the offered translations "bar by bar, note by note, syllable by syllable, with an attention to detail which might be termed microscopic."[126] Accordingly, we can also appreciate in his correspondence – and to an extent in the letters of his parents and siblings – plentiful spontaneous appearances of '*le mot juste*' cleverly harnessed within the flow. These foreign words (particularly French, English, and sometimes Latin or Greek) seem to have been used to help clarify a thought, at other times to offer a riddle, and also so as not to distort the original meaning of a quote or subject. This following quote, in which Felix describes with considerable

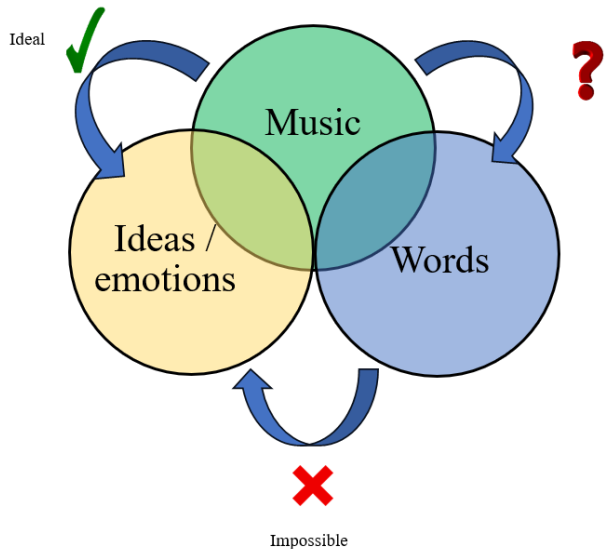
[121] John Michael Cooper, "'For You See I Am the Eternal Objector': On Performing Mendelssohn's Music in Translation," in *Mendelssohn in Performance*, ed. Siegwart Reichwald, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 207.
[122] Todd, *Mendelssohn Essays*, 4.
[123] Peter Ward Jones, "The Library of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," in *Festschrift Rudolf Elvers Zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds., Rudolf Elvers, Ernst Herttrich, and Hans Schneider (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 1985), 291.
[124] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 38.
[125] Jones, "The Library of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy", 291.
[126] F. G. Edwards, *The History of Mendelssohn's Oratorio "Elijah"* (New York: Novello, Ewer and Company, 1896), 50. I located the quote in Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 515.

details and humour – as requested by his mother – the particulars of the Parisian handkerchief fashion, readily exemplifies the concept:

> "The richest and most distinguished handkerchiefs have, instead of a hem, a *feston ondulé* around the entire handkerchief, a *broderie avec des échappements, les chiffres en fleurs,* finally *une valencienne d'un pouce cousu tout au tour du feston*. However, these cost from 60 to 120 francs. I do not recommend the latter; authorities even differ greatly on the *feston ondulé*. The width of the hem, however, always remains the same (*il faut ourler avec les loups*), and if I have also said that one wears clothes without any trimming, when I passed on Mde Valentin and Leo's best greetings and repeatedly asked for all kinds of similar requests so that I can show myself as a true Parisian son and brother, I believe I have expressed my view clearly and distinctly (*au centre: très-bien, très-bien. Minimises aux extrémités*)."[127]

Following these considerations, illustrating the current state of these concepts in a diagram would prove helpful. As can be observed, the next relevant step should be to examine Mendelssohn's aesthetics on the relationship among words, music, and ideas or emotions in the context of texted repertoire.

Diagram 2.1. – Mendelssohn's General Aesthetic Diagram.



[127] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 487. French emphasis mine.

2.5. Positioning the credo *cum verbis* (with words)

Mendelssohn's vocal music, which amounts to nearly 50% of his whole output, is rich and diversified: it is both sacred and secular, for the church and the stage, accompanied and a cappella, and for ensembles and soloists. Composing for voices remained at the core of Mendelssohn's art during his life; an unsurprising fact, given his early involvement with the Sing-Akademie, an ensemble in which he sang as an alto at only eleven years old, and from which he gained access to a profusion of sacred choral music of the past.[128] Additionally, beginning at the age of ten and until his death, he produced a new Lied nearly every month for twenty-eight consecutive years.[129] Mendelssohn's lyricism and inclination towards vocal music can also be felt in his instrumental music, namely in the aforementioned *Lieder Ohne Worte,* but also in his use of the (textless) Chorale idiom in the 'Reformation' symphony, the Organ Sonatas Op.65 or in his famous Prelude and Fugue in E minor Op.35 for piano. His sacred choral music alone comprises eighty-six works, and his art songs, a staggering 153 works. Surprisingly, only his Lieder – and to some extent also his incidental repertoire, but seldom his choral music – generated scholarly attention in respect to their aesthetics, as exemplified by the work of Douglass Seaton, Susan Youens, Michael Cooper and Jennifer Ronyak.[130]

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[128] Todd, *A Life in Music*, 55.
[129] Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns," 278-279.
[130] These four scholars have presented the most salient studies in English regarding Mendelssohn's song aesthetics. See Douglass Seaton, ed. "With Words: Mendelssohn's Vocal Songs", in *The Mendelssohn Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001) 661-698. Also, Douglass Seaton, "The Problem of the Lyric Persona in Mendelssohn's Songs", in *Mendelssohn,* ed. Benedict Taylor (Early Romantic Composers. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2015), 69-88. Susan Youens, "Mendelssohn's Songs", in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Jameson Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge Companions to Music. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 189-205. John Michael Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns: Mendelssohn's Song Aesthetic, with an Unpublished Cycle (1830)," Journal of Musicological Research 21 (4) (2002): 277–317, and also John Michael Cooper, "Words without Songs? Of Texts, Titles, and Mendelssohn's Lieder ohne Worte," in *Musik als Text? Bericht über den internationalen Kongreß der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, Freiburg im Breisgau 1993*, eds., Hermann Danuser and Tobias Plebuch, Vol. 2 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999), 341–46. Finally, see Jennifer Ronyak, "Reassessing Mendelssohn's Song Aesthetic through the Lens of Religion: The Case of 'Entsagung', in *Rethinking Mendelssohn,* ed. Benedict Taylor (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 379-399.

Mendelssohn's attitude towards musical text setting mirrors, in some sense, his search for '*le mot juste'*; he aimed to choose poetry that already contained in itself a 'precise emotion'. He maintained that various poetic texts (even in the Bible) were unconducive to music, that is, texts that were deprived or exuding too vivid or complex sentiments. Mendelssohn's letter to his cousin Henriette Pereira is often used to justify this claim. In it, he clearly distances himself from the possibility of composing for a 'descriptive poem', comparing the undertaking to a 'joke', "somewhat like the paintings in juvenile spelling-books, where the roofs are coloured bright red, to make the children aware they are intended for roofs."[131] The ideal texts were the ones in which precise and sincere feelings emerged directly so as to "cry out for music". This is what he confided to his close friend Carl Klingemann, who authored the poetry of eight Mendelssohn lieder:

> "With your words [Klingemann's], I have the singular feeling that I don't need to create any music: it is as if I read it [the music] between the lines [of the poem], as though it already stood before me. And if with other poems, especially Goethe, the words turn away from music and want to stand alone, so your poems *cry out for music*."[132]

Mendelssohn soon developed the conviction that the immediacy of the text's underlying feeling also had to be universal. In 1824, at only fifteen, he wrote to Friedrich Voigts, librettist of his Singspiel *Die Hochzeit des Camacho* Op.10: "I will take pains to emulate your words; if my music cannot express *all that anyone would feel* at the first reading of your text, then it will not be for lack of good intentions, and I will strive to do the best that I can."[133] The consistency of Mendelssohn's modus operandi in setting words to music is remarkable; eighteen years later, in 1842, while writing incidental music for the Greek tragedy *Antigone* in Berlin, he tells his friend

[131] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 437. Translation located in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters from Italy,* 201-202.
[132] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 388. Translation located in Youens, "Mendelssohn's Songs", 192. Emphasis mine.
[133] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 37. Translation located in Tomlinson and Elvers, *Felix Mendelssohn, a Life in Letters,* 19-20. Emphasis mine.

Johann Droysen of the same process: "The moods and verse rhythms are everywhere so genuinely musical that you don't have to think of the individual words and only have to compose those moods and rhythms; then the chorus is done."[134] In fact, translating these 'moods' into musical tones was a way of life for the composer, even a leisure activity. Hiller recalls from his memoirs:

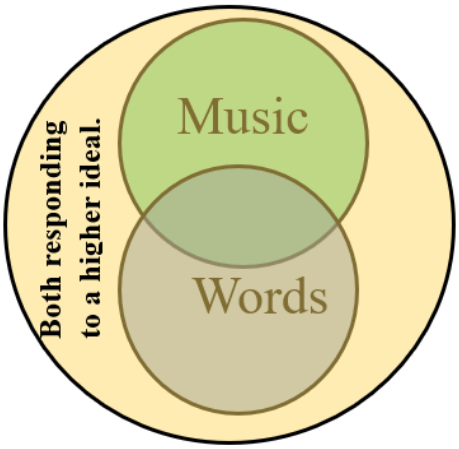
> "When our life had become a little quieter so that we often spent the evenings at home, Mendelssohn proposed that we should improvise on given poems. We read and played in turns, each declaiming for the other, and found it a most amusing and exciting pastime. Heaven only knows how many poems of Schiller, Goethe, and Uhland had to serve us for musical illustrations."[135]

Seaton, Youens and Cooper situate Mendelssohn's approach to connecting words and music amidst the Second Berlin School, a more 'restrained' song school that co-existed with the well-known Schubertian *Lieder-Ästhetik* until 1850. The prominent characteristics of the Berlin School aesthetics include positioning the singer as the interpreter of the song (as opposed to the composer), the absence of a unique character or persona, a general mistrust of communicative ability of words (*Sprachskepsis*), and a preference for the strophic form. These stylistic features, particularly the latter, induced two major differences from the Schubertian Lieder: first, the creation of songs deprived of strong pictorial or tone-painting elements since composers preferred "to identify and convey in tones the central idea behind a text" instead of specific words. And secondly, the absence of an identifiable lyric persona (that is, a role to be performed, displaying their psychological state musically) gave room to allow both performers and listeners

[134] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 3338. Located in Monika Hennemann, "Felix Mendelssohn's Dramatic Compositions: from Liederspiel to *Lorelei*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 226.
[135] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections*, 174. Hiller also describes (pp. 151-52) a similar activity in which both he and Mendelssohn wrote different music to the same poetry by Eichendorf for a Liedertafel in Leipzig, as a game to see if it could be guessed by the singers who wrote what.

to identify with the central idea offered, or 'the poet's voice'.[136] Seemingly, for Cooper and Youens, Mendelssohn would have thought achievable the collaboration of text and music in his art songs under certain conditions: first, they both had to respond to the same underlying idea(s) of the poetry, and secondly, the song had to represent these ideas musically on a higher sphere, only to include text-specific details here and there,[137] and "in such a fashion that the music would mediate between his and other auditor's understanding of the words."[138] Considering this new aesthetic proposition, we could update our diagram thusly:

Diagram 2.2. – Mendelssohn's Art-Song Aesthetic Diagram.

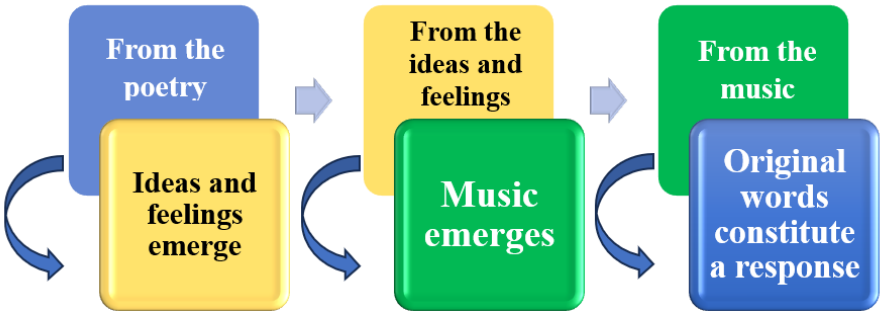


Seaton pushes this position even further, though not uncomplicatedly, arguing that in Mendelssohn's art song's aesthetic, the usual roles attributed to words and music get reversed. Because the ideas (that is, the feeling behind the words) expressed in the text suggest music that will become intrinsically closer to these ideas, the roles reverse after creating the music; words then act as an answer or response to the music: "As with all his vocal music, the basis for the composition had to be his sense of finding music that embodied the mood from which the words arises", and by doing so, these same words of the poem subsequently act as a compelling

[136] Cooper, "Of Red Roofs and Hunting Horns," 283.
[137] Youens, "Mendelssohn's Songs," 194-195.
[138] Cooper, "'For You See I Am the Eternal Objector,'"210.

response.[139] Seaton justifies this claim with the fact that words, despite their inability to describe a feeling, do constitute a natural response to them. This way, the precision and superiority of music is maintained, and the words from the poetry are justified in the process. Seaton's understanding of Mendelssohn's word-music relationship could be illustrated as:

Diagram 2.3. – Seaton's understanding of Mendelssohn's Art Song Aesthetic Diagram.



Lastly, Jennifer Ronyak has recently offered a different and promising reading of Mendelssohn's song aesthetics 'conundrum'.[140] She argues that one should move away from the 'mismatch' of comparing his musico-poetic relationship to the 'Schubert-derived hermeneutic field analysis' since they operate on different frameworks (Berlin School), a fact particularly exemplified by Mendelssohn's distinct views on words and his hesitancy to make use of a central persona. Instead, she invites us to focus on the possible compatibility Mendelssohn would have granted to both mediums to unite despite their inherent specificities: "Depending on the nature of a given poetic text, words and music could turn away from each other or towards one another. The composer's best musical response could thus range from refusing to set certain words to music at

[139] Seaton, *The Mendelssohn Companion*, 198-199 and 662-663.
[140] Ronyak, "Reassessing Mendelssohn's Song Aesthetic," 379-399.

all to merging music and words into an interpenetrating fusion."[141] Also, she identifies a central problem to the discussion: that it is not contextualized and genre-related enough. More specifically, one should not generalize to every single genre the views expressed in the *Locus Classicus*, for it was written expressly in response to wordless instrumental pieces onto which text was forced. Simply put: "Vocal lieder *with* words are a different genre from those without despite the occasional links between the two genres in Mendelssohn's output or more broadly."[142] Ronyak sees in the above-mentioned letter to Klingemann (footnote 122), in which Mendelssohn declares that his friends' poems 'cry out for music', a possible scenario in which "words and music can form a near-perfect union."[143] She argues that not only the coupling of both mediums is possible – if the specificities of a text can in turn meet music's 'species of precision' – but also that a successful merger can lead to "exceed their original communicative effect."[144]

Regarding all this, I would like to offer a few more thoughts to conclude this chapter. First, Ronyak's enlightening concept of words and music's 'specificities' could also be understood as the 'faculties' delineating the inherent capacities and limitations of each medium, a notion that I believe Mendelssohn knew too well. He knew that words could be so evocative and powerful that they could not give way to any music. He also knew words to be so ambiguous that they could not convey a precise feeling. Conversely, he knew that despite music's inability to describe objects, facts, or events, it could precisely define universal ideas and feelings. Secondly, I believe that Mendelssohn's reluctance to be 'too close' to the words is partly contextual and contingent on the function of the text. For instance, his musical response to narrative or dramatic

[141] Ibid., 381.
[142] Ibid., 383.
[143] Ibid., 384.
[144] Ibid., 381, 389.

texts designed for the stage is very different from evocative poetry written for domestic settings. In other words, he varied the proximity of his 'textual zoom' according to dramatical needs; he knew that in order to provide some traction to a story, a few 'red roofs' were an unavoidable necessity. I believe that this sensibility to the compositional genre-related context and convictions with regards to the musico-poetic communicative capacities should be looked at from an unexplored angle; that of a gifted orator.

Chapter 3. The Gifted Orator

> *"Expression in music can be compared to that of an orator. The orator and the musician have the same goal, both in the composition of their productions and in their expression. They want to seize hearts, to excite or calm the movements of the soul, and transport the listener from one passion to another. It is in their interests to have some idea of each other's abilities."*[145]

As established in previous chapters, Mendelssohn aimed through different means, whether verbally, non-verbally or musically, to communicate the strength of his 'inner self'. Alongside his mastery of different languages, his hope for '*le mot juste'*, his sensitivity to the context of a musical genre, the portraying of a precise emotion, his respect for words and music's inherent faculties, we can also discern principles of a larger operating framework that so far have gone unnoticed: that of a gifted orator intently crafting his discourse. The apparent affiliations with classical rhetoric in Mendelssohn's works are too many to simply be dismissed. In the following chapter, I will provide key evidence demonstrating how these larger rhetorical principles emerged and operate among his aesthetics.

[145] Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu Spielen Berlin* (Berlin: Voss, 1752), ch.11, §1. Quoted in Bruce Haynes and Geoffrey Burgess, *The Pathetick Musician: Moving an Audience in the Age of Eloquence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

3.1. Traces of Classical rhetoric

Claiming that Mendelssohn was a professed rhetorician would be an overstatement. Nowhere in his writings can we locate irrefutable substantiation that he directly studied or aimed to master classical or musical rhetoric. His affiliations with rhetoric are of another nature: their subtlety compels us to build the evidence in an 'oblique' way, almost through a process of osmosis. To begin with, it is not insignificant that Mendelssohn 'rubbed shoulders' with the writings of some of the most prominent Greek and Latin classical authors who defended and perfected the art of rhetoric, namely, Cicero, Horace, and Tacitus (and to a lesser degree, Plato, Homer, and Sophocles). Mendelssohn's 1844 library indicates the paramount importance of this literature to him: "the Greek and Roman classics, in the original and in German translations, together with collected editions of German standard authors form its basis."[146] This fascination stemmed in part from his rigorous education with two Hellenistic philologist tutors, first with the 'quiet and thorough' Dr. Carl Heyse,[147] who instructed all four Mendelssohn children in French, Greek, Latin and arithmetic for seven years (1819-1827),[148] followed by the young Johann Gustav Droysen for two years (1827-1829), with whom Felix developed a sustained friendship.[149] Mendelssohn's *engouement* for the classics is such that even on his 1825 trip to Paris with his father, he writes to Heyse continuing his Latin studies from there and reading Tacitus with the historian Léon Halevy, closing the letter with a Latin quote and pun on his name: *quod felix faustumque sit!*[150] The letter does not specify which of Tacitus' work he read, but we know he later owned the complete edition in his library (item 112). Tacitus (56-120 AD) was known for

[146] Jones, "The Library of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy", 291.
[147] Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me*, 8.
[148] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 34, 47.
[149] Celia Applegate, "Mendelssohn and Droysen" in *Rethinking Mendelssohn*, ed. Benedict Taylor, 159-160.
[150] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 58. A variant of the original from Cicero: *Quod bonum, felix faustumque sit* - May it be good, fortunate, and prosperous! See Carl Meissner, and Charles Pascal, *Phraséologie Latine* (Nouvelle Collection À L'usage Des Classes, 8. Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1885), 206.

his ‘oratorical prowess’, from his work with Quintillian. A gifted orator, he wrote five works, the third called *Dialogus de oratoribus* (a dialogue on oratory) lamenting the decline of rhetoric and oratory capacities in the republic, based on Cicero’s rhetorical dialogue style.[151]

Perhaps a stronger connection to the classic rhetoricians can be established with the Roman statesman and writer Cicero (106-43 BC), the famous orator with a “gift for eloquent spoken and written expression that has rarely been approached since,”[152] and author of central works on rhetorical precepts including *De Inventione, De Oratore, Brutus* and *Orator*. Of note, Cicero petitioned for a reunification of *sapientia* and *eloquentia*, of wisdom and eloquence, hoping to create a philosophical orator able to apply rhetorical concepts *in situ,* that is, “to meet the demands for proof (logical, ethical, emotional) required by virtually any audience and circumstance”[153] (Cicero’s sensibility to the importance of *decorum* will be echoed in Mendelssohn’s art, and will be treated below). Mendelssohn alludes to the great orator a total of sixteen times in his letters[154] and refers to five of his works (*Oratio in Catilinam* I & II, *Orationes Philippicae, Paradox Stoicorum, Tusculanae disputationes*).[155] Some allusions are directly about his life, others about famous quotes or rhetorical stylistic devices used by the orator, such as *captatio benevolentiae*;[156] which consists of using flattering opening words to gain the immediate favor of an audience. Cicero’s allure for Mendelssohn can be seen in his knowledge of different domestic details related to his life in Italy (where he lived, travelled, and

[151] T. D. Barnes, “The Significance of Tacitus’ Dialogus de Oratoribus,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 90 (1986): 225–44.
[152] George Alexander Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton Paperbacks. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 128.
[153] William J. Dominik and Jon Hall, *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 251, 256, 263.
[154] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 13, 42, 44, 63, 294, 420, 526, 568, 893, 1964, 2921, 3884, 4297, 4666, 4789, 5416.
[155] See *Sämtliche Briefe*, band 12, 383-384.
[156] See *Sämtliche Briefe*, no. 1243.

spoke famous orations),[157] with which, he writes to his sister Rebecka, he loved 'occupying' his thoughts:

> "At the same time, Brutus concealed himself on the island after Caesar's assassination, and Cicero visited him there. Back then, as it is now, the sea lay in between, and the cliffs hung bent into the sea with greenery growing on them, as it does now. These are the antiquities that *appeal to me* and that give *food for thought*. More than a few chunks of masonry."[158]

He also quotes in five different letters Cicero's renowned interjection *o tempora! o mores!* ('o times! o morals!) from the *Oratio in Catilinam I*, both in contexts of discouragement at the state of something, or as in this case, in amazement and stupefaction at something: "Imagine there is a little boy here playing Kalkbrenner's rondos, and he is only nine years old. *O tempora, o mores!* – You do know your Cicero!"[159] Even more telling is Mendelssohn's letter on July 6th, 1824, in which he concedes having "read 80 verses in [Homer's] Iliad and 3 chapters in Cicero, and have memorized one page."[160] It is not specified which Cicero text he memorized[161] or if his tutor Heyse required him to do so; however, this information displays an evident dedication to know the works of the orator.[162]

3.2. Horace's *Ars Poetica*

Lastly, an even more felicitous kinship can be established with the Roman poet Horace (35-8 BC). To the day, sixteen years prior to writing his *Locus Classicus* and while putting the last touches to his famous Octet Op.20, Mendelssohn sent to Heyse, for his birthday on October

[157] Particularly *Sämtliche Briefe* No.13, 420, 526, 4297.
[158] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 420, emphasis mine.
[159] See *Sämtliche Briefe* No. 63, 294, 1964, 2921, 4789.
[160] See *Sämtliche Briefe* 42.
[161] Given that most of his quotes come from Cicero's *Oratio in Catilinam I* in his life, I believe it is fair to assume that he referred to memorizing excerpts of that oration.
[162] It should be noted that Cicero does not appear in Mendelssohn's 1844 library, nor in the 1839 'lent list'. However, as Peter Ward Jones recognizes, "no attempt, however, has been made to compile a list of books known solely from references in correspondence." See Jones, "The Library of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy", 290.

