

# When Heroes Sigh

## Sentimental Heroism in Opera Culture Around 1800

*Melanie Unseld*

One of the main discourses of the European Enlightenment dealt with the nature of man: Nearly all Enlightenment thinkers and philosophers discussed the question of what man is like ‘by nature’. This is because by turning to nature, they argued for a stable order grounded in and justified by science, a natural order that would also stabilise the social order. What had until then been legitimised only by Christian thinking now had to invoke a different basic order – and that is what nature (and the scientific confirmation) stood for. Especially considering this character of overthrow, it can be explained why the new order of the nature of man was so serious, so controversial and – in the end – so influential.

Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and many others invoked nature in this sense in order to arrive at definitions of man. From the beginning, this definition was linked to the biological sex. Nature had provided, so the consensus, precisely two biological sexes. This meant that not only was the *one-sex model*, which had previously acquired some significance, off the table, but the *two-sex model* – as given by nature – was just as unavoidable as the unambiguous characterisation of these two sexes. The difference between the sexes was naturally conceived and focussed on their criteria of difference. To mention just a few examples already known and widely discussed:<sup>1</sup> “Woman has a superior feeling for the beautiful, so far as it pertains to herself; but for the noble, so far as it is encountered in the male sex”,<sup>2</sup> as Immanuel Kant wrote in his aesthetics in 1764:

Man on the other hand has a decided feeling for the noble, which belongs to his qualities, but for the beautiful, so far as it is to be found in woman. From this it must follow that the

<sup>1</sup> See for example: Kordula Knaus, ‘Mythos Weib’. Diskurse, Kontexte und narrative Funktionen in Richard Wagners Schriften, in: Christine Fornoff / Melanie Unseld (Ed.), Wagner – Gender – Mythen (Wagner in der Diskussion; 13), Würzburg 2015, pp. 41–56.

<sup>2</sup> “Das Frauenzimmer hat ein vorzügliches Gefühl für das *Schöne*, sofern es *ihnen selbst* zukommt, aber für das *Edle*, insoweit es am *männlichen Geschlechte* angetroffen wird.” Immanuel Kant, Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen (1764), 3rd section: Von dem Unterschiede des Erhabenen und Schönen in dem Verhältnisse der Geschlechter, in: Immanuel Kant. Akademieausgabe, Vol. 2, pp. 228–243, here p. 240, <http://korpora.zim.uni-duisburg-esen.de/kant/aa02/228.html>, 7 June 2018. Emphasis in the original. English translation: Immanuel Kant, Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, trans. John T. Goldthwait, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1965, p. 93.

purposes of nature are directed still more to ennable man, by the sexual inclination, and likewise, still more to beautify women.<sup>3</sup>

During the same time period, Jean-Jacques Rousseau distinguished the sexes in a similar way. And three decades later, in 1794, Wilhelm von Humboldt formulated a similar kind of anthropology of the two sexes:

The entire disposition of the male gender is directed towards energy; this is what his force, his destructive violence, his striving for outward effect, his restlessness, are aimed at. In contrast to this, the temper of the female [gender] with its persistent strength, its inclination towards unification, its tendency to react when being acted upon and its gracious steadiness, [is directed] solely towards maintenance and thereness.<sup>4</sup>

It is not new in gender history or related disciplines to point out this difference between the sexes as being conceived as a natural order. Gender history has been occupied intensively with this for a number of years, with Karin Hausen's essay "Die Polarisierung der 'Geschlechtscharaktere'. Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben" from 1976 still being among the core texts in this debate.<sup>5</sup> Nor is it new to understand this difference between the sexes conceived as a natural order as a strong guideline for many discourses in the late eighteenth, and more intensively in the nineteenth century: mainly, all discourses of civil order – from aesthetics to the juridical discourse – can be seen as marked by it. For the field of men's studies, George Mosse underlined the heteronormative impact and its consequences for imagined masculinity. In 1996, he wrote in "The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity":