15th, 1825, a meaningful present: a complete German metrical translation of Terence's first comedy *Andria* (published anonymously and also sent to Goethe for approval).[163] The following year, proceeding from Greek to Latin with increased confidence, Mendelssohn sent Heyse another mighty gift for his birthday: the German translation of Horace's *Epistle to the Pisos*, known as the *Ars Poetica*.[164] The celebrated 476-line poem crafted in hexameter (that is, each line with six metrical feet) "revered for over fifteen hundred years as the indispensable guide for practicing poets,"[165] is a statement of aesthetic principles written in a rhetorical style with a clear didactic intent. More than an epistle, bordering on being a treatise, it acts as a 'handbook' filled with illustrations and maxims about the seriousness of the poetic art. More importantly, the work was read alongside Cicero in early medieval schools "as a set of rules for rhetorical theory and compositional teaching, […] valued for its advice on such basic issues as how to choose one's material, how to achieve stylistic consistency, and how to maintain narrative continuity."[166] Mendelssohn's translation is not in hexameter, yet it is acatalectic (that is, every line complete in itself using the same number of syllables), and respects the same number of lines (476). Given the care with which Mendelssohn accomplished this task, the time he must have spent on this text, and his tendency to absorb and stay true to rules learned during his youth, one should not be entirely surprised to locate amidst his approach to composition a considerable amount of the precepts put forth in Horace's text (I could count a dozen). For now, the illustration of two principles will suffice. First, Horace encourages poets to constantly rework their craft, to have a self-critical attitude towards their work in order to enhance its clarity:

[163] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 154-155.
[164] The original unpublished autograph, written in Mendelssohn's hand, is available here.
[165] Jennifer L. Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica: Family, Friendship, and the Art of Living* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 1.
[166] Ibid., 23.

> "The good and prudent man will check sluggish verses, he will find fault with the harsh ones, he will smear a black mark on the untidy with a reed turned sideways, he will cut back ambitious ornaments, he will force insufficiently clear verses to produce light, he will convict the one spoken ambiguously, he will note things that have to be changed."[167]

This maxim could not better describe Mendelssohn, with his persistent tendency to constantly revise his compositions so that, beyond meeting his exacting standards in order "to achieve the finest of which he was capable,"[168] he could better articulate his ideas. He explained the process to his friend Moscheles:

> "You have often advised me not to alter so much, and I am quite aware of the disadvantages of so doing; but if, on the one hand, I have been fortunate enough to render my idea in some parts of my work, and have no desire to change those, I cannot help striving, on the other hand, to render my idea in other parts, and, if possible, throughout."[169]

Said differently, not without a touch of humour, he reported to his colleague Johann Christian Lobe: "I prefer to roast a dish too long and have it turn to charcoal once in a while than to bring all my courses to the table raw."[170] His continuous alterations, bordering on 'obsessiveness', can help explain why only 72 opuses were published during his lifetime – from nearly 750 pieces – and also why so many other works were withheld from publication or simply discarded.[171] Interestingly, this Mendelssohn trait seems to conform to another precept of Horace: that of the 'nine-year-rule', which is to let one's work rest and "be pressed until its ninth year within bindings placed upon it" before deciding to publish it or not.[172] Be that as it may, along this relentless refining process ruled another decree by which Mendelssohn abided: that any given

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[167] Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica,* xii-xli, lines 445-449.
[168] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 311.
[169] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, 149.
[170] Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World,* 196.
[171] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn,* 313.
[172] Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica,* xii-xli, lines 386-391. It should be noted that Mendelssohn refers directly to Horace's rule in the *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 863. When the English violinist and publisher Mori from Mori & Lavenu in London refused to publish his concert overture *Die Schöne Melusine* Op. 32 right away, Mendelssohn suspected the need for the work to 'mature' a little more, and quoted from memory part of line 387 from *Ars Poetica*: *nonum premature*.

talent 'from above' is under obligation to first be improved, refined by the "most thorough schooling in technical and aesthetic matters." [173] Again to Lobe, he advised that the only way of life for a composer was that of *nulla dies sine linea*:[174] "I know perfectly well that no musician can make his thoughts or his talents different to what Heaven has made them; but I also know that if heaven has given him good ones, he must also be able to develop them properly."[175] Once more, this conviction Mendelssohn held can be traced to the *Ars Poetica*:

> "Whether a praiseworthy song-poem is made by nature or by art was the matter under investigation. I see neither what use it is to apply oneself without a rich vein [of talent], nor of what use unpolished talent could be; in this way, the one demands the assistance of the other, and [each] conspires in a friendly manner."[176]

The second illustration concerns the word's semantic change occurring over time and the poet's role in possibly fashioning this change. Horace argues that, similarly to life, words inevitably undergo a natural cycle contingent on their usage, leading to shifts in semantic accuracy and meaning:

> "Just as the woods are transformed in their leaves each year, the first leaves fall, so the ancient age of words perishes and ones just born flourish in the manner of young men and are vigorous […] Many things will be reborn which have already fallen, and the words that are now held in honor will fall, if usage wills it, in whose hands are judgement and the code and the norms of speech."[177]

Horace's cyclical and generational semantic change in 'codes and norms of speech' affecting meaning is not dissimilar to the word's lack of universal specificity deplored in Mendelssohn's *Locus Classicus*. And so, early on at only seventeen, Mendelssohn took to heart a warning about words' semantic ambiguousness, a suspicion that only grew for the rest of his life.

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[173] Todd, ed. *Mendelssohn and His World*. 189
[174] 'Not a day without a line'. Also quoted in Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World,* 189. The industrious Zelter also used the common expression. See Bodley. *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 521.
[175] Hiller, *Mendelssohn. Letters and Recollections,* 85.
[176] Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica,* xii-xli, lines 408-411.
[177] Ibid., lines 60-61b, 70-72.

3.3. Decorum

Beyond specific authors, I would like at this point to suggest larger rhetorical concepts which Mendelssohn seems to have gained from his proximity to classical literature. Observable throughout Mendelssohn's art is the principle of *decorum*. Also known as appropriateness and labelled as one of the four virtues by Theophrastus (who is credited for organizing rhetorical theories into four teachable categories: purity, clarity, propriety and ornamentation), *decorum* "discusses the adaptation of the style to the circumstances of the speech, the character of the speaker, the sympathies of the audience, and the kind of speech."[178] Rightly positioned in the third *officium* of the traditional rhetoric system (*elocutio* or style), *decorum* refers to the adjustment or conforming of the orator's style and choice of devices to employ according to the expectations or pre-existing knowledge of a given audience.[179] The need to contextualize one's message according to the addressee is also part of Horace's *Ars Poetica*: "The customs of every age must be noted by you, and appropriate qualities must be given to changeable natures and ages."[180]

Mendelssohn's sensitivity to *decorum* is readily apparent in crafting compositions and selecting musical genres that took into consideration both the audience and the performer. His "primary listeners were the German Bürger of the Vormärz or Biedermeier period," therefore, an "educated urban society" representing "only about 5 percent of the German population."[181] Germany's ambient 'cultural mission' during the first half of the nineteenth century included pursuing moral betterment and self education – in sum, *Bildung* – and Mendelssohn gladly

[178] George A. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 275-276. Both Cicero and Quintilian build their rhetorical approach using Theophrastus' four virtues.
[179] Dominik and Hall, *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, 318.
[180] Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica,* xii-xli, lines 156-157.
[181] Douglass Seaton, "Mendelssohn's Audience", in Siegwart Reichwald, ed., *Mendelssohn in Performance*, 2.

participated in this 'artistic project' by providing *Bildungsmusik*.[182] Accordingly, Mendelssohn wrote domestic music – lieder, part songs, piano four-hands, songs without words – that was accessible and aimed at the family audience, dilettantes, and sometimes even addressed to particular individuals.[183] In the same manner, his larger choral-orchestral works, written for the Lower-Rhein Festival, Birmingham Triennial Music Festival, or the Gewandhaus, display a sensitivity to oratorio conventions, audience expectations, and size and capacity of the performing forces. His early *Te Deum a 8* MWV B15, written for the Sing-Akademie in 1826, also provides a clear example, for it is intimately tied in its conception to the group for which it was written.[184] The sacred twelve-movement assemblage for double chorus is built like a kaleidoscope and portrays various compositional influences, from polychoral Renaissance works to Bach's motets, all of which were regularly rehearsed by the Sing-Akademie in the 1820s.[185] And so, Mendelssohn modulated his compositional *elocutio* according to the recipient in a way similar to the addressee of his correspondence; thus, he spoke a language that was familiar and could be understood.

3.4. The persuasive appeals

One of the central tenets of classical rhetoric proposed by Aristotle in his treatise *On Rhetoric* subsequently appropriated by Cicero and Quintilian and still applicable nowadays, is the necessity for the orator to make use of and master the three available persuasive appeals – namely, *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* – to successfully deliver a compelling speech to their

[182] Ibid., 13.
[183] Ibid., 14.
[184] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 157.
[185] Barbara Mohn, *Te Deum a 8*, foreword. Carus-Verlag 40.137, 1996, v.

audience.[186] These three *pisteis*, or 'means of persuasion', refer to the character of the speaker (whether they are found trustworthy), the awakening of emotions (we judge differently under an emotional spell), and the logical arguments themselves (the proofs, the texts, the words). Each acts as a pillar of this 'rhetorical triangle' to be kept in balance, thus giving rise to a certain tension to maintain them equally when engaged in one's oration. The orator's potential eloquence and persuasiveness is thus proportional to their capacity in sufficiently mastering all three modes, strikingly resembling the role of a funambulist. The inherent tension in this balancing act undoubtedly struck a chord with Mendelssohn's aesthetics, in which the question of "degree and balance" in art was quintessential.[187] In fact, Mendelssohn particularly loathed extremes, in life, religion or in art, as he conceded to Julius Rietz on April 23rd, 1841:

> Just as the French, by conjuring tricks and overwrought sentiment, endeavour to make their style harrowing and exciting, so I believe it possible, through a natural repugnance to this style, to fall into the other extreme, and so greatly to dread all that is *piquant* or sensuous, that at last the musical idea does not remain sufficiently bold or interesting; that instead of a tumour there is a wasting away: it is the contrast between the Jesuit churches, and their thousand glittering objects, and the Calvinists, with their four white walls; true piety may exist in both, but still the right path lies between the two. [188]

Music lacking emotional depth (pathos), structural clarity (logos) or exuding flashy technical display and empty bravura (ethos) – in sum, deficient in at least one of the pillars – was *de facto* considered extreme or shallow in some sense for Mendelssohn, if not altogether artistically *Philistine*. In opposition, 'true art' proceeded with wisdom, recognizing universal and immutable principles that were held in balance, and translated musically in "normative standards applied to contemporary taste."[189] I would suggest that this principle certainly helps to explain Mendelssohn's famous estrangement with his friend A.B. Marx. Despite their divergence on how

[186] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, Translated by George A. Kennedy (2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 37-44, section 1356a-b.
[187] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 319.
[188] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 3126. Located in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 228. Also used in Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 319.
[189] Leon Botstein, "The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation," 35.

'assimilated Jews' should construct their new identities as Protestants,[190] much remains to be revealed between these two important musical figures who travelled and composed together, and shared so much in common. The story – at least according to Marx's wife Therese – indicates that serious conflicting aesthetic principles must certainly have been at play. Answering Marx's request to have his *Magnus Opus*, the oratorio *Mose*, premiered at the Gewandhaus, Mendelssohn played through the first half at the piano with his friend singing, then coolly rose, saying "don't be angry with me, but there is nothing I can do for this work."[191] A brief look at Marx's composition, particularly segments using biblical texts that Mendelssohn had also previously set to music (of note, excerpts from Psalm 22, 42, 55, 91, 114),[192] readily provides evidence of a musical aesthetic that Mendelssohn would have seen as extreme or distorted. One could easily understand his contention with Marx's overtly dramatic musical setting and its pictorial overuse of 'red roofs' to the point of caricature. Marx's desire to exceedingly closely represent the words, such as plastering many interjections and questions with a brassy and fortissimo diminished chord, or picturing the lament of Israel with countless *seufzenmotiv,* paired with constant rapidly changing keys, tempi and truncated melodies, must have pushed Mendelssohn to consider the two-hour oratorio as unsalvageable.[193] The 'exaggerated' portrayal of emotions rendered the *ethos* lacking in truthfulness, and the rapidly changing melodic assortment weakened the form, and therefore the solidity of the *logos*. And so, as this case

[190] See Jeffrey Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation: Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 58-77.
[191] See Therese Marx, *Adolf Bernhard Marx' Verhältniß Zu Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in Bezug Auf Eduard Devrient's Darstellung* (Leipzig: Dürr, 1869), 22-23. I used Sposato's translation, *The Price of Assimilation*, 60.
[192] Edgar Kellenberger, "Felix Mendelssohn als Librettist eines Moses-Oratoriums: Erstedition mit Kommentar," Musik und Kirche 63 (1993), 139.
[193] Given the proximity of the two composers in their youth and numerous affiliations in later life, the potential aesthetic conflicts but also ideas of convergence (Marx abundantly quoted music of the past, particularly Mozart's Requiem) represented in this work should be investigated more. In Marx's defense, even though the work fell into oblivion (although Breitkopf & Härtel have announced a new upcoming edition), it is filled with original and surprising harmonies and settings, clearly operating under a different aesthetic.

reveals, Mendelssohn could not endorse a work in which the three persuasive appeals were lacking or extreme. His dislike of other compositions as much as his own works provides an indication of the difficulty and the essential need of keeping the three elements in balance. A brief investigation of each appeal is given below.

3.4.1. Ethos

Ethos, the moral character of the speaker that procures credibility and enables trust was, according to Aristotle, possibly "the most authoritative form of persuasion."[194] Closely related to *ethos* is the word ethics, relating to the governing moral constituents of one's character, from which an audience can gauge if the orator is trustworthy. The inherent virtues emanating from the moral character, such as humility, truthfulness, and kindness, directly impact how we receive their views. Keenly aware of this truth, Mendelssohn displayed in his life an utmost sensitivity to ethics and allotted much importance to the cultivation of one's moral character. To his student Carl Eckert, he declared: "Without talent nothing can be done, but without character just as little."[195] Furthermore, underneath this statement rested another conviction which he also voiced numerous times, that life and art intermingled and were "not to be separated."[196] The man, husband and father within the intimacy of domestic settings, and the artist, conductor and composer exposed publicly to audiences, were bound to the same moral integrity. No dichotomy existed between the two, and for this reason "his personality and moral convictions inevitably determined the character of his music."[197] His renowned dislike of nineteenth-century French Opera, epitomized by Meyerbeer's *Robert Le Diable* and its 'seducing and dancing nuns', can be

[194] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, p. 39, section 1356a.
[195] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 3351. Translation located in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 257.
[196] See Eduard Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me*, 79-80.
[197] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn,* 313.

in part justified by this heightened *ethos*. Despite his criticisms of the music as "frigid and heartless,"[198] the audience's rude behavior in Paris, and the superficiality of the libretto, "Mendelssohn's most weighty concern was the lack of morality in contemporary French opera."[199] In fact, he was so scandalized by the immorality contained in *Robert Le Diable* that he wrote to his father: "so if the present epoch exacts this style, and considers it indispensable, then I will write oratorios."[200] Mendelssohn's life-long search for the perfect opera libretto echoes his taste for the right *ethos* within a text for him to set it to music. Hennemann described with much *doigté* the ideal libretto for Mendelssohn: "A German historical event or legend of noble, educational, and worthy character with a dramatic plot lending itself to stage performance, but with no superficial stage effects or morally objectionable parts."[201]

Ultimately, Pastor Schubring reminds us in his memoirs that Mendelssohn's strong ethical behavior and character "had a deep feeling of religion for its basis."[202] Mendelssohn may have said that life and art are inseparable, but he also declared to his friend: "I feel about art the same way as I do about religion."[203] Schubring saw in Mendelssohn an 'unconditional Schleiermacherite' pursuing his art with 'a serious religious feeling', representing nothing short of 'a sacred duty.'[204] Benedict Taylor sums it up beautifully: "Rightly or wrongly, everything is grounded for Mendelssohn in God, and this cannot help [but] affect the nature of his ethical and aesthetic decisions."[205] By and large, Mendelssohn's 'ethical credo' on *Kunstreligion* was forged

[198] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 326.
[199] Hennemann, "Felix Mendelssohn's dramatic compositions: from Liederspiel to *Lorelei*", 218.
[200] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters from Italy,* 308. Located in Todd, *A Life in Music*, 252.
[201] Hennemann, "Felix Mendelssohn's dramatic compositions: from Liederspiel to *Lorelei*", 224.
[202] Julius Schubring, "Reminiscences of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy", in Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World,* 227.
[203] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 431. Located in Sabine Koch, "Mendelssohn's Difference in Faith Rethinking *Kunstreligion* in the Context of His Compositional Aesthetics," in *Rethinking Mendelssohn*, ed. Taylor, 313.
[204] Schubring, "Reminiscences of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy", 227.
[205] Benedict Taylor, "Beyond the Ethical and Aesthetic: Reconciling Religious Art with Secular Art-Religion in Mendelssohn's 'Lobgesang'", in *Mendelssohn, the Organ, and the Music of the Past: Constructing Historical Legacies*, ed. Thym Jürgen (Eastman Studies in Music, V. 118. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 302.

during the 1820s, a time during which "he engaged critically with Schleiermacher's aesthetics and philosophy,"[206] but especially a period in which he received his Christian instructions from Pastor Wilmsen, leading to his Lutheran confirmation confession in 1825.[207] Surprisingly, this rare document written at the age of sixteen and containing exceptional insights on Mendelssohn's theological views, generated no scholarly attention outside of Martin Staehelin's essay.[208] This testimony of personal faith was the crowning achievement following the group preparatory lessons, and took the form of written answers to questions (that are now lost) previously prepared by Pastor Wilmsen for each individual candidate. A conventional and 'good-Christian' tone permeates the text, obviously aiming to please and provide correct answers to his spiritual counsellor. Yet, the text also goes beyond simple and prepared theological answers one would expect out of catechism classes. Rather, despite his young age, Mendelssohn displays how deeply rooted his ethical views are, and presents with much self-assurance the virtues by which to conduct his life: self-denial, meekness, humility, piety, undaunted candor, love, unselfishness, truthfulness, obedience, reverence before God, and so on. One gets the sense that his emphasis is almost disproportionately placed on ethical behavior as opposed to displaying his understanding of the Lutheran theological creed. Mendelssohn does not quote Philippians 4:8 directly (he uses Philippians 2:8-9); however, I would argue that this verse embodies his aims in the confession and explains the salience of his *ethos* in his art: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable,

[206] Koch, "Mendelssohn's Difference in Faith Rethinking *Kunstreligion*," 315.
[207] The English translation of the confession is given in Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 93-101. Interestingly, Pastor Friedrich Wilmsen (1770-1831) was also a member of the Sing-Akademie from 1793-1803, where he sang with Abraham Mendelssohn in the bass section. He remained close to the Mendelssohn family, married Fanny and Wilhelm Hensel, and baptized their son (Felix's nephew) Sebastian.
[208] Martin Staehelin, "Der frühreife Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Bemerkung zu seinem 'Konfirmations bekenntnis'" in *Mendelssohn-Studien* 16 (2009): 11–49.

whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."[209]

3.4.2. Pathos.

> *"But no such thing exists as an excess of sensibility; and what is designated as such is, in fact, rather a dearth of it. The soaring, elevated emotions inspired by music, so welcome to listeners, are no excess; for let him who can feel do so to the utmost of his power, and even more if possible."*[210]

Pathos, or its Latin equivalent *affectus*, is the second mode of persuasion and refers to the emotional appeal that orator can induce into the hearers' state of mind intending to 'facilitate' their judgment process.[211] For instance, a crowd verdict will first vacillate according to their trust or mistrust of the orator (*ethos*), but then be impacted according to emotional degree of sympathy or indifference, joy or sadness, admiration or loathing (*pathos*).[212] Aristotle thus paired in contrasts the wide range of positive or negative emotional responses, and recognized a 'change' in the hearer on the rise of these emotions accompanied by the feeling of pain or pleasure.[213] *Pathos* can also refer more specifically to deeply felt passions, desires, and longings, known as the affections. The power of affects and their capacity to 'move' or 'lead' an audience were well-known in the performing arts and literature. In his *Ars Poetica*, Horace famously advises poets that: "It is not enough for poems to be beautiful; they shall also be sweet, and they shall lead the listener's spirit wherever they wish. Just as human faces laugh at laughing people, so they weep at weeping ones: if you want me to weep, you yourself must first feel pain."[214] The expression of

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[209] English Standard Version.
[210] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, from 1833 to 1847*, 2.
[211] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 113-114.
[212] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 74.
[213] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, p.113, section 1378a.
[214] Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica,* xii-xli, lines 99-102.

affections in music, particularly in Baroque Germany, led to, inter alia, the establishment and codification of musical-rhetorical figures closely associated with texts and what came to be known as 'the language of affections' (therefore, a composite of *pathos* and *logos*).[215] As for drama, which shares a multitude of affiliations with classical oratory, the use and mastery of *pathos* was *sine qua non* to actors and to providing a successful play.[216]

Mendelssohn regularly addressed the importance of *pathos* in his correspondence with different formulations. As discussed in chapter 2, he regularly referred to the strength of his own emotions with tentative words such as *Gemüt, Stimmung, Gefühl, Empfindung, Eindruck* (disposition of mind, soul and heart, mood, sentiment, feeling, impression), could not be contented with words' ambiguous offer) formulations all deemed inadequate compared to the precision offered by music. However, the main point here is that Mendelssohn repeatedly spoke of outside stimuli, largely musical but visual too, 'affecting' his inner self, fully recognizing in music the power to 'stir' *pathos*. The following excerpt from a letter to Moscheles aptly describes it: "That's where I admire Handel's glorious style; when he brings up his kettledrums and trumpets towards the end, and thumps and batters about to his heart's content, as if he meant to knock you down – no mortal man *can remain unmoved*."[217] In truth, the universal language of emotion emanating from music – given our capacity to feel *pathos*, to be *affected* – was for Mendelssohn the 'language of the ideal', "a language that each individual can understand in terms of his or her individual experience."[218] For Mendelssohn, music's potency resided in its capacity to induce, both personally and collectively, a strong *pathos*, working as a binding agent for mankind: "What music does is arouse sympathetically the same feelings in different people.

[215] Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 30.
[216] Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, 93.
[217] Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, 119.
[218] Cooper, "'For You See I Am the Eternal Objector,'" 208.

Music becomes, through the capacity for emotion, the best language for communication with fellow human beings."[219] In his own words, to his colleague Lobe, he declared: "The composer, in particular, if he wishes to have an effect on all musical humanity, will have nothing at all to do with partisan ideas about politics or the state, but only with *feelings*, and purely human ones."[220] Botstein and many other scholars position Mendelssohn's 'aesthetic of emotion and feeling' amidst the ideas of the liberal theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, a proponent of the 'theology of feeling' "attributing the very essence of religion to this subjective centre of perception."[221] The capacity for subjective feeling "mirrored the presence of God" and music in turn could "intensify emotion in the service of religious faith."[222] Consequently, *pathos* was also ethical, a wonderful bestowal given from above and answering to the divine. But for music to successfully move, affect, and stir the soul, it also "had to be clear, as evident as the principles of faith,"[223] hence leading us to the next appeal, the *logos*.

3.4.3. Logos.

In classical rhetoric, *logos* refers to the rational or logical argumentation made in an oration. The Greek root of the word came to hold different meanings, but could be summarized as anything that is 'said', such as words, speeches, arguments, and reasons.[224] *Logos* also indicates the meaning behind a word or expression, or abstract concepts such as the "power of thought and organization, the rational principle of the universe or the will of God."[225] Given the "inner instinct to persuade" with words, the term *logos* could even be interchanged with the word rhetoric itself. *Logos* is concerned with content rather than style, with a principal subject or case

[219] Botstein, "The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation," 31.
[220] Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World*, 201.
[221] Ronyak, "Reassessing Mendelssohn's Song Aesthetic," 391.
[222] Botstein, "The Aesthetics of Assimilation and Affirmation," 33.
[223] Ibid., 34.
[224] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 13.
[225] Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, 8.

at hand, aiming to provide arguments and reasons to persuade listeners of the truth.[226] Aristotle categorized *logos* into two types of evidence: deductive arguments (with the use of enthymemes, probabilities, topics, syllogisms and signs), and inductive arguments (which can be historical, but also invented, such as a fable).[227] As can be expected, writings on rhetoric give considerable space to the construction, elaboration and organization of the *logos*, namely the fundamental five canons (sections) of all orations: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio*.

In response to all this, an obvious question must be asked: how and where can we find in Mendelssohn's art a clear and persuasive *logos,* given his dislike of dry aesthetic conversations and professed belief in the limitations of words? Mendelssohn's *logos* is not made of words, but of tones, musical sentences and movements, topics, figures, historical quotations and stylistic referents that all build on the bedrock of normative conventions. Undoubtedly, it is in the study of his 'compositional-*logos*' that we can observe the master at work and get to know his 'oration'; a critical exercise that is the focus of this essay's second half. In the meantime, two points about Mendelssohn's 'artistic *logos*' must be mentioned. First, his *logos* could contain actual words, given that they were set to music, and as previously discussed, that they were words containing ideas and feelings that were ethical, edifying, and complementary to the music's own inclinations. The 'musical-*logos*', particularly crafted in the form and central idea of a piece, had to be simple and clear enough that it could 'speak' the same language as the 'words-*logos'*, as Mendelssohn explained to his young composition student Boguslawski about his opera *Elfino*:

> "I would like to see your ideas *expressed* more simply and naturally, but *thought out* more complicatedly and specifically. And the only way to achieve this is to let the form and the

[226] Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 11.
[227] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 156-192.

idea of the entire piece be suggested more—or rather exclusively— by the words and the situation, and then carry it out as simply and clearly as possible."[228]

Secondly, in a manner analogous to an orator's *logos*, Mendelssohn pursued a 'deliberate musical agenda' "to reform public taste, not by writing or talking about music but by making it."[229] All of his musical professional activities – his repertoire choices as director of the Düsseldorf festival and at the Gewandhaus, his revival of J.S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion, the choice of composers to perform a keyboard soloist – point to an agenda consisting of promoting what he considered 'good music' and the conscious sustaining of historical legacies that he esteemed a 'living tradition'.[230] Behind Mendelssohn's compositions (in his use of the chorale for instance) and performances (such as his organ benefit concert for the erection of a Bach monument in Leipzig) often lurked a didactic intent contributing to his agenda.[231] As Horace advised in the *Ars Poetica*: "He makes off with every reward, who intermingled what is useful with what is sweet, by delighting the reader and *advising* him in equal measure."[232]

3.5. Epideictic rhetoric

Lastly, the essence of Mendelssohn's musical aesthetics could also be partly qualified as *epideictic*. Aristotle distinguished three types or species of rhetoric: the deliberative (political), judicial (martial or forensic) and epideictic (ceremonial or demonstrative).[233] The distinction between these three genres of oratory, which were subsequentially adopted by Cicero and Quintilian, is primarily based on the 'function' of the audience; that is, whether it is a 'judge' or not.[234] In the first two categories, deliberative and judicial oratory, arguments are presented to

[228] Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World*, 326.
[229] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 320. Also located in Mendelssohn, *Letters of Felix … from 1833 to 1847*, 2.
[230] Brown, *A Portrait of Mendelssohn*, 321.
[231] Glenn Stanley, "The Music for Keyboard" in Mercer-Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn* 165.
[232] Ferriss-Hill and Horace, *Horace's Ars Poetica*, xii-xli, line 343.
[233] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by George A Kennedy, 47-48 (section 1358b).
[234] Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 158.

audiences in order for them to decide on future actions to take or judge past events. Accordingly, the deliberative oration, often linked to the political sphere, concerns the advantages and disadvantages of future actions, whereas the judicial oration, intrinsically attached to the court, involves the presentation of past factual accounts calling for determination of justice.[235] In contrast, the epideictic oration, rooted in the present, does not require 'judging', for it is ceremonial in nature and devoted to the presentation of the virtuous, the honorable, and to a lesser extent its opposite, the shameful.[236] This specie of rhetoric, "intended to influence the values and beliefs of the audience",[237] was used at funeral eulogies, ceremonies, and public festivals, taking the form of encomiums, in order to praise or blame. Unconcerned with debate, this different mode of persuasion – with its possible subdivisions of courage, self-control, magnificence, magnanimity, liberality, prudence, and wisdom[238] – is therefore heavily moral in nature and conducive to "long-term reinforcement of a community of social values and ethical positions."[239] Braunschweig argues that musically, through the 'shared experience' of a performance, the epideictic analogy can be located in establishing a sense of community and agreement on ethical values such as joy or nobleness first, before moving the listener to a particular emotion.[240] As discussed above in the *Ethos* segment, Mendelssohn's dedication and pursuit to elevate shared ethical values that were honorable and universal, stemming from his

[235] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition*, 18.
[236] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. Translated by George A Kennedy, 75-79 (section 1366b).
[237] Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 4.
[238] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, p.76, section 1366b.
[239] Karl David Braunschweig, "The Metaphor of Music as a Language in the Enlightenment: Towards a Cultural History of Eighteenth-Century Music Theory," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997, 29.
[240] Ibid.

faith, cannot be missed: "Through music, the transient, the ugly, and the evil were transcended, highlighting the ultimate victory of moral truth."[241]

Thereupon, we can locate evident epideictic qualities in Mendelssohn's ceremonial music,[242] a genre particularly concerned with praises and doxologies, for the most part crafted for large choral-orchestral ensembles, and strongly associated with Handel, whom for the composer "represented the alpha and omega of edifying, ceremonial music."[243] For instance, Mendelssohn's five Psalm-cantatas, containing much ceremonial and reverential music, could be qualified as epideictic, since "the Psalms also illustrate features of style that are characteristic of biblical epideictic."[244] I would argue that the repeated occurrences of epideictic music in Mendelssohn's output, reminiscent of Handel's *Coronation Anthems* and exemplified in the 'glorious' and 'ceremonial' style à la *Zadok the Priest*, principally concerned with 'praise', justifies recognizing it as an idiosyncratic topic. It usually consists of long sustained homophonic choral lines, sometimes in a chorale, often *colla parte* with the woodwinds, driven by incessant dotted rhythms in the strings, and punctuated by strategically placed chordal accents in the brass. The chorus *Mache dich auf* from *Paulus* is emblematic of this Mendelssohnian/Handelian topic (score). In a different manner, we could also argue that Mendelssohn makes 'epideictic arguments' in his historicism, both in incorporating musical languages associated with the past in his own works, but also in his resolute commitment to 'revive' masterworks that fell into oblivion. For instance, we discern no allusions to the archaic or *passé* in his decision to include Bachian counterpoint and fugues, but rather, a volition to elevate, bring praise, and make known

[241] Leon Botstein, "Wagner as Mendelssohn: reversing habits and reclaiming meaning in the performance of Mendelssohn's music for orchestra and chorus" in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Mercer-Taylor, 259.
[242] Mendelssohn's ceremonial music is best represented in his Psalm-cantatas, Lobgesang, Gutenberg and Humboldt cantatas, different sections of his three oratorios, and his Te Deum a 8 in D.
[243] Todd, *Mendelssohn Essays*, 29.
[244] Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian Secular Tradition*, 121.

the importance of older musical languages that he deemed worthy of emulation, from which one should still learn and upon which to keep building. Musically embodied in quotations, allusions, and the use of earlier musical idioms and forms (such as the chorale), these musical references particularly testify to his reverence for Palestrina, Handel and Bach, and therefore, implicitly act as 'musical epideictic orations'.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the number of topics stemming from classical rhetoric in Mendelssohn's art is by no means comprehensive in this chapter. Much remains to be revealed, particularly about the upbringing of the siblings and the exact curriculum content the different tutors taught the children with. This information would help understand precisely which Greek and Latin authors they memorized, studied, and copied, but even more so how they approached this literature of old. For the moment, we can provisionally establish from Mendelssohn's letters and the content of his library that he was immersed from a young age and for the remainder of his life in Classical literature, but also that this proximity undoubtedly tainted his approach to composition. As discussed above, Mendelssohn's sensibility for decorum, his mastery of the three persuasive appeals (Ethos, Pathos, Logos), and tendency for writing works that are 'epideictic' in essence profiles someone inasmuch concerned about the content than the manner with which music is communicated. Inspired by great orators, Mendelssohn knew that his unremitting quest for honing the balance of a worthy and ethical character, a sustained and palpable passion, and a well written and crafted musical message, held the promise of reaching and touching his surroundings while possibly even securing his place within music history.

Part II – Case study: *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* Op. 60

"*Sa partition est d'une clarté parfaite, malgré sa complexité;*
les effets de voix et d'instruments s'y croisent dans tous les sens,
se contrarient, se heurtent, avec un désordre apparent qui est le comble de l'art."[245]

Introduction and context

The cantata *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* holds a unique place in Mendelssohn's compositional output. From the originality of its subject, the choice of instrumentation and colorful orchestration, the singularity of its form, the vividness and proximity of textual images rendered in music tone, its long and labored conception to its heavily tailored final version, the work offers us a rare chance to witness some of the foremost impassioned dramatic music Mendelssohn ever wrote. Seaton rightly observed that the work "elicited more musical discussion from the composer himself in his letters than practically any other of his work"[246] while Julie D. Prandi keenly suggested that the combination of the "non-liturgical nature of the text, the plot of the ballad, and the vibrancy of the poetic language" led Mendelssohn to grapple more intensely with musical experimentation for he was "freed from the yoke of older musical forms."[247] Moreover, the fact that Mendelssohn – a Jewish composer of Church music and an avowed Lutheran – decided to set to music the particular subject of paganism in which not Christians but pagans are depicted in a favorable light, combined to the 'highly symbolic' epithet Goethe ascribed his poem, has naturally prompted a multitude of reactions and interpretations

[245] Hector Berlioz, *Mémoires de Hector Berlioz, Membre de l'Institut de France : Comprenant Ses Voyages En Italie, En Allemagne, En Russie et En Angleterre, 1803-1865, Avec Un Beau Portrait de L'auteur,* Tome 1 (C. Lévy, Paris, 1878), 53.
[246] Douglass Seaton, "The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of Die erste Walpurgisnacht." *The Musical Quarterly* 68 (1982): 409.
[247] Julie D. Prandi, "Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*" in *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History,* eds., John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 138.

from scholars. For instance, Botstein saw in the pagans "veiled surrogates for Jews,"[248] while Prandi understood Mendelssohn's decision to set the poem as a "natural similarity in artistic temperament" between him and Goethe since they shared a common affinity for Enlightenment ideologies rooted in "German intellectual life."[249] Seaton considers the tale as symbolic for "the struggle for religious freedom,"[250] while Cooper suggests that the seemingly opposite, mutually exclusive dichotomies of Pagans and Christians are rather "dualities, individual parts of a coherent whole."[251]

Without taking anything away from these enlightening perspectives, I tend to side with Sposato in thinking that "Mendelssohn's motives, rather, found their origin in much less lofty concerns."[252] I believe that the content of Goethe's poem combined with the implied folkloric elements – namely the 'witches sabbath' – ultimately struck a chord with Mendelssohn's own interests and natural proclivities, while the supernatural undertones proved an 'irresistible magnet' giving way to all sorts of images and musical possibilities. This is exactly what Mendelssohn wrote to his friend Devrient, having begun composing the work "just because I liked it and it spoke to me,"[253] and to his sister Fanny:

> "The thing [Die erste Walpurgisnacht] … can really be fun; for at the beginning there are plenty of spring songs and such; then, when the watchmen raise a ruckus with their pitchforks and spikes and owls, the witches' spook is added, and you know I have a *particular weakness* for that. Then the druids, ready to sacrifice, come out in C major with trombones, then again the watchmen… and finally at the end the complete sacrificial song."[254]

[248] Leon Botstein, "Mendelssohn and the Jews," *The Musical Quarterly*, 82, no. 1 (1998): 213.
[249] Prandi, "Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*," 135-36.
[250] Seaton, "The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of Die erste Walpurgisnacht," 404.
[251] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 161.
[252] Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation*, 112.
[253] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 443. Translation located in Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 82.
[254] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 401. Translation located in Prandi, "Kindred Spirits," 144.