The concept of modern masculinity stood for a definite view of human nature and human actions that could serve a variety of causes and that left hardly one modern ideology untouched. Nevertheless, as a theory of human nature, it was concrete and definite enough, constituting a coherent system that can easily be examined. This is the more so, as during its relatively short life – from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards – *the manly ideal changed very little*, projecting much the same so-called manly virtues, such as will power, honor, and courage.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Der Mann dagegen hat ein entschiedenes Gefühl für das *Edle*, was zu *seinen* Eigenschaften gehört, für das *Schöne* aber, insofern es an dem *Frauenzimmer* anzutreffen ist. Daraus muß folgen, daß die Zwecke der Natur darauf gehen, den Mann durch die Geschlechterneigung noch mehr zu *veredeln* und das *Frauenzimmer* durch ebendieselbe noch mehr zu *verschönern*." Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> All English translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. "Der ganze Charakter des männlichen Geschlechts ist auf Energie gerichtet; dahin zielt seine Kraft, seine zerstörerische Heftigkeit, sein Streben nach Außenwirkung, seine Rastlosigkeit. Dagegen die Stimmung des weiblichen, seine ausdauernde Stärke, seine Neigung zur Verbindung, sein Hang die Einwirkung zu erwidern und seine holde Stätigkeit allein auf Erhaltung und Daseyn." Wilhelm von Humboldt, Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluß auf die organische Natur (1794), in: id., Werke, Vol. 1: Schriften zur Anthropologie und Geschichte, ed. by Andreas Flitner / Klaus Giel, Stuttgart 1960, pp. 227–228.

<sup>5</sup> Karin Hausen, Die Polarisierung der "Geschlechtscharaktere": Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben, in: Werner Conze (Ed.), Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas: Neue Forschungen, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 363–393.

<sup>6</sup> George Mosse, The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity, Oxford/New York 1996, pp. 3–4. My emphasis.

In the context of reflecting heroism, it is important to consider that academics such as Anne-Charlott Trepp,<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Habermas,<sup>8</sup> Martina Kessel,<sup>9</sup> Andreas Reckwitz and others have advocated in favour of a differentiation. That is because despite this very clear *essentialisation of the difference* between the sexes, it would be *wrong to assume that there was nothing but such a heteronormative discourse*. It would be likewise incorrect to assume that there was a stringent process from the Enlightenment until the modern era of the *grand récit* of heteronormativity and a dichotomy of difference between the sexes. In summary, Andreas Reckwitz clearly criticises the *grand récit* regarding the order of individuals (“*Subjekt*”) within societies:

There are indications of degendering tendencies in early bourgeois culture before 1800, and of emotionalisation, in this context, being directed at the (‘*das*’) subject within the framework of a specifically modern bourgeois strategy of universalisation, with men and women being equally addressed in a gender-neutral fashion.<sup>10</sup>

Specifically in the field of emotionality, possibilities of debating gender codes opened up: “By no means are men deprived of emotionalisation and psychologisation here; in fact, as ‘men of feeling’, they themselves provide one of the models for these processes.”<sup>11</sup>

Particularly more recent masculinity research emphasises that even the hegemonic middle class of the nineteenth century did not deal with a monotonous, downright monochrome masculinity. Although indeed, following Max Weber and Norbert Elias, “Modernisation [was] described as a ‘disenchantment of the world’ or, respectively, as an increase in affective control, and predominantly, if implicitly, applied to masculine subjects as agents of ‘occidental’ modernity.”<sup>12</sup> Martina Kessel, Manuel Borutta, Nina Verheyen and others rightly emphasise that the

<sup>7</sup> Anne-Charlott Trepp, *Sanfte Männlichkeit und selbständige Weiblichkeit. Frauen und Männer im Hamburger Bürgertum zwischen 1770 und 1840*, Göttingen 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Rebekka Habermas, *Frauen und Männer des Bürgertums. Eine Familiengeschichte (1750–1850)*, Göttingen 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Martina Kessel, *Heterogene Männlichkeit. Skizzen zur gegenwärtigen Geschlechterforschung*, in: Friedrich Jäger [et al.] (Ed.), *Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften*, Vol. 3: Themen und Tendenzen, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 372–384.

<sup>10</sup> “[Es spricht] einiges dafür, dass die frühe Bürgerlichkeit vor 1800 zu einem *degendering* tendierte und die Emotionalisierung sich in diesem Kontext im Rahmen einer spezifisch bürgerlich-modernen Universalisierungsstrategie entsprechend an ‘*das*’ Subjekt richtet, sie geschlechtsindifferent an Frauen und Männer gleichermaßen adressiert ist.” Andreas Reckwitz, *Umkämpfte Maskulinität. Zur Transformation männlicher Subjektformen und ihrer Affektivitäten*, in: id., *Unscharfe Grenzen. Perspektiven der Kulturoziologie*, Bielefeld 2008, pp. 177–196, here p. 185.

<sup>11</sup> “Keinesfalls sind Männer hier der Emotionalisierung und Psychologisierung entzogen, sie liefern vielmehr selber als *man of feeling* eines ihrer Modelle.” Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “[dass] Modernisierung als ‘Entzauberung der Welt’ bzw. als zunehmende Affektkontrolle beschrieben und sich dabei, wenn auch implizit, vorwiegend auf maskuline Subjekte als Agenten ‘okzidental’er Modernität bezogen [wurde