Mendelssohn's fascination (or rather *faible* as he expressed it) for the supernatural is well-known. Elves, fairies, and witches find their way in multiple pieces of the composer,[255] to the extent of *de facto* associating the 'elfin scherzo style' to Mendelssohn.[256] The topic is characterized by various measured and unmeasured trills and oscillating rhythms often in thirds or sixths, in high velocity and register, pianissimo and staccato, often introduced in the violins (strings), or flutes. Also, one year prior to beginning his work on the *Walpurgisnacht* in 1829, Mendelssohn intently grappled with the genre in *Hexenlied* Op. 8 no. 8. The song relays "a conversation between witches on the Brocken in which broomsticks and pitchforks,"[257] crafted with a vertiginous piano part etched with a velocity and virtuosity rarely seen within Mendelssohn's art song, labeled by Seaton as "a small-scale, comic Walpurgisnacht."[258]

Based on the same tale as his *Hexenlied* and also referred in German folklore as the 'Witches Sabbath' on top of the Brocken – Harz mountains' highest peak, – the *Walpurgis Night* relates a story of the pagan celebrations on the eve of May 1st to welcome the arrival of springtime amidst many supernatural elements. Over time, as with many pagan legends, the famous night on April 30th was 'Christianized' at the end of the 8th century in honor of the Anglo-Saxon missionary St. Walpurgis.[259] Accordingly, Goethe's poem tells the story of the druids' efforts hiking up to the Brocken's top to offer their ritual fires and sacrifices to the *Allvater* (Father of the Universe) despite the threat of the Christians' persecution. Instead of hiding, they come up with a cunning scheme to outwit the medieval 'dimwitted, gullible' Christians, and put

[255] Abreast of the *Midsummer's Night Dream* overture and scherzo Op.61, salient examples of Mendelssohn 'elfin scherzo style' include the scherzo from the String Octet Op. 20, the scherzo of the Piano Quartet in B minor Op.3, the scherzo from the String Quintet in A major Op. 18 and naturally, the first and sixth movement of *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* Op.60 (treated in chapter six).
[256] Todd, *Mendelssohn Essays*, 255.
[257] Melhorn, *Mendelssohn's Die Erste Walpurgisnacht,* 52. The Brocken, the highest peak of the Harz mountains, is associated in Germany to many tales, legends, and superstitions, particularly the witches' Sabbath.
[258] Seaton, "With Words: Mendelssohn's Vocal Songs," 667.
[259] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 10.

forth a masquerade in which they dress as 'wolf-men', 'dragon-women' and other hellish creatures in order to scare them with their own superstitions. The ploy succeeds, and the Christians flee in terror, leaving the Druids in peace to complete their rituals around the fire.[260]

In all, Mendelssohn's work on Goethe's ballad spanned more than thirteen years, with great interruptions, and a multiplicity of sketches, drafts, and revisions "in order to gradually succeed in coming closer to his actual thoughts and expressing them clearly,"[261] ultimately leading to the production of "two complete but very different autograph scores."[262] Following three unsuccessful attempts from his teacher Zelter to set it to music in 1799, 1802 and 1812, Mendelssohn began composing the first version shortly after his visit to Goethe in May 1830 during the Grand Tour. He finished most of the vocal movements in Italy by July 1831 and the overture by February 13th, 1832, while in Paris. The premiere of the first version took place in Berlin on January 10th, 1833, in the Sing-Akademie Hall as part of a three-concert charity subscription event, which neither Zelter nor Goethe could unfortunately hear. After close to a ten-year hiatus, incidentally following Horace's nine-year rule to let a work mature, Mendelssohn revised the cantata in December 1842 and premiered the second version at the Gewandhaus on February 2nd, 1842.[263]

[260] Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation*, 110.
[261] Christoph Hellmundt, "Mendelssohns Arbeit an seiner Kantate Die erste Walpurgisnacht: Zu einer bisher wenig beachteten Quelle," in *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Kongreß-Bericht Berlin 1994*, ed. Christian Martin Schmidt (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1997), 76.
[262] Ibid., 99.
[263] For a full account of the work's genesis, conception, revisions, and publication, see Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 78-96.

Chapter 4. Rhetorical Affinities

4.1. Word-music aesthetic.

Notwithstanding the uncharted seas that Mendelssohn may have entered in deciding to set Goethe's fable to music, the cantata also reveals characteristic and authentic Mendelssohnian qualities perceivable in its elaboration and composition, which help confirm some of the aesthetic tenets proposed in the first part of this research. To begin with, Goethe's text proved naturally 'musical' for Mendelssohn: its essence portrayed ideas and emotions that could turn towards and not away from music's specificities. As discussed in chapter two, Goethe's text offered an opportunity similar to Klingemann's in that music and text could form a 'successful merger' (Mendelssohn considered Klingemann's poems to 'cry out for music'). Having written the bulk of the work by July 15th, 1831 (the overture was still missing by then), he exchanged a letter with Goethe about his progress on August 28th of that year saying:

> "Permit me to express my gratitude for the heavenly text. When the old druid brings his sacrifice and the whole thing becomes solemn and incomparably grand, there is no need to write music—it is all already so clearly present and resonant that I always sang the verses to myself without meaning to. If I can find a good chorus and an opportunity in Munich, whither I depart tomorrow, I will try to perform it there. My only hope is that people will hear in my music how deeply I have felt the beauty of the text."[264]

Despite Mendelssohn's overpraising and humble tone towards one of his mentors, this letter confirms the aesthetic tenet of the possible word-music fusion given that they answer to the same higher emotion. In fact, Mendelssohn describes a fusion so strong that the music is already there. This quote strikingly parallels another letter written to his philologist friend Droysen while setting the incidental music to Sophocles' *Antigone* on December 2nd, 1841:

[264] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 456. Translation located in John Michael Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night: The Heathen Muse in European Culture, 1700-1850* (Eastman Studies in Music, [v. 43]. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 82-83.

> "The more or less jolting words do not inspire concern; but the mood and the verse rhythms are everywhere so truly musical, that one need not think about the individual words but rather compose only for those moods and rhythms – and the chorus is finished. Even today one could hope for no richer a task than these multifaceted choral moods: victory and daybreak, peaceful reflection, melancholia, love, mourning, Bacchus's song, and the earnest warning at the end – what more could one want?[265]

In both excerpts, Mendelssohn speaks of deeply feeling particular moods exuding from the text, which contained evident 'musical potential' since the textual moods (emotions) when rendered in tones remain unabated.

4.2. Classical rhetoric

Mendelssohn's sensitivity to *decorum* while fashioning the work is manifest in two main instances. First, different elements point to the possibility of his having conceived the work to be sung by Berlin's preeminent chorus, the Sing-Akademie. To begin with, Mendelssohn took liberties from Goethe's text in giving to the chorus a greater dramatic function than simply commenting on the narrative.[266] Then, he augmented the contribution of women's voices to the work by placing the female chorus on equal footing with the men's and also by creating a female solo – *eine alte Frau* – that was originally meant to be sung by a man from the populace.[267] The Sing-Akademie was progressive in being the first amateur choral society to allow both men and women to publicly sing sacred music together, and by voting for by-laws in 1821 requiring parity from the board.[268] Also, Mendelssohn premiered the work in the Sing-Akademie Hall on January 7th, 1833 with the Royal Orchestra and the Theater Chorus amidst a three-concert series

[265] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 3338. Translation located in Michael P. Steinberg, "The incidental Politics to Mendelssohn's *Antigone*," in *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 149.
[266] Reinhard Szeskus, "Die erste Walpurgisnacht, Op. 60, von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy," *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* 17 (1975): 174.
[267] Mendelssohn included women in lines 14-17, 18-27, 60-65, 69-71, 96-99, instead of the only ones explicitly given to women lines 28-32. See Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xix.
[268] Ryan Kelly, "Artistry and Equality: How the Berlin Sing-Akademie Transformed Community Choral Singing," *The Choral Journal* 53, no. 10 (2013): 12.

benefitting the widows of the Royal Orchestra.[269] The oddity of performing the work within the Hall of the Sing-Akademie, yet without its chorus, can likely be explained by Mendelssohn's convoluted application a few months prior to succeed his teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, a project that notoriously failed in favor of Zelter's assistant, Rungenhagen.[270] One could understand the board's desire to have objectivity in the process and they could well have refused to allow the work to be performed for this reason. To this, we can add that the bulk of the *Walpurgisnacht*'s first version was written while in Italy during the Grand Tour in 1831, where Mendelssohn also wrote his *Drei Kirchenmusiken* Op.23, dedicated to the Sing-Akademie.[271] Lastly and partly addressed in chapter 3.3., the many divisi, antiphony and responsorial exchanges amidst the choral writing of *Walpurgisnacht* display one of the Sing-Akademie's signature capacities; the group regularly rehearsed and performed multi-chorus works of the Renaissance, Bach motets, and most significantly, Bach's *St. Matthew* Passion with its imposing double chorus in 1829 with Mendelssohn at the helm.

The second instance displaying *decorum* is all the more pragmatic. On July 13th, 1831, Mendelssohn writes to Devrient, "I wrote the part of the priest so that it lies well in your throat, with your permission", and added on August 27th about the composing process, "… it lies very well for your voice. But write to me whether you can hit the high *F* – not sustained, but just for a quarter note. It occurs near the end."[272] Mendelssohn met the bass-baritone Eduard Devrient, "the most impressive voice and the most significant dramatic talent among Mendelssohn's circle

[269] Wolfgang Dinglinger, "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys Berliner Intermezzo," *Mendelssohn-Studien* 13 (2003): 120-121. In his memoirs, Devrient erroneously state that the premiere took place in the concert-room of the Theater, thus leading astray other scholars. See Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy*, 157.
[270] For a full account of Mendelssohn's application to the Sing-Akademie, see Wm. A. Little, "Mendelssohn and the Berlin Singakademie: The Composer at the Crossroads," in Todd ed., *Mendelssohn and His World*, 65-85.
[271] Garratt, James Garratt, "Mendelssohn's Babel: Romanticism and the Poetics of Translation," *Music & Letters* 80, no. 1 (1999): 81.
[272] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 443 and 452. Translation located in Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 82.

of friends,"[273] in 1818 through the Sing-Akademie, but most notably, Devrient sang Christ's role in the famous *St. Matthew* Passion 'rediscovery' concerts in 1829.[274] Mendelssohn knew very well his friends' voice and tessitura, but also the emotional potency it contained to fully convey the 'worship grandeur' necessary for the druid priest's role in *Walpurgisnacht*.

Another principle from classical rhetoric can be observed in the music Mendelssohn wrote for the Druid priest's role reserved for Devrient (mvts. 3, 7 and 9). The *epidictic* qualities emanating from these three movements, concerned with the *Allvater* worship, are unmistakable. Mendelssohn's ceremonial topic is on full display in these encomiums made of 'Handelian' arpeggios in the strings sustaining hymnlike quarter note melodies, punctuated by dotted rhythmic interjections of the chorus echoed in the winds, leading to grand, loud, and prolonged cadential arrivals. In fact, as Sposato recalls, the dignity accorded to the druids in these movements, presenting them musically as virtuous and honorable, led Marx to qualify them as "characteristic of Christendom."[275] Mendelssohn himself conceded to his friend Hauser that the work "can be colorful enough, for there are majestic elements in it,"[276] and to Goethe labelled them as "solemn sacrificial chorus."[277] However, the most *epideictic* quality of these musical celebrations might be the inclusion of trombones, so strongly tied to the nobility of worship in his *Lobgesang* and *Paulus*, the assurance of his prophet *Elijah*, the dignity of chorales in his *Psalm-cantatas*, and the kingly attributes given to his *Christus*.

I believe that Mendelssohn's decision to musically 'dignify' the druid's praise of the *Allvater* also stems in part from his sensibility to the persuasive appeal of *ethos*. The genuineness

[273] Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 28.
[274] Peter Ward Jones, "Mendelssohn's Performances of the 'Matthäus-Passion': Considerations of the Documentary Evidence," *Music & Letters* 97, no. 3 (2016): 421.
[275] Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation*, 113.
[276] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 80.
[277] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 407. Translation located in Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 81.

required of one's worship supersedes potential conflicts as to the 'non-Christian' nature of the addressee. In other words, Mendelssohn above all recognized and elevated the sincerity of the druid's devotional rites despite only being a tale or pertaining to a different religion. His desire to musically render a close and authentic representation of the characters' moods and intents, in sum a strong and genuine *ethos*, permeates the story. In addition, Mendelssohn often pairs this ethical truthfulness of characters (*ethos*) with a strong underlying *pathos*, rendering a 'true emotion'. Instances include the inherent joy accompanying the arrival of spring leading to merry songs of the women's chorus (mvt.1), the intense and profound suffering of the *alte Frau* relating past atrocities (mvt. 2), the growing courage of the druid's guard march assembling (mvt.5), the ecstatic excitement of the of the witches' spook (mvt.6) and the hellacious fear medieval Christians experience while fleeting the scene (mvt.8).

4.3. Musical rhetoric

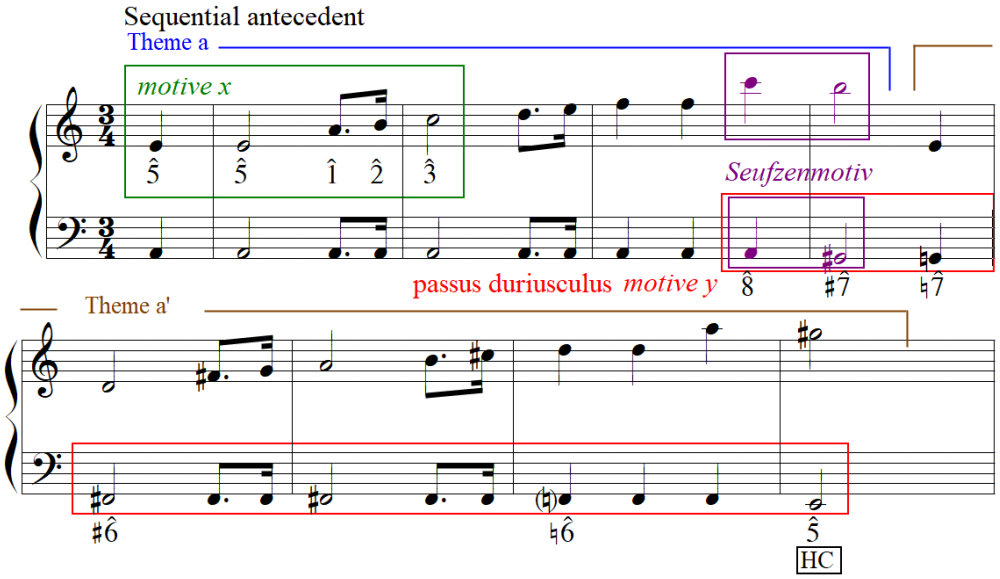
The most salient feature of Mendelssohn's *logos* in the *Walpurgisnacht* is indisputably its thematic cyclicity. Nothing less than a *tour de force* and greatly resembling Berlioz's *idée fixe*,[278] the number of ongoing motivic metamorphosis – whether melodic, harmonic or rhythmical – in the entirety of the work is staggering. Cooper qualified the work as "a concentrated essay in the nineteenth-century ideology of organicism and the technique of thematic transformation in multimovement cyclic form"[279] while Seaton attributed this "explicit thematic cyclicity" to the "abstract musical symbol of the Romantic thinkers' desire for unity in all things."[280] Musically, the whole work rests on three main thematic cells or motives exposed at the onset of the

[278] Incidentally, Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* was also given at the Gewandhaus two days after *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht's* final completion premiere. See Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 449.
[279] Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xvii-xviii.
[280] Seaton, "The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of Die erste Walpurgisnacht," 406.

overture, all intertwined in the opening subject.[281] As can be seen in the example below, the main melodic theme outlines a shorter motivic cell, identified by Cooper as motive *x*,[282] designed as triadic rising gesture on scale degrees 5-5-1-2-3, beginning on an anacrusis and using dotted rhythms. Cooper associates the motive with "the pagans' edification, devotion, and religious rites,"[283] which is certainly the case; however its omnipresence in other contexts, such as the opening songs of joy (mvt.1) or the silent dispersing of pagan guards in the forest (mvt.4), calls for broader interpretation. The multitudinous variants of motive *x*, "which permeate nearly all aspects of the musical texture"[284] strongly parallels that of an oration containing a primary topic from which arguments, facts, proofs, and refutations are presented in the form of countless permutations. To be sure, Mendelssohn's opening melodic gesture could be understood as a *locus topicus* or main *topos*, referring to 'common places' or to the central topic, from which the discourse's declination will unfold through the *dispositio* (the following nine movements) and in which the motivic metamorphosis are stylistically adjusted according to context, thus implying a process of *elocutio*. Interestingly, the strong underlying cyclicity also point to procedure of *peroratio*, a 'summing up' of the whole work encapsulating all points and arguments, usually closing an oration but here presented first, thus pointing to a 'rounded' feeling of the work.

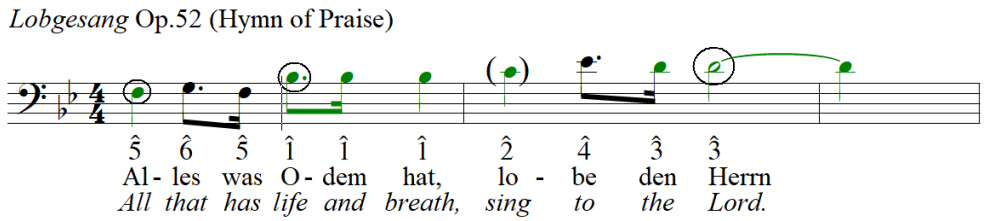
[281] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 501. "My A-minor Overture is finished; it represents bad weather."
[282] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 154.
[283] Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xviii.
[284] Benedict Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory: The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 277.

Main theme and thematic / motivic cells



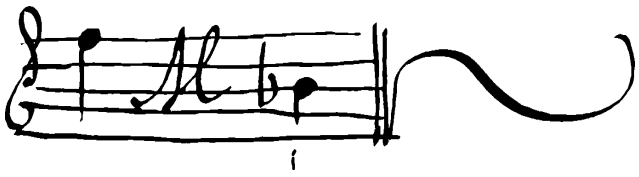
Motive *x*, consisting of the rising scale degrees 5-5-1-2-3, marked by an opening fourth with pulsated and dotted rhythms, outlines what I would label 'Mendelssohn's melodic signature'. This melodic motive is used in works beyond the *Walpurgisnacht* and can be identified throughout Mendelssohn's output, both as an auxiliary component, but especially as a central melodic force.[285] The motive naturally exudes epideictic and ceremonial qualities, but also contains noble and celebratory overtones, enabling immediate access in its simplicity. The work that possibly best exemplifies the 'melodic signature' with these inherent qualities is the *Lobgesang'* motto.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's Melodic Signature



[285] Dahlhaus and Seaton both already established a clear connection between motive *x* and the Scottish symphony's primary theme while Taylor has also suggested a similitude to *Lobgesang's* (mvt.7) *Die Nacht ist vergangen*. To these, many more examples could be given, such as *Paulus'* overture (without the first 5, the rest is note for note) and chorus *Mache dich auf* (no.15), Psalm 95's duet *Denn in seiner Hand ist* and the fugal theme *Lasst uns mit Danken* (mvt.2), Psalm 115's opening theme, Psalm 42's chorus *Meine Seele dürstet nach Gott*, and most notably, Gutenberg's *Festgesang* hymn "*Vaterland, in deinen Gauen*" commonly known as "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."

More importantly, this particular embodiment and text, just as much as *Walpurgisnacht* motive *x* and its final metamorphosis into major praising the *Allvater,* suggests the importance and centrality of worship in Mendelssohn's art as a signature modus operandi. As previously mentioned, everything in Mendelssohn's *oeuvre* is deeply ethical and grounded in God, pointing to transcendental moral values of universal nature. Pastor Schubring helped clarify Mendelssohn's process: "When I recollect, however, with what a serious religious feeling he pursued his art, the exercise of it always being, as it were, a sacred duty; how the first page of every one of his compositions bears impressed on it the initial letter of a prayer."[286] The 'initial letter of a prayer' Schubring refers to are in fact two different dedications Mendelssohn regularly wrote on his autographs, similarly to old Bach's *Soli Deo Gloria,* consisting of H.D.m. (*Hilf Du mir*, "Help me, O Lord"), and L.e.g.G (*Laß es gelingen, Gott*, "Let it succeed, O Lord").[287] Alongside these pious dedications and the aforementioned melodic signature revealing ceremonial religious fervor epitomized in *Lobgesang*, I would like to suggest the possibility of a third signature. Mendelssohn curiously signed a letter to his sister Rebekah on November 13th, 1835, using a musical cryptogram of his name (again, analogously to Bach).[288] The signature displays an F – M – Bb in descending fifth, possibly as a typical Mendelssohnian polite bowing gesture while signing off. However, this small jotting certainly confirms Mendelssohn's recognition of his name's musical interval characteristics, which are usually realized as an ascending perfect fourth in his compositions, as in the *Lobegesang* and *Walpurgisnacht*.



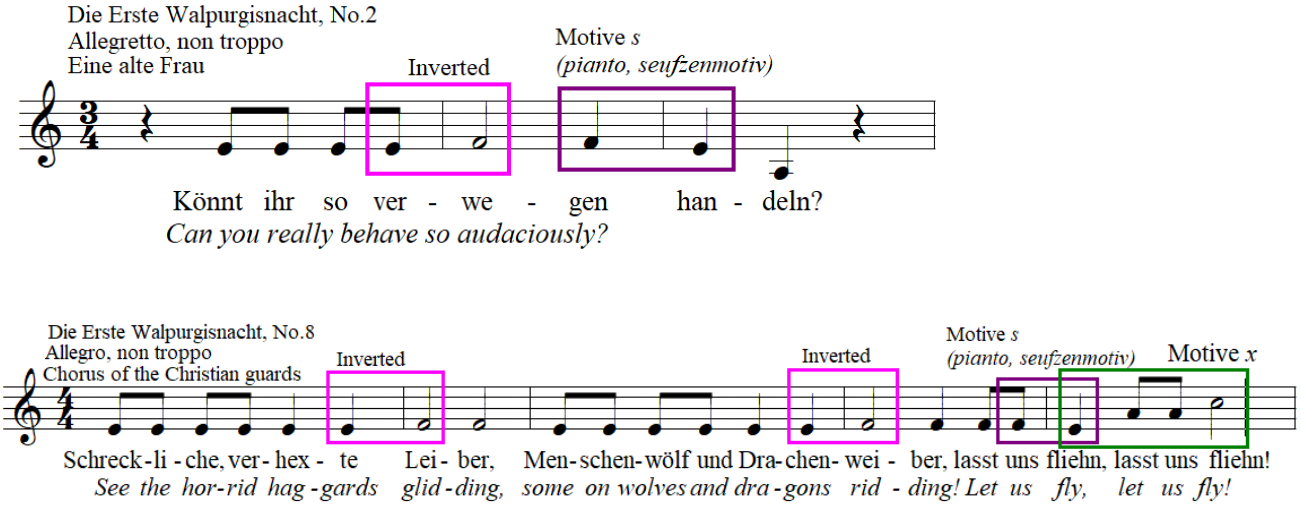
[286] Schubring, "Reminiscences of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy", 373.
[287] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 173.
[288] See *Sämtliche Briefe* no. 1243.

All these different signatures disclose a composer who was aware of the importance of legacy, previous and future, but more consequentially, they demonstrate an orator concerned with leaving an imprint on his audience, one that is inviting, communal, ceremonial and pointing to the divine.

The second main motive, identified as *y*, is heard in the bass against the antecedent's second a' (see figure 4.1.). Strong in *pathos*, motive *y* is a chromatic descent in the minor mode from tonic to the dominant, known as a chromatic fourth, *passus duriusculus* or as the lament topic. Mendelssohn sometimes fragments it (such as in the ritornello of the guard's march, mvt.5 – mm.21-22), uses it in other voices than the bass (such as the lament of second altos in mvt.2, mm. 70-77) or inverts it as a rising gesture (such as the *Hexenspuk*'s high point for soprano and bass, mvt. 7, mm.179-183). Cooper denoted in the motive attributes representing "the other salient aspect of the text and historical context of Goethe's ballad: that of strife or conflict."[289] These attributes confirm in part the traditional understanding of the *passus duriusculus*, a form of *catabasis*, prized for its strong affect and expressive qualities, generally paired with texts relating to mourning, suffering, or as the topic suggests, lamenting.[290] The device's familiarity and expressive potency also led rhetoricians to see in its usage extramusical possibilities of an exegetical nature.[291] Mendelssohn employs motive *y* both for its sheer dramatical force, almost in a pre-Wagnerian way leading to grand cadential swells on pedals (mm. 276-282 in the overture), but also as suggested, to portray strife, the severity of bad weather and storm, and the ostracization of pagans.

[289] Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xviii.
[290] William E. Caplin, "Topics and Formal Functions: The Case of the Lament" in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory,* ed. Danuta Mirka (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2014), 417.
[291] Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*, 358.

Mendelssohn reserves for the tales' strongest pathos-laden episodes the enactment of a third motivic cell equally powerful: the *seufzenmotiv* (sighing motif). Cleverly appearing at the tail of motive *x* and on the onset of motive *y* (see figure 4.1.), motive *s* is, strictly speaking, already present in the chromatic semitones of motive *y*. However, Mendelssohn makes extensive use of this falling semitone (such as a sigh) also known as *pianto,* in multiple harmonic contexts. In fact, he constructed the entirety of the second movement on this independent small gesture, taking here and elsewhere motivic proportions, and emanating affectations of deep sorrow. Interestingly, Mendelssohn also builds a cross-reference with motive *s* by quoting it in movement 8 both in the vocal and instrumental parts, but this time in relation to the stifling fear affecting the fleeting Christians. In referring to the same motive within an almost identical musical phrase in both instances, Mendelssohn alludes to the perpetrators that caused the suffering, while joining the two different affections (suffering and fear) on the same side of the spectrum of negative emotions.



Comparably to Bach's propensity in associating the *pianto* with the *passus duriusculus*,[292] – the B minor mass' *crucifixus* and Cantata *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* BWV 12 being landmark examples, Mendelssohn aptly includes both motive *s* and *y* in the movement to enhance musically the genuine affliction shared by the *alte Frau*. Drawing on past and painful events, the old woman warns the pagan populace by sharing the atrocities perpetrated by medieval Christians who, on their ramparts, slaughtered their fathers and children (verses 18 to 27). Accordingly, the emotional intensity suggested by this text led Mendelssohn to use different forms of *pathopoeia* to portray suffering, pain, and despair (see the analyzed score in Appendix I with listed rhetorical devices). To the considerable amount of *Seufzenmotive* and chromatic segments calling on motive *y*, he also included a few *suspirationes* in short rests at the end of phrases suggesting 'gasping' or 'crying'. Also, while building a *gradatio* with three iterations of motive *s* (rhetorical tricolon, see chapter 5), Mendelssohn raises the *pianto* to a tritone on the last reiteration, a device also known as *saltus duriusculus* (harsh leap) equally representing distress, while the orchestra disappears in an *abruptio* to heighten the voice's plea (mm. 10-16). In the second section, the women's chorus also contribute emotionally with multiple *catabases* picturing the fall and the doom awaiting them, while creating a *pathopoeia* from motive *s* on the key words *Walle*, *Kinder* and *falle* (mes. 50, 53, 64, 68). In this already heavily pathos-invested musical texture, Mendelssohn hides multiple appearances of Bach's anagram ([Bb – A] – [C – Bn]), suitably made of two *piantos*, within the chorus' parts and also in the bass. Melhorn had already noticed how the movement's reduced orchestral instrumentation, comprising strings and oboes only, was reminiscent of Bach's passion settings.[293] It is impossible to confirm Mendelssohn's motivation behind these signature quotes, which at the very least indicate a

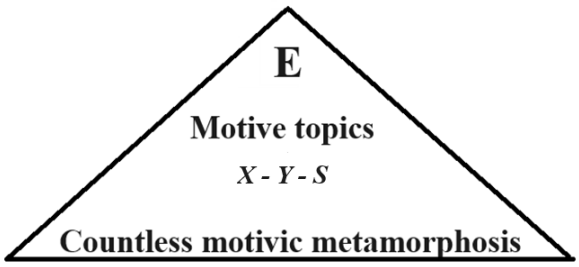
[292] Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69.
[293] Melhorn, *Mendelssohn's Die Erste Walpurgisnacht,* 114.

bowing gesture to one of his musical *maître à penser*, however, his previous knowledge of the BACH musical cryptogram can indisputably be established, thus ruling out simple coincidence. On August 6th, 1840, two years before reworking the *Walpurgisnacht*, Mendelssohn gave an all-Bach organ recital in order to raise funds for "the erection of a monument to J.S. Bach in the immediate vicinity of the Thomas-Kirche," in which he closed the concert with a long and 'free improvisation' based on the B-A-C-H motif.[294] Thus, we have in this short second movement the elaboration of an oration (*logos*) based on a central *topoi*, the *pianto* motive *s*, crafted with multiple musical rhetorical gestures and 'motive-*y*-chromatic-inflections' to enhance the text's inherent *pathos* relating of genuine (*ethos*) suffering, and ultimately, paired with a cryptogram (signature) inferring and honouring the presence of a composer who mastered 'passion-related' rhetorical devices.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to suggest the omnipresence of a single-note motive, subsuming all three previous ones and acting as a unifying and connecting thread, akin to the mountain peak which enfolds all musical elements. A precursor of Berg's single-note B murder motive in the opera *Wozzeck*, Mendelssohn builds nearly every melodic line, both vocal and instrumental, by opening or closing them with the note E. Furthermore, the note E is often the apex of melodic lines, thus emphasizing key words or verbs of the story (*Mai*, *Mag*, *Rauch*, *Pflicht*, *fliehen*, *reinigt*, *Licht*). Harmonically, the note E acts as a pivot note connecting the main keys of the work, and by doing so, outlines most of motive *x* (5-5-1-2-3): A minor – bad weather/ *hexenspuk* (fifth), A major – spring weather (fifth), E major – start of ruse (root), C major – worship/Light key – (third). Also, Mendelssohn regularly places it in the bass, creating harmonic

[294] W.A. Little, "Mendelssohn and the Organ" in *Mendelssohn, the Organ, and the Music of the Past: Constructing Historical Legacies*, ed. Thym Jürgen (Eastman Studies in Music, V. 118. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 96-105. It should also be noted that the 1833 version contained only one BACH cryptogram in the second movement, whereas the 1842 version uses it six times, suggesting a growing fascination with it.

inversions on the third or the fifth of the tonic chord, thus propelling the story forward in delaying harmonic resolution (particularly in the druid priest interventions of mvt. 3 and 7, but also in the fleeing of Christians in mvt. 8). Although tempting to attribute a definite symbolism to the note, such as fire, light, the *Allvater* or the divine, it remains conjecture and an open question. Nevertheless, beyond the obvious unifying qualities of the single-note motive E, it certainly operates as a narrative element facilitating the junctions of the movements and verses, the change of scenes and characters, almost as a musical punctuation furthering and guiding the required intonation to lead, grasp, move the audience through the oration.



Chapter 5. Musico-poetic Relationships

5.1. General observations

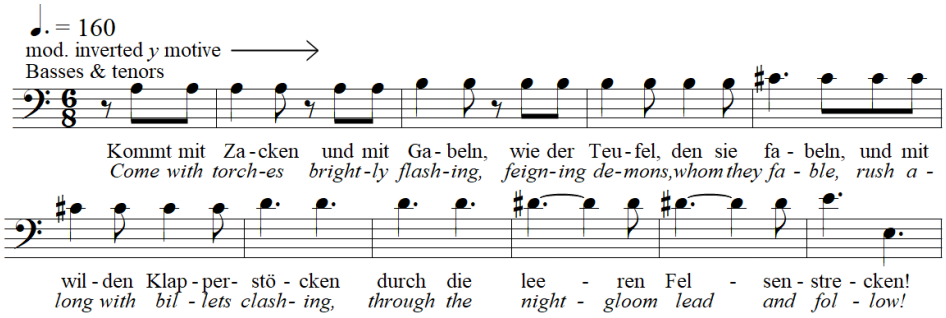
Mendelssohn's musical proximity to Goethe's text is carefully crafted in a nearly completely syllabic musical delivery, thus rendering the music closer to speech, facilitating the understanding of the plot, and consequently enhancing the dramatic qualities of the work. Excluding the eight-minute overture, Goethe's ninety-nine verses are set musically in a swift and approximate twenty-seven minutes of music; thus providing "a succinctness and refinement less and less evident in the dramatic cantatas after Mendelssohn's death."[295] This brevity is also explained by Mendelssohn's decision to set the text with continuous music, as opposed to a more

[295] Melhorn, *Mendelssohn's Die Erste Walpurgisnacht,* 99.

conventional cantata or 'oratorio style' succession of "self-contained movements separated by short pauses."[296] This 'through-composed' approach aimed to focus on the narrative elements of the ballad, an aesthetic mixed genre in which a "dramaturgy of the urgent"[297] is interwoven amidst different accentuations of the lyrical, epic, and dramatic.[298] Combined with this condensed text-setting are many typically Mendelssohnian 'up-tempo' sections, a trait providing what Lawrence Kramer qualifies as 'antiapocalyptic dynamism': "the strong rhythmic and registral profiling, the agitated or repercussive countermelodies and accompaniments, the love of sheer high velocity."[299] It must be conceded that the 'concentrated-narrative' approach comes perilously close to producing the opposite effect in compromising the intelligibility of text when tempi are on the brisk side. Yet, these 'out-of-breath' moments bordering impossible verbal articulations could also be understood as an outpouring of excitement from where they originate. In other words, they are not tone-painting, but emotional-tone-paintings approaching theatricality. A salient example occurs at the very beginning of the *Hexenspuk* (mvt.6, mes.33-43), where the druids' guards, after the assembling of troops in the preceding movement, introduce verse 60-65 (which is partly based on the preceding verse 52-59) in a lightning fast tempo on an almost fully rising chromatic line (inversion of motive *y*). The segment undoubtedly propels the excitement of this central and longest movement of the work rapidly to new heights. Ultimately, Mendelssohn brilliantly saved the intelligibility of the text by repeating it at least

[296] Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xx.
[297] Tobias Fichte, "'...Don't You Think This Could Become a New Kind of Cantata?' Rituality, Authenticity and Staging in Mendelssohn's Walpurgisnacht," *The World of Music: Journal of the Department of Ethnomusicology, Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg*, 40, no. 1 (1998): 127.
[298] Carl Dahlhaus, "'Hoch Symbolisch Intentioniert': Zu Mendelssohns Erster Walpurgisnacht," in *19. Jahrhundert. III: Ludwig van Beethoven—Aufsätze Zur Ideen Und Kompositionsgeschichte—Texte Zur Instrumentalmusik*, ed, Hermann Danuser (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2003), 527.
[299] Lawrence Kramer, "Felix culpa: Goethe and the Image of Mendelssohn," in *Mendelssohn Studies*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 67.

seven times in the rest of the movement, this time on longer rhythmical values, without having to abate the mob's exhilaration of the opening.



The almost completely syllabic work contains a handful of melismas to heighten the importance of certain words, but also to subtly enhance lyrical qualities (incidentally, the lack of cantilena was criticized by Ludwig Rellstab after the Berlin premiere).[300] Julie D. Prandi mentions only four words, yet a total of nine words, organized mostly in pairs, can be identified with three (in one case four) notes per syllable: *Schnee* / *Lust* (mvt. 1), *Herz* (mvt 1), *Walle* / *Falle* (mvt. 2), *heule / Klapperstöcken* (mvt. 6) *kann / rauben* (mvt.9).[301] In some measure resembling Bach's own word treatment in his cantata recitatives, this approach provides a glimpse into the composer's own interpretation of the text. Accordingly, these five melismatic word pairs act as central emotional agents pertaining to key segment of the story: *Schnee* / *Lust* and the inherent joy in celebrating the disappearance of winter and spring's arrival (mvt.1), *Herz* and the ethical and solemnity of worship (mvt. 1 and 7), *Walle* / *Falle* and the visceral pain and suffering related by the wise and old woman's past experiences (mvt. 2), *Rundgeheule / Klapperstöcken* exhibiting the excitement of the grand dancing and howling *fête* at the heart of the masquerade (mvt 6 – *Hexenspuk*), and lastly *kann / rauben*, radiating peace in the conviction that no one can rob us of the *Allvater*'s inner light (mvt. 9).

[300] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 85-86.
[301] Prandi only mentions *Lust*, *Herz*, *Falle* and *Rundgeheule*. See Prandi, "Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*," 145. To this list, I omitted *verteilt* of mvt 4 for it is only in the tenor section and used as passing tones.

5.2. The ‘rule of three’

Implicit, yet almost subconsciously, lies within both Goethe’s and Mendelssohn’s work a powerful literary device known as the ‘rule of three’. The unwritten maxim is at the heart of many oral traditions including folktales, legends, and epic poems. Instances and variations amidst fables and stories are virtually countless: three wishes, three guesses, three little pigs, three blind mice, three musketeers, three wise men, and so on. Additionally, examples are not confined to tales; they permeate many other conceptual realms such as religion (trinity – father, son, holy spirit), time (past, present, future), sports (ready, set, go), philosophy (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), and form (beginning, middle, end). The strong associative and persuasive qualities given to the number three stem in part from the fact that ‘three’ is the smallest number from which a pattern can be established. Also, the obvious benefit of organizing material in three segments or repeating it three times (identically or with a variation) is memorability. Repetitions provide a chance for an audience or reader to better retain, grasp or comprehend what is presented. Furthermore, reiterations provide a more potent emotional impact by intensifying the message and displaying from the addresser the importance bestowed upon a particular object, person or subject.[302]

Goethe’s ballad, written in twelve stanzas – totalling 99 verses (3X33) – engages with the whimsical and efficient ‘rule of three’ in multiple ways, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Mendelssohn. First, according to Catharine Rose Melhorn, the story line (excluding the orchestral introduction) could be summarized in three main events or changes: movements 1-4 mark the arrival of spring, the druids’ change of heart and rededication to duty, movements 5-6 the rallying of troops, the change of costumes and the masquerade (*hexenspuk*), and lastly

[302] Dominic Cheetham, “The Rule of Three (or Four), and Pairs,” *English Literature and Language* 39 (2002): 71-2.

movements 7-9, the druids' worship, their change of fortune, and the Christian's fleeing.[303] Secondly, as observed by Cooper, "Goethe's text portrays at least three individual or collective personae," which are the pagan druids (including the priest and guards), the pagan populace (including an aged woman of the people) and their opponents, the Christian medieval missionaries (including the guards).[304] Lastly, the unfolding of events suggests three clear separate locations organized in three topographical strata in which the action takes place, thereby mentally reinforcing for the listener the obvious visual images of the mountain: (1) the top of the Brocken, the ultimate emplacement to host the sacrificial rites of worship, (2) the slopes where druid guards disperse and hide at first, to eventually muster their courage and conduct the masquerade, and finally (3) an unspecified location from where the Christians observe and imagine hellish creatures and flee on lower ground.[305]

Alongside the poem, Mendelssohn likewise makes great use of the compelling number three musically to enliven and reinforce ideas, images and the plot. First and foremost, he reorganized the musical form into nine movements in the Op. 60 (3X3), as opposed to two main sections in the 1833 version. Following Goethe's three main personae, he cast the possibility of five different characters for the three main soloist roles: alto (an aged woman of the people), tenor (a druid, a Christian guard), and bass-baritone (druid priest, druid guard).[306] Similarly, Mendelssohn also ascribed three collective personae for three main choral ensembles: the Chorus of the Druids and the Pagan Populace, the Chorus of the Druid Watchmen, and the Chorus of the

[303] Catharine Rose Melhorn, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Mendelssohn's Die Erste Walpurgisnacht," D.M.A. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1983, 104.
[304] Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and John Michael Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth Century, 49, Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xx.
[305] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 210.
[306] Melhorn provides a few examples from nineteenth-century performances in which more than three soloists were used. See Melhorn, "Mendelssohn's Die Erste Walpurgisnacht," 101-102.

Christian Watchmen.[307] Additionally, the work opens on an *exordium* of three simple chords (I-V-I), in 3/4 time signature, setting the stage instantly with a sense of urgency. Following this hurried introduction, the main motive *x* is heard in a three-part harmonization for upper strings, somewhat suggesting three voices or characters, even possibly three groups of witches. This postulate is supported by the fact that a similar version of the triadic harmonisation for upper strings (sometimes including the woodwinds) occurs throughout the *hexenspuk* (mvt. 6) – "one of the most powerful of the witches' rides" – on rapid swells ascending and descending, organized this time as *faux-bourdons* (and so, resting on the third in the bass) in a 6/8 "sinister equestrian meter."[308] A particularly vivid example occurs in measures 157-162 during the long 'howl' of sopranos while bass instruments disappear in all sections; hence forgoing a sense of gravity and depicting a clear visual 'flight'. Moreover, the gesture is preceded by two other *faux-bourdon* moments, this time sung by female voices on close neighboring degrees on the 'tongue twister' *Kauz und Eule heul in unser Rundgeheule* with the strings in *colla parte* (measures 143-149 and 153-157). All this could be pure conjecture, yet, Mendelssohn wrote to his family while composing of having to 'get back to his witches',[309] and also, during these examples deprived of bass, the lowest note is given to the oboes on a low E, the very instrument and register about which Mendelssohn warned his sister that a low B on the instrument can only be "only granted for special occasions such as witches or great pain."[310] Having a trio of witches in the *Walpurgisnacht* is not so improbable considering Mendelssohn's knowledge of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and its Three Witches, a work on which he considered writing an overture for two

[307] Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 210.
[308] Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 63.
[309] See *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 421. Located in Seaton, "The Romantic Mendelssohn," 406.
[310] See *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 483.

months after the premiere of the first version in 1833.[311] To this short list we could add countless triple-musical repetitions, which will be addressed in relation to the text below.

5.3. Figures of repetition

Mendelssohn's numerous textual repetitions amidst *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht*, achieved through a variety of literary devices, figures of speech, and "by means of his own elaborations and alterations,"[312] are possibly the most elaborated, sophisticated, and compelling of his whole output. More notably, these figures of repetition – for the most part absent from Goethe's original poem – reveal direct evidence of 'Mendelssohn the orator' vouching and aiming to persuade his audience of certain ideas, emotions, and objects he considered paramount to the story. Abreast of formidable communicative abilities and inherent persuasiveness, figures of repetition also contain a rhetorical flair, particularly when thrice repeated (a direct correlation to the 'rule of three'), properties soon detected and exploited by great orators. For instance, rhetoric employs the commanding tricolon or hendiatris in a series of three parallel words or elements of similar length (*liberté, égalité, fraternité / veni, vidi, vici*) and different types of anaphora, epistrophe, alliteration to enhance the emotional impact and memorability. Similarly, Mendelssohn engaged in repetitions (generally threefold) in various combinations: sometimes both the text and music are repeated, sometimes the text or music alone are repeated, and other times textless instrumental moments are repeated.

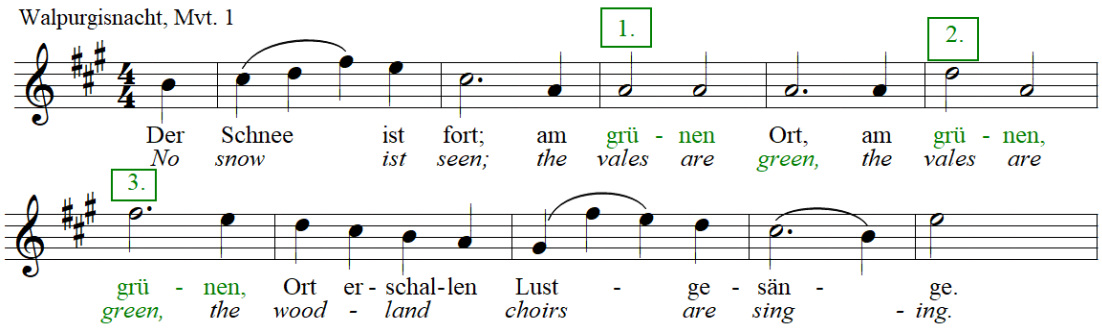
Similarly to the tricolon, Mendelssohn makes substantial use of the ardent 'epizeuxis', an exact and consecutive repetition of a single word as a robust figure of emphasis. Using action verbs, *Hinauf*! *Hinauf*! *Hinauf*! (Higher up!) or *Kommt*! *Kommt*! *Kommt*! (Come!) on identical

[311] See *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 693.
[312] Cooper, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (WI: A-R Editions, 2008), xix.

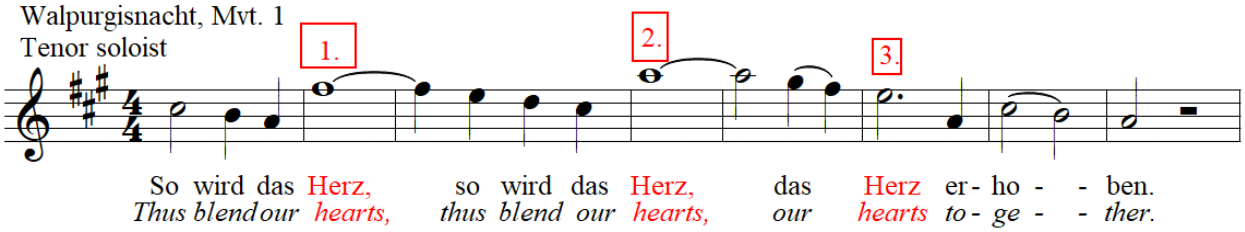
rhythms and thrice repeated, Mendelssohn candidly displays a sense of haste boiling amidst the druids and pagan populace to accomplish their duty and to participate in the howling rounds (no.5-6). Mendelssohn certainly knew the potency of the gesture from the three invocations *Herr*! opening Bach's *St. John* passion, a work rehearsed in part at the Sing-Akademie as early as 1815.[313] The intensity of the gesture, contributing also to elevate the dramatic quality of the work, finds no direct equivalent in Mendelssohn's output. The closest we find are the twice-repeated '*Baal*' calls in *Elijah* (no.13), also displaying a desperate sense of urgency from the prophets' inability to gain any response from their god after three attempts. Also similar in vehemence are the repeated interjections in the passion-like *turba* choruses *Wehe ihm*! (Woe to him! *Elijah*, no.24) and *Steiniget ihn*! (Stone him to death! *Paulus*, no.8), yet they are not true instances of epizeuxis since they are made of two words.

Another salient figure of repetition Mendelssohn uses is an anaphoric incremental repetition, in which the meaning is explained by the third repetition while outlining a particular word (tricolon), a technique most appropriate for the ballad genre: "Incremental repetition is a common strategy in ballad narrative technique, whereby a song unfolds in sequences of repeating lines or stanzas that, with each occurrence, introduce a change of word or phrase that furthers the plot."[314] For instance, Mendelssohn evokes the radiancy of spring's arrival by textually repeating and marking the word *grünen*[315] midway through the sentence, thus reinforcing the joyful song's visual element amidst the pastures (the technique, alas, is partly lost in the translation).

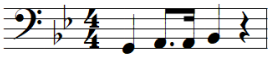
[313] Anna N. G. Rutledge, "Zelter, Goethe and the Emergence of a German Choral Canon." Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2012, 142-143.
[314] Cushman, ed., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms,* 21.
[315] Green is also generally understood as Mendelssohn's favorite color; the color with which he bound his correspondence, today referred as the 'Green Books'.



A similar treatment is reserved for the word *Herz*, thrice repeated on long and high notes, this time in both languages. As mentioned in chapter 5.1., *Herz* is one of the key emotional words and thus received special treatment with melisma. In addition to this, the entirety of the sentence – [from worship] thus will the heart be edified – points to the importance of connecting the heart to our actions, but also to the centrality of an ethical worship practice to lead one's life. Prandi argued that "the concept of 'heart' in this poem unites the aesthetics of Romanticism with the ethics of the Enlightenment in a way both Goethe and Mendelssohn reflect in their work."[316] Notwithstanding this claim, I would also argue that Mendelssohn considered the 'heart' as the source from which true and genuine worship can overflow, a theological stance found in the well-known Bible verse Matthew 12.34b, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,"[317] a verse Mendelssohn quotes from memory in Martin Luther's translation seven times in his letters.



[316] Prandi, "Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*," 145.
[317] Matthew 12.34b. English Standard Version.

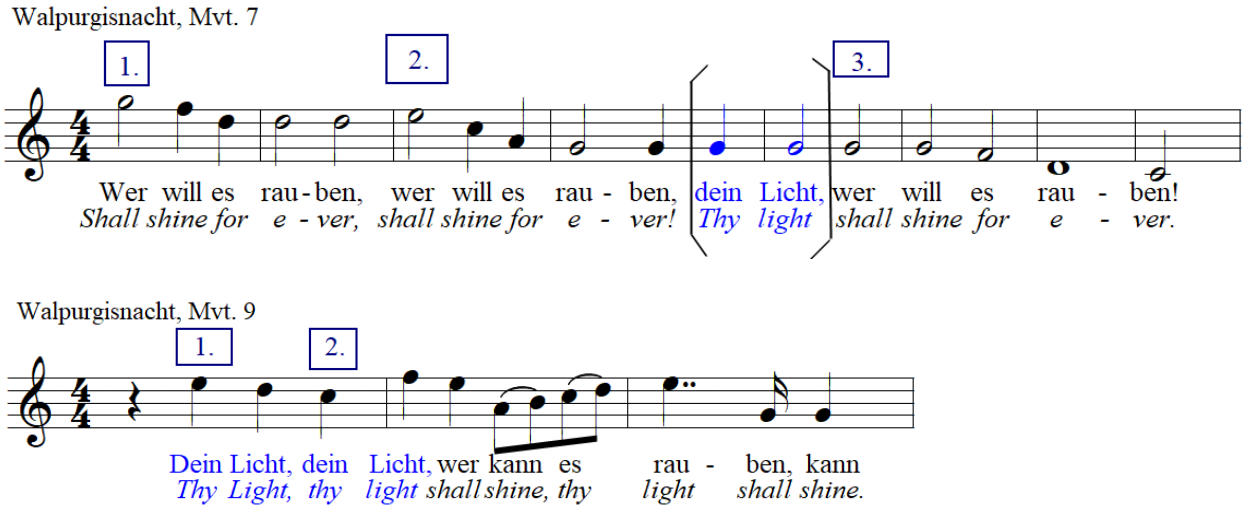
Another compelling form of repetition, this time amidst Goethe's text, is the *polysyndeton*, a figure of speech that make use of conjunctions repeatedly– such as 'and', 'or', 'but' – to modify the rhythm or flow of a sentence leading to calming or intensifying it. The device was well-known to rhetoricians such as Quintillian who qualified it as "exhibiting an appearance of vehemence, and of passion bursting forth as it were time after time."[318] Goethe's famous *polysyndeton* appears in verses 54-57, at the heart of the fable, to portray the many elements druids gather in preparing and ensuring the successful ruse: "*Kommt mit Zacken und mit Gabeln und mit Glut und Klapperstöcken*" (Come! With prongs and pitchforks and with embers and clappers). Interestingly, Mendelssohn's musical answer to this 'list' of elements does not involve a direct repetition of notes but instead, the repetition of cells, phrases, and formal sections. In doing so, he corroborates the text's accumulations by repeating formal elements, while signifying the outcome of the call in having more singers symbolizing the amassed forces. More specifically, Mendelssohn constructs the movement on a short rhythmic ostinato cell punctuated by bass drum and cymbals, thus indubitably suggesting a military march. Placed in the bass at first then joined by upper voices, this rhythmic cell is easily identifiable since it is based on the rhythmic dotted motive heard in the opening *x* motive, but also based on what Diane Johnson Retallack labelled the 'signal motive' from the trumpets in the preceding movement.[319]  Secondly, he builds a nine-bar main melodic segment A (the second half partly constructed on motive *y*) to be repeated three times (thus matching the number of conjunctions 'and'), gradually augmenting the number of singers to suggest the gathering of troops: the First A is for the bass solo druid guard calling the troops, the second A is

[318] Stephen Cushman, ed., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms*, (Third edition. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 276. Also see Quintilian *Institutio oratoria* 9.3.51–54.
[319] Diane Johnson Retallack, "A Conductor's Study for Performance of Mendelssohn's Die erste Walpurgisnacht," D.M.A. diss., Indiana University, 1987, 138.

for basses, symbolically representing the first regiment joining, and on the third A, for tenors who by joining push basses to answer in a modified canon (thus another form of repetition). Lastly, this gradual thickening of the texture is matched orchestrally by different entrances in the woodwinds suggesting the numerous *Kauz und Eule* joining the march (more on the birds in chapter 6.2.). We understand their presence textually by measure 49 at the opening of the B section, now with trumpets and horns also answering each other. Finally, a last A' is heard in unison to welcome the entrance of the strings, in fluttering staccato elfin style, leading to a short coda where a gradual disappearance of instruments also visually suggests the spectrality of troops fading into the distance. Mendelssohn saves a short humoristic wink with a last dynamic 'surge' on measure 70-71, for the chorus and brass, as if a last unseen battalion passes by.

Lastly, Mendelssohn makes judicious use of the diacope, a rhetorical poetic gesture belonging to the hyperbaton family, consisting of interposing words (*diakopto*, to cut through) within a repetition to "emphasize a particular word or idea, convey an emotion state, or fulfill the demands of poetic meter."[320] Mendelssohn's decision to use a diacope to dignify the importance of the 'light' on one of the central verses of Goethe's text is therefore revealing. After a short responsorial introduction to the phrase 'who <u>would</u> rob us of your light' by the soloist and the chorus, Mendelssohn restates the phrase three times, into which '*Dein Licht*' is inserted to help focalise the divine perpetual position of light within us despite the possible robbing of exterior customs. In the final movement, Goethe changes the sentence to 'who <u>can</u> rob us of your light', leading Mendelssohn to make use instead of an anadiplosis in repeating the key word 'light', thus simply differently emphasizing it: dein Licht, dein Licht, wer kann es rauben!

[320] Cushman, ed., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms,* 147.



Chapter 6. Extra-musical Referentialities

The different dramatical elements amongst Goethe's poem, combined with Mendelssohn's fondness for the supernatural as one of the main incentives to embark on the compositional project, naturally led the composer to turn away from the more restrained Berlin aesthetic found in most of his art song, and instead move closer to stylistic aspects found in the Schubertian *Lieder-Ästhetik*, namely text-painting, even pictoriality. Said differently, given the nature of the poem and the performing forces 'acting' it, Mendelssohn had to adjust his 'textual zoom' and provide a few 'red roofs' in order to give traction to the story.[321] In fact, *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht* might very well be Mendelssohn's most descriptive work, one in which the implied textual images engendered a musical response that contained specific cases of referentiality. But moving to the more 'descriptive' side of the pendulum did not go without long hesitations and careful considerations. As discussed in chapter 3.4., Mendelssohn's approach to composition, resembling that of a funambulist balancing the three persuasive appeals, caused him a quandary with regards to employing the potentially boisterous piccolo, bass drum, cymbals and trombones:

[321] See chapter 2.5. 'Red roofs': to make use of highly and obvious descriptive music.

> "I am cloaked in uncertainty as to whether I should use the bass drum. "Prongs, pitchforks, and clappers" actually do make me inclined to use it, but moderation would make me disinclined. I am certainly the only one ever to have composed the Blocksberg without using piccolo, but I would be sorry to forgo the bass drum."[322]

Mendelssohn opted to only keep the trombones in the 1833 version, but even then, when beginning the revision of the 1842 version, he said:

> "On the 21st or 22nd we will give a concert here for the king [. . .] In the second half my *Walpurgisnacht* will be resurrected, albeit in a rather different habit than the previous version, which was fed all too generously with trombones and rather scrappily written for the voice."[323]

Mendelssohn's ambivalence and fear of disproportionate instrumentation reported in these two quotes reveals once more how much he abhorred extremes. Seaton situates this inner conflict between the 'Classicistic' and "vividly Romantic sides of his own artistic judgment."[324] However, I would argue that Mendelssohn's hesitation stemmed from the possibility of creating a precedent in using instruments that epitomized his dislike of Mayerbeer's *Robert le diable* (which has deafening trombones in the overture, followed by multiple loud interventions of the bass drum and cymbals) all the while knowing the obvious dramatic benefits in using them. To his colleague Lobe he confided: "I do not like blaring brass instruments and have never emphasized them, although I often enough had occasion to notice the effect they have on many members of the audience."[325] Fortunately, Mendelssohn opted for their inclusion in movements 5-7, thus creating a clear case of referentiality with the piccolo, bass drum and cymbals, suggesting Janissary music and a military march gradually gaining in strength as more and more

[322] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* letter no. 421. Translation located in Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 81.
[323] See *Sämtliche Briefe,* letter no. 3710. Translation located in Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night*, 81.
[324] Seaton, "The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of Die erste Walpurgisnacht," 406.
[325] Todd, *Mendelssohn and His World,* 197-198.

troops answer the druid guard's thrice-repeated invitation: "*Kommt*! *Kommt*! *Kommt*!"[326] To some extent, Mendelssohn resolved his dilemma by introducing the bass drum and cymbals in movement five with the softest dynamic allowed by the composer (*pianissimo*),[327] thus giving time to the audience to notice their presence almost imperceptibly, and also by introducing frequent pauses in the movement to avoid unnecessary auditory fatigue, and ultimately by saving the 'big *fortissimo* moment' for the arrival of witches in movement six (treated below).

6.1. A fondness for the supernatural

In some measure, Mendelssohn's inclination towards *le fantastique* can be traced back to the novelist Jean-Paul Richter, of whom Felix and the Mendelssohn siblings were *dévotés*.[328] Beginning his Grand Tour in 1829 and crossing the channel to England, Mendelssohn brought with him *Flegeljahre* (1804-5) – a work he got to know intimately, mentioning it 46 times in his complete letters – thus instigating a life-long fascination (shared by Schumann) for the novelist.[329] Mendelssohn possessed in his 1844 library the complete works of 'Jean Paul';[330] an impressive portfolio displaying novels filled with humour, satire, the bizarre, the supernatural and above all, dreams:

> "*Le rêve, dans les romans de Jean-Paul, est partout: une nostalgie du paradis le lui a fait entrevoir aussi bien dans les jardins rococos pleins de jets d'eau, de rocailles et de labyrinthes, que dans les nuits étoilées sous lesquelles ses personnages parlent de la mort, de la vie et de Dieu. Tout est métamorphosé sans cesse par le sentiment, par l'image, par des exaltations, par des magies verbales, et jamais la terre n'est apparue plus belle que chantée par ce poète, qui savait si bien s'en évader*."[331]

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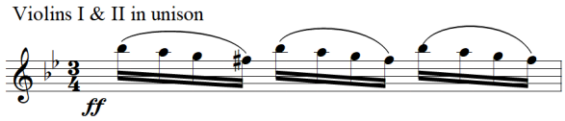
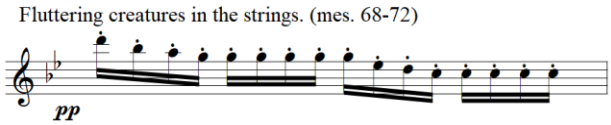
[326] Mendelssohn's understanding of Janissary music conventions is related in a letter to the publisher Simrock, in which he claims that every military orchestra knows the term 'Janissary', referring to the inclusion of the bass drum. See *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 3710.
[327] Mendelssohn "particularly disliked *ppp*", see Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn to Ignaz and Charlotte Moscheles*, 96. Also see *Sämtliche Briefe*, letter no. 866.
[328] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 165.
[329] Ibid., 202. Also see *Sämtliche Briefe*, band 12, p. 536.
[330] Jones, "The Library of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy", 294.
[331] Albert Béguin, *L'Âme Romantique et Le Rêve; Essai Sur Le Romantisme Allemand et La Poésie Française*, (2. ed. Paris: J. Corti, 1939), 187.

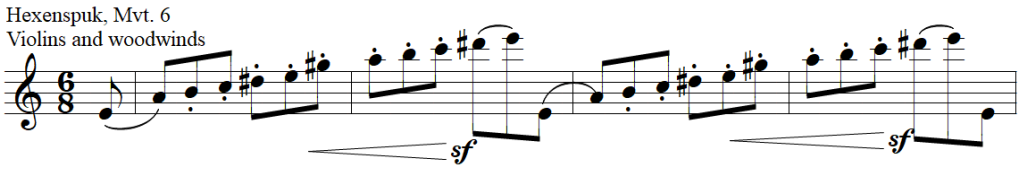
To what extent the dream encapsulated in Jean Paul's novels allowed Mendelssohn to 'escape' is hard to say, but as briefly mentioned at the onset of this case study, supernatural elements not only acted as a stimulus to compose the work, but they also found themselves in the *Walpurgisnacht* in two main extra-musical motifs analogous to the famous 'elfin scherzo style'. Foremost, we find a sixteenth note restrained motif right from the second measure, buzzing at first in the violas and cellos, outlining at one moment motive *x*, at other moments scalar, gaining momentum with the basses by measure 31, and finally passing on to the violins at measure 48. By then, it becomes a descending four-note cell strongly suggesting the steady recurrent beating of wings.



It is hard to identify precisely what Mendelssohn portrays musically, but there is certainly an element of flying, with high velocity, up and down in groups of twos and threes through the strings' register in mm. 169-180 (and other places). This motif could partially refer to witches (except for the wings). However, given that the motif reappears in the *Hexenspuk* (mvt.6), at night with 'fluttering' in the woodwinds (mes. 11-14) and more 'buzzing' in the strings in 6/8 meter (mes. 48-58), we could then certainly think of insects such as dragonflies or fireflies as fitting the description. Adding to this postulate is another motif in the strings, at the end of movement five, where troops gather, possibly at dusk, just before the *Hexenspuk*. Just as swift, the motif in the strings this time is staccato and followed by repeated notes, somewhat suggesting the phenomenal 'passive stability' of dragonflies.

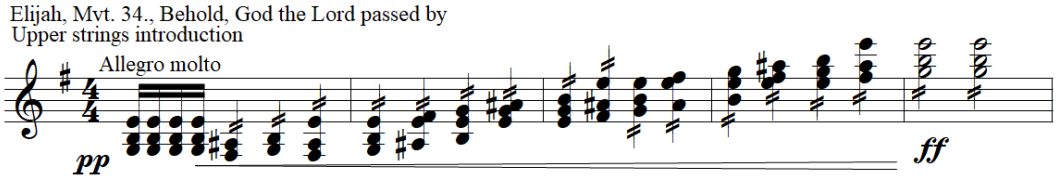


The second element pointing to the supernatural is all the more felicitous, strongly descriptive and cross-referential in the work. At the onset of the exposition of the *Hexenspuk* (mvt. 6, mes. 59), Mendelssohn introduces a most intriguing scale in the first violins, flutes, and first oboe, which accompanies the female chorus' entrance singing their melody in a 'round'. The rising A harmonic minor scale contains a raised 4 degree and no 6 degree. It outlines a Hungarian minor scale (Gypsy scale) or double harmonic minor scale, as if containing two leading tones (Ds and Gs). Mendelssohn even reinforced the mysterious overtones by placing the A and Ds on the strong beats while using a crescendo and sforzando on the Ds. On the repeat of the round at measure 91, the scale gains momentum with the addition of piccolo, first clarinet, second violins and violas on segments of the scale. It reappears briefly in the development section in G minor (mes. 215) and comes back in full force within the strings for the abridged recapitulation (mes. 251).

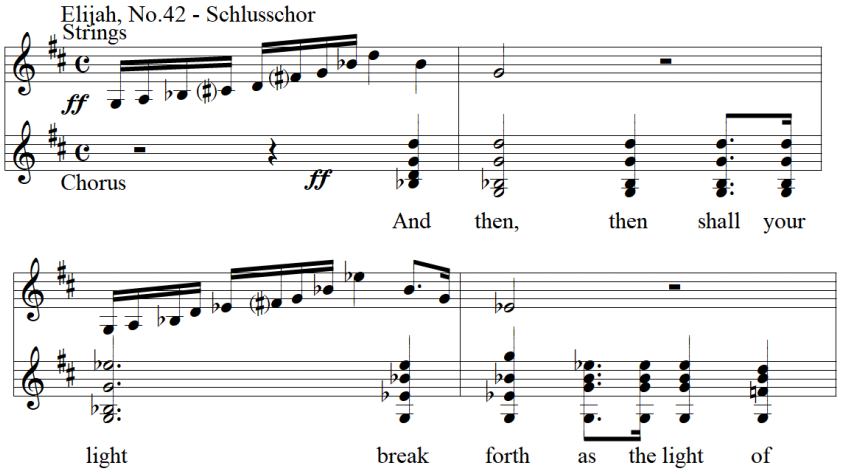


As discussed in chapter 5.2, the possibility of portraying witches is once more very strong, particularly in that the motif accompanies the entrance of female voices, using a rising and 'exotic' scale, as if from an unknown land. However, the case gets stronger upon considering the three reiterations of the motif in the later movement eight (mes. 10 in D major, mes. 14 and 16 in A minor), as Christians flee the scene thinking they saw '*Menschenwölf und Drachenweiber*' (Wolf-men and dragon-women). The motif reappears very quickly and sparsely, as if the last few creatures fly over the frightened the frightened Christians as they run away from the masquerade. Compellingly, Mendelssohn also exploited this scale in two important moments of his oratorio *Elijah*. The minor scale with raised fourth degree appears in no.34 to introduce

Elijah's famous encounter with God on Mount Horeb where three theophanies take place (great wind, earthquake, and fire). Each manifestation is introduced by the ascending scale in the strings but in tremolo, in successive E minor, B minor and C major.[332]



Just as telling is *Elijah*'s final movement, also displaying a rapid Hungarian minor scale in the strings in unison, directly referring to the work's last dramatic event of number 38: the prophet's ascent to heaven in a chariot of fire.



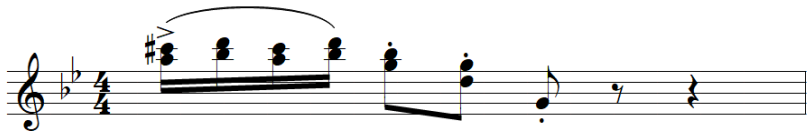
These three scenes taken from two different works act as idiosyncrasies amidst Mendelssohn's corpus, and by doing so, help us clarify the signification of these extra-musical gestures.[333] As established, the ascending scale in all three scenes points to the supernatural, but also to aerial components such as flying, the air, and the wind, taking place on or next to a mountain. Also, all three scenes refer either to light or fire in relation to darkness and lastly, all excerpts use swift and fleeting 'scherzo-like' rhythms suggesting rapid movements taking place above ground.

[332] The Hungarian major scale has a raised second and fourth degree, accordingly used in *Elijah* and *Walpurgisnacht*.
[333] To these examples, we could also surmise traces of the Hungarian minor scale in his piano trio No.2 in C minor Op.66, in which a s4 inflections lurks around in the first movement. A very similar situation occurs in the clarinet part of his incidental music *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Op.61 funeral march.

6.2. Pictorialities

Moving in closer to the implied text images, we encounter in the *Walpurgisnacht* descriptive musical motifs that aim to 'paint in tones' the object they describe, which "develop mostly from a mutual illumination of word and sound."[334] In fact, as our first example shows, some of the pictorial motifs are iconic for they resemble the object they portray. Specifically, in movement five, amidst the Janissary music of troops marching, Mendelssohn gradually introduces the hordes of strigiformes, namely *Kauz und Eule* (hoopoe and owls) as signified in the text at verse 58, following the druid's invitation to join the 'howling round'. Fluff, plumage and feathers become apparent in the woodwinds through the use of a twice rising accented neighbouring tone (inversion of motive *s*), harmonized with major thirds or minor sixths, surrounded by multiple leaps in staccatos and appoggiaturas in the piccolo. Also, Mendelssohn places the different entrances asymmetrically at first, suggesting the somewhat naturally disorganized swarm of nocturnal birds joining the *fête*. However, by the start of movement seven, the motif pervades the whole orchestra, inferring an alignment of all pagan forces, druids, guards, witches, insects and birds, now dancing in synchronicity in their 'howling round' before gradually disappearing.

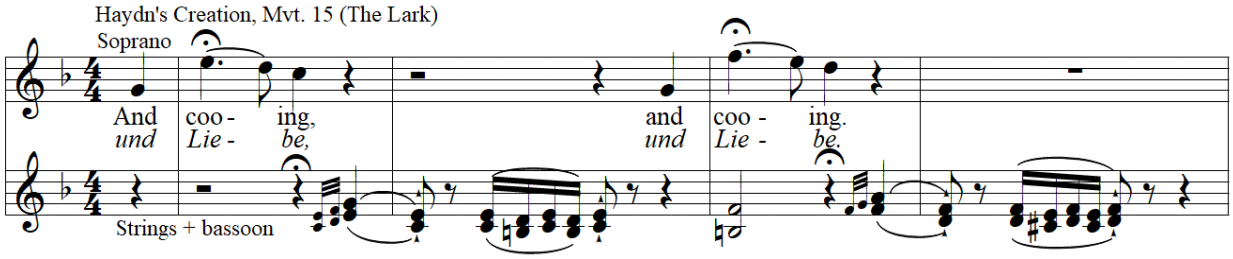
Mendelssohn's Owl's howling in the woodwinds,
particularly the flutes and piccolo (mes.38 al fine)



The motif strangely bears a resemblance to the lark cooing motif found in number 15 of Haydn's *Creation*. Mendelssohn conducted Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* on multiple occasions at different festivals (Düsseldorf, Birmingham, Second North German Musical Festival, etc.)[335] and

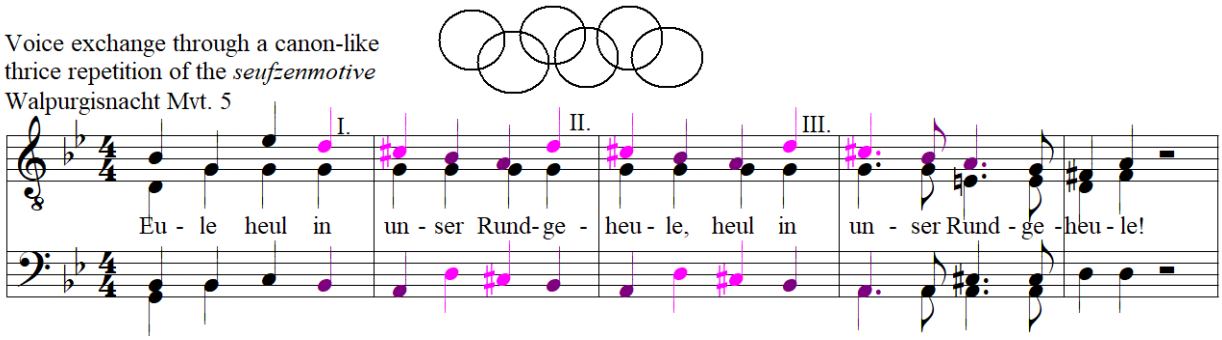
[334] Tobias Fichte, "'...Don't You Think This Could Become a New Kind of Cantata?'", 131.
[335] Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music*, 296, 364, 401, 410, 436, 515, 527.

probably sang the work at the Sing-Akademie, seeing as it was rehearsed by Zelter as early as September 1815.[336] Haydn's version is more consonant than Mendelssohn's since the neighboring tones are not accented; yet, despite differences between cooing and howling, both motifs display an onomatopoeia of birds singing in rapid thirds to visually bring their presence through sound.

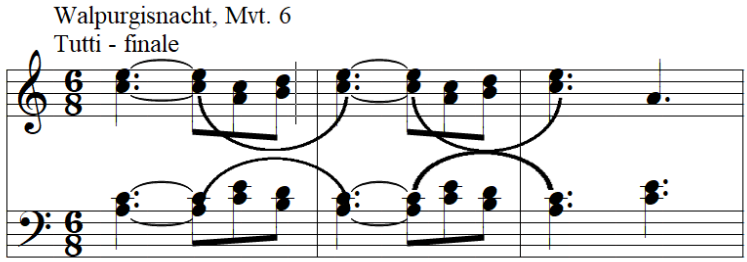


Another form of pictoriality is inferred by Mendelssohn stemming from Goethe's fabricated word '*Rundgeheule*'. The word, insinuating a *Rundtanz* (a round, but also a dance), combines both 'round' (the song) and 'howling' (from the owls). Also, *rund* (circle) describes the formal attributes of a round, meant to be sang in canon, thus repeated in circles *ad nauseam*. Mendelssohn's cyclicity (addressed in chapter 4.3) is probably the most obvious instance of the work's affinity with circles. However, two more examples are worth mentioning. Firstly, in movement five, at the end of the B segment (mes. 54-58), the tenors and basses 'act' the round in singing the rhetorical polyptoton made of three assonances '*Eule heul in unser Rundgeheule*' in a thrice repeated canon gesture involving voice exchanges and the mysterious raised s4 from its tonicization into the dominant. More pertinently, Mendelssohn here musically captures the rounded elements inferred by the text as the troops of guards march and dance in circles.

[336] Gottfried Eberle, *200 Jahre Sing-Akademie Zu Berlin: "Ein Kunstverein Für Die Heilige Musik"* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1991), 222.



Secondly, at the end of the *Hexenspuk* (mvt. 6), Mendelssohn visually displays in the chorus the completion of two half-circles united through the rhetorical gesture known as the *circulo*, two surperimposed *circuli mezzi*, consisting of a scalar motion ascending and descending a third.[337] Kramer's reading of the choruses' reunion is very suggestive: "The male and female voices seem to hurl the music back and forth before rushing together, a process that ends, like a ritualized consummation, when the choirs enter successively, basses to sopranos, to build up a final extended turn for full chorus."[338] Knowing Mendelssohn's prudish and moral nature, the musical display of pagan consummation might be a little strong, but Kramer is certainly right in mentioning the 'extended turn' as both choruses finally synchronize in the dance to 'howl' the Christians away.



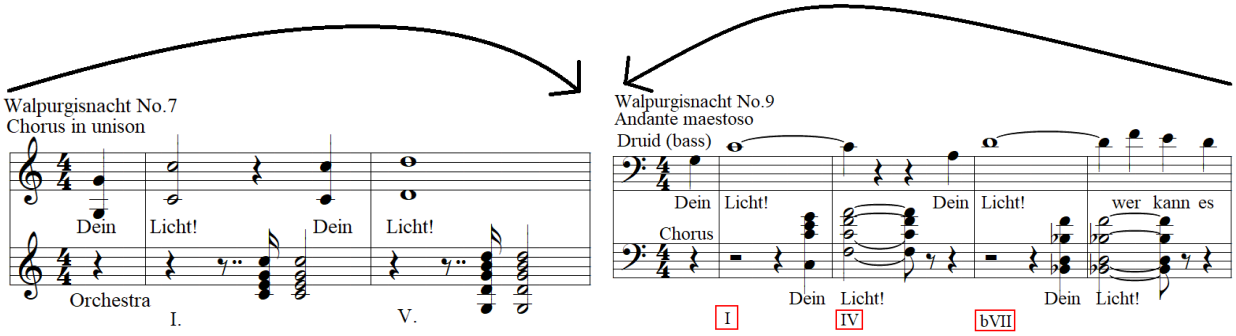
To conclude the chapter, a last pictorial case must be briefly presented regarding fire. Light in relation to darkness is at the heart of Goethe's poem, symbolized with different words including *Flamme* (flame), *Licht* (light), *Brande* (fire) and *Glut* (glow), each pertaining to the

[337] Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*, 216-217.
[338] Kramer, "Felix culpa: Goethe and the Image of Mendelssohn," 77.

pagan rituals but also, as Prandi suggests, to Enlightenment ideas.[339] Mendelssohn depicts different gradations of luminosity primarily through the choice of keys, thus following in some sense the traditional understanding of certain keys, but also his own idiosyncrasies. For instance, the passage from bad weather in A minor to the arrival of spring in the radiant key of A major both correspond to Haydn's understanding, as displayed in the A major 'holy beams' (no.2), birds, hills and verdure (no.17) of the *Creation*, or the duet 'Spring, Her Lovely Charms Unfolding' of the *Seasons* (no.9), all the while answering to Mendelssohn's own depiction of spring in his numerous *Frühlingslied* written in A or E major.[340] But more significant is the pagans' final worship in the key of C major that is intrinsically linked to the word 'light' and the worship of the divine. As Taylor noticed, the key of C major is 'indelibly' marked as the key of light since Haydn's rendition of '*und es ward Licht*' in the *Creation*.[341] Examples abound just as much in Mendelssohn's own music, where C major tends to indicate purity, light and the divine.[342] But in the *Walpurgisnacht*'s movements seven and nine, in which multiple responsorial interjections are given on '*dein Licht*', Mendelssohn interestingly portrays the dissemination of light through a circle of fifths. Starting from the divine standpoint of C major, he answers the second call on the dominant in movement seven, thus moving to the traditional 'brighter' side of the spectrum; whereas in movement nine, he answers both calls in a typically Brahmsian gesture moving to the 'flat' or 'darker' subdominant side of the spectrum. Not only does this imply again a circular motion around the tonic key with an 'all-around' radiance, but more notably, it also indicates how Mendelssohn vouched for the strength of divine light, shining through the middle of the night and darkness, granting it transcendental strength, yet accessible universality. The apostle Paul says it even more eloquently in a verse Mendelssohn knew from his work on

[339] Prandi, "Kindred Spirits," 139.
[340] Op.59, no.1, Op.8, no. 6 and 11, Op.57 No.1 to name a few.
[341] Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory*, 278.
[342] In Elijah, for instance, Mendelssohn modulates to C major in mvt. 9 for the phrase 'through darkness riseth light'. He also modulates to C major in no. 19 for the appearance of the little boy watching for the rain inferring the purity of a child, or again in no. 35, the thrice-holiness of God is portrayed in a resounding C major.

Paulus: “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”[343]



Conclusion

In this research, I aimed to ascertain different aesthetic tenets operating amidst Felix Mendelssohn’s compositional approach in order to help understand what – and especially how – the composer communicated through his music. The stakes of Mendelssohn's premise vis-à-vis music’s capabilities and signification were set high enough in Souchay’s letter: ‘but we all understand the music’. As discussed, behind Mendelssohn’s distinctive position regarding music’s communicative precision is first and foremost a composer who desired to share the strength of his ‘innermost soul’. Learning from a tradition strongly rooted in the Mendelssohn household, Felix quickly developed and mastered verbal and non-verbal communication conduits, particularly in the form of articulate, detailed, intentional, and humorous correspondence. This extended also to his use of visual arts, which allowed him to gain access to and share his interior world, grasp ideals and illustrate inexpressible feelings, thus circumventing the need for words.

[343] Bible verse, 2 Corinthians 4:6, English Standard Version.

This research also aimed to reassess Mendelssohn's peculiar relationship with words, often dismissed or hastily charged with their inability to convey precise meanings (*sprachskepsis*). Mendelssohn's correspondence and superior linguistic abilities instead unveil someone excessively aware of the multiple semantic possibilities, and therefore concerned with '*le mot juste*'. Words simply proved wanting in certain roles, namely as delegates to portray the strength and precision of an emotion or feeling, a process for which music was far more superior. Mendelssohn respected the words and music's inherent faculties – that is, their capacities and limitations – and believed they could collaborate compositionally given that they both answered to the same underlying idea or feeling, which they could articulate according to their own specificities.

Therefore, Mendelssohn's heightened sensitivity to means of communication led me to suggest another outlook to better appreciate his compositional standpoint: that of a gifted orator intently and precisely crafting his discourse. From his unique education, designed by tutors versed in Greek and Latin classical literature, Mendelssohn gained and absorbed larger rhetorical concepts. Specifically, his proximity to the writings of Cicero, Horace, and Tacitus – which he partly memorized and translated – imprinted the composer's approach to his art, observable in his concern for compositional appropriateness (*decorum*) and edifying ceremonial music (*epideictic*). To these, we discern another resolve permeating his modus operandi and resembling a funambulist act: that of keeping in tension the three persuasive appeals. Mendelssohn's dedication to equilibrize and write music containing emotional depth (*pathos*), structural clarity (*logos*), and displaying ethical and genuine ideas (*ethos*) helps explain his dislike of extremes and demonstrate how cardinal was the question of degree and balance.

From the different findings revealed by examining *Die Erste Walpurgisnacht*, four must briefly be singled out for their relevance and contribution to future research. First, this case study confirmed Mendelssohn's proximity to and love of words, particularly in the case of a text he deemed praiseworthy. His many alterations of Goethe's text – for the most part taking the form of carefully planned repetitions and syntactic modifications – indicate how much he absorbed its essence, structure, and underlying emotions, but more importantly, they exude his own interpretation of Goethe's poem, reinforcing and intensifying certain key words and ideas through powerful poetic and rhetorical devices such as the tricolon and other forms of gradation, initially absent from the text.

Secondly, Mendelssohn's mastery of cyclicity cannot be ascribed to a simple compositional strategy typically associated with the nineteenth century, but rather, it acts as a springboard for persuasion and a display of eloquence. The proficiency with which he condenses motivic cells to act as central *topoi* from which countless elaborations enfold displays a finely constructed oration, from the *exordium* to the *peroratio*. Also, the inherent feelings attached to the main cyclic motives (the ceremonial motive *x*, pathos-laden motives *y* and *s*) act as cross-references to the story that musically enable a greater dramatical force, but they especially reinforce the character and memorability of the music.

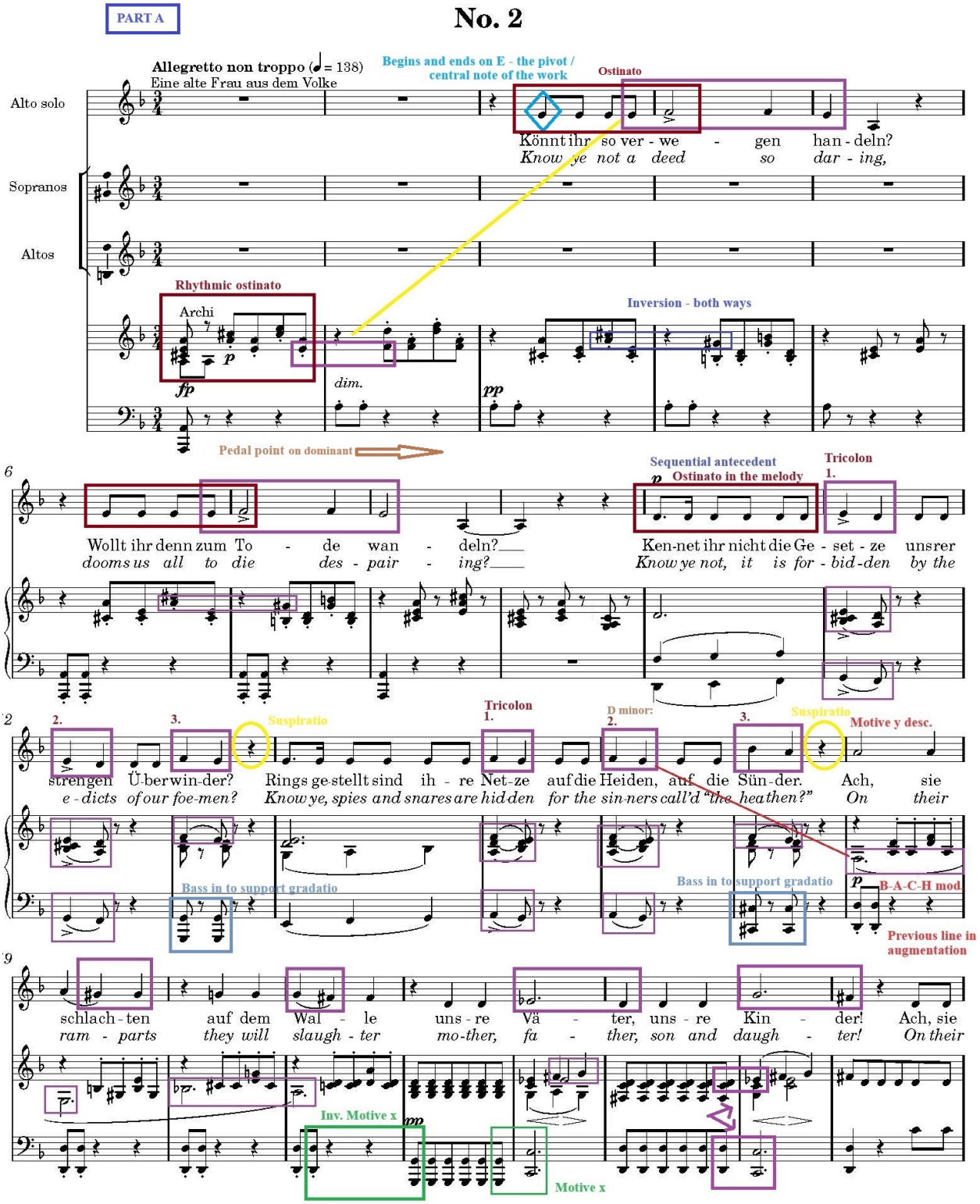
Thirdly, the omnipresence of music exuding ceremonial and epideictic qualities amidst Mendelssohn's corpus has been underrated and deserves more attention. Not only does it represent a 'Mendelssohn topic' given its numerous occurrences, but ceremonial music also acts as a an 'ambassador' displaying deeply ethical values that Mendelssohn considered preeminent to him, and also to his audience. The virtuous, the honorable, the noble and worthy of praise, in

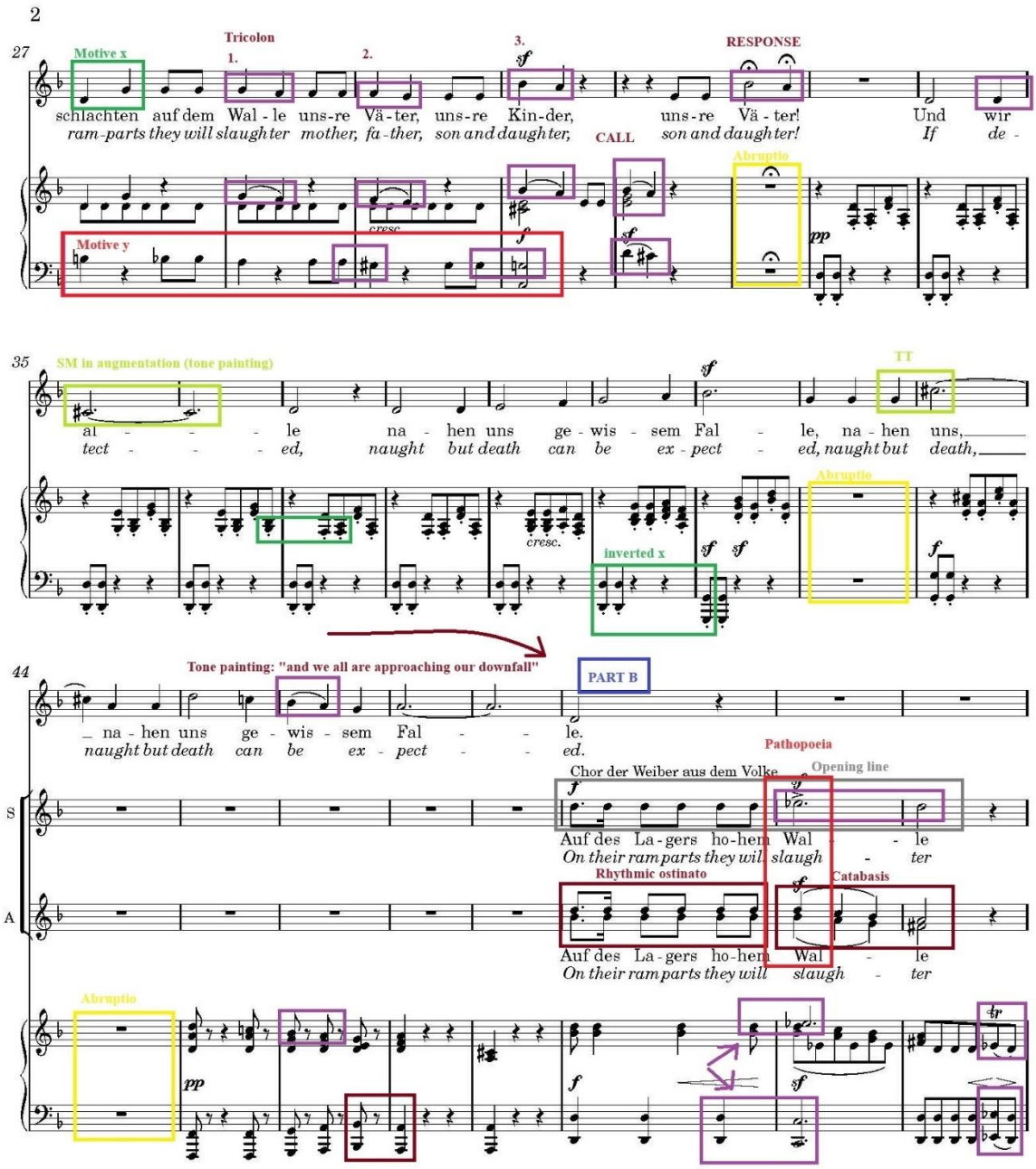
sum, what uplifts and edifies the soul, represents a signature of the composer, for whom the centrality of worship exceeded sacred music and answered to a higher call.

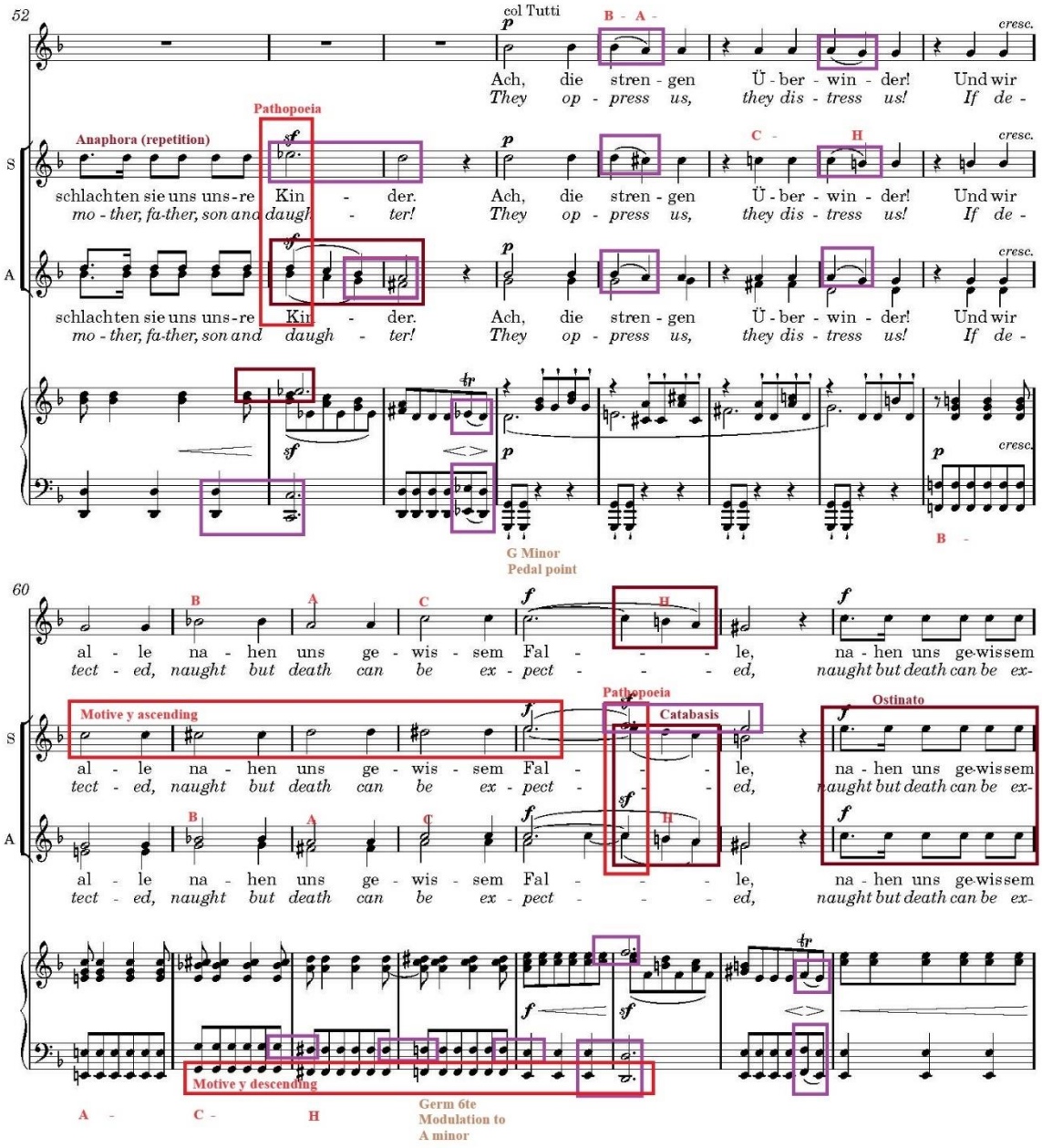
Lastly, this research illustrates that positing a complete schism between music and rhetoric after 1800 is untenable.[344] As the second movement of *Walpurgisnacht* confirms, and despite the ongoing theorization of rhetorical musical figures with Forkel, Kirnberger, Rameau and Marpurg, rhetorical principles that permeated German music history for more than 250 years naturally found their way in the music of nineteenth-century composers. The abundance of rhetorical elements, both from Classical literature and Baroque music, subtly emerge in Mendelssohn's music, particularly in his vocal-orchestral compositions, amidst a truly Romantic language, to help enhance and define his thoughts. Mendelssohn did not aim to reform art, but rather perfect his musical ideas within the bedrock of normative conventions, as established by composers before him. He did not despise 'earlier music' and 'old Classical literature'. On the contrary, he knew that, even as 'a child of his time,' the wisdom they contained could prove salutary to the road ahead.

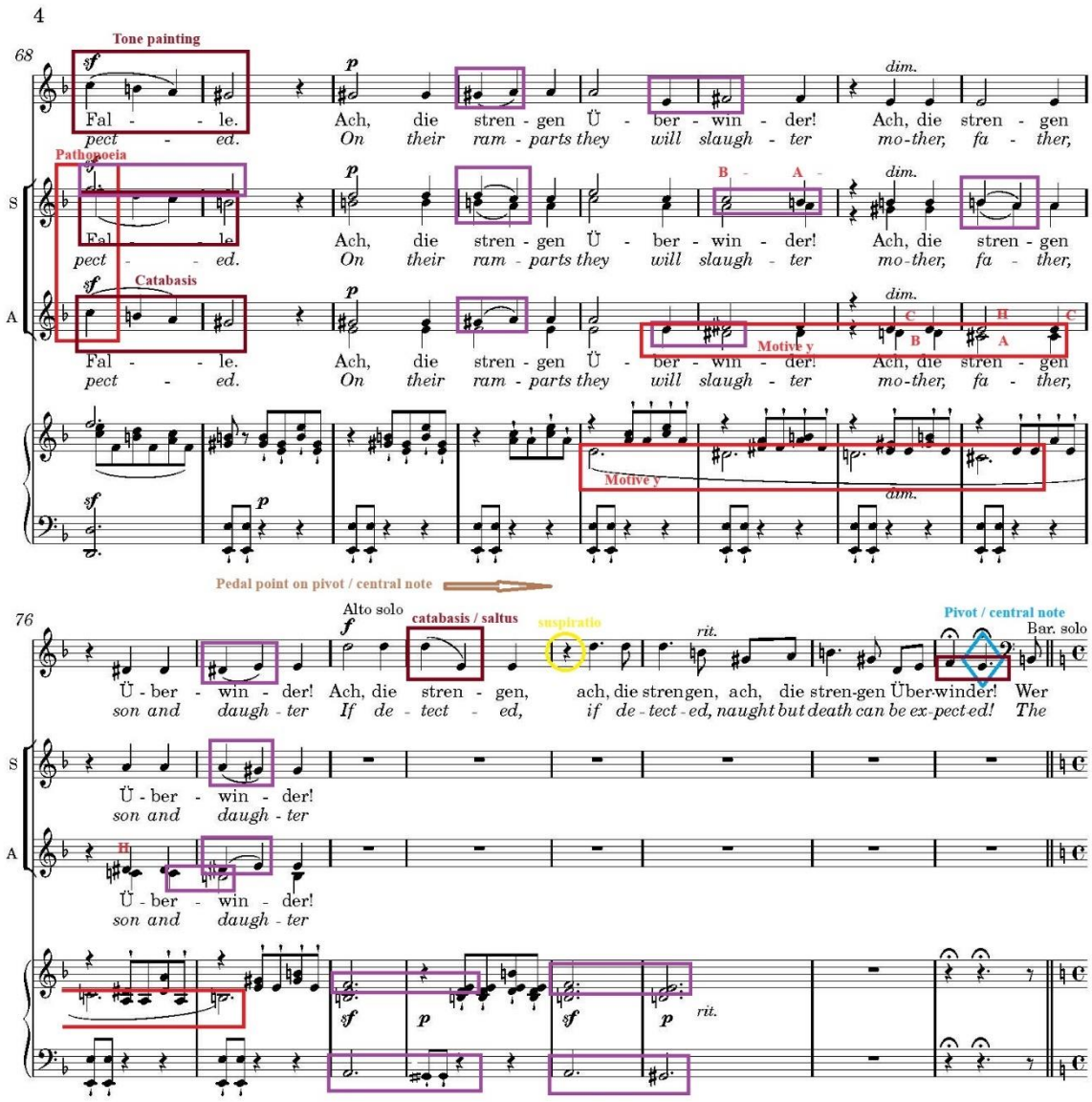
[344] Patrick McCreless, "Music and Rhetoric," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 872-876.

Appendix I


PART A
No. 2
Allegretto non troppo (♩= 138)
Eine alte Frau aus dem Volke
Begins and ends on E - the pivot / central note of the work
Ostinato
Alto solo
Sopranos
Altos
Könnt ihr so ver - we - gen han - deln?
Know ye not a deed so dar - ing,
Rhythmic ostinato
Archi
Inversion - both ways
dim.
Pedal point on dominant
Sequential antecedent
Ostinato in the melody
Tricolon
1.
Wollt ihr denn zum To - de wan - deln?
dooms us all to die des - pair - ing?
Ken-net ihr nicht die Ge - set - ze unsrer
Know ye not, it is for - bid-den by the
Suspiratio
Tricolon
D minor:
Motive y desc.
strengen Ü-ber-win-der? Rings ge-stellt sind ih - re Net-ze auf die Heiden, auf die Sün-der. Ach, sie
e - dicts of our foe-men? Know ye, spies and snares are hid-den for the sin-ners call'd "the heathen?" On their
Bass in to support gradatio
B-A-C-H mod
Previous line in augmentation
schlach - ten auf dem Wal - le uns - re Vä - ter, uns - re Kin - der! Ach, sie
ram - parts they will slaugh - ter mo-ther, fa - ther, son and daugh - ter! On their
Inv. Motive x
Motive x


2
27
Motive x
Tricolon
1.
2.
3.
RESPONSE
schlachten auf dem Wal - le uns-re Vä - ter, uns-re Kin-der, uns-re Vä - ter! Und wir
ram-parts they will slaughter mother, fa-ther, son and daughter, CALL son and daughter! If de -
Abruptio
Motive y
cresc.
35
SM in augmentation (tone painting)
TT
al - - - - le na - hen uns ge - wis - sem Fal - le, na - hen uns,
tect - - - - ed, naught but death can be ex - pect - ed, naught but death,
Abruptio
cresc.
inverted x
44
Tone painting: "and we all are approaching our downfall"
PART B
_ na - hen uns ge - wis - sem Fal - - le.
naught but death can be ex - pect - - ed.
Pathopoeia
Chor der Weiber aus dem Volke
Opening line
S
Auf des La - gers ho - hen Wal - - le
On their ram parts they will slaugh - - ter
Rhythmic ostinato
Catabasis
A
Auf des La - gers ho - hen Wal - - le
On their ram parts they will slaugh - - ter
Abruptio


52
col Tutti
B - A -
cresc.
Ach, die stren - gen Ü - ber - win - der! Und wir
They op - press us, they dis - tress us! If de -
Pathopoeia
Anaphora (repetition)
C - H
S
schlachten sie uns uns - re Kin - der.
mo - ther, fa-ther, son and daugh - ter!
A
G Minor
Pedal point
60
B A C H
al - le na - hen uns ge - wis - sem Fal - - - le,
tect - ed, naught but death can be ex - pect - - - ed,
na - hen uns ge-wissem
naught but death can be ex-
Motive y ascending
Pathopoeia
Catabasis
Ostinato
Motive y descending
A - C - H
Germ 6te
Modulation to
A minor


4
68
Tone painting
Pathopoeia
Catabasis
Motive y
Motive y
Pedal point on pivot / central note
76
Alto solo
catabasis / saltus
suspiratio
Pivot / central note
Bar. solo
Fal - - le.
pect - ed.
Ach, die stren - gen Ü - ber - win - der!
On their ram - parts they will slaugh - ter
Ach, die stren - gen
mo-ther, fa - ther,
dim.
rit.
Ü - ber - win - der!
son and daugh - ter
Ach, die stren - gen,
If de - tect - ed,
ach, die strengen, ach, die stren-gen Über-winder!
if de - tect - ed, naught but death can be ex-pect-ed!
Wer
The

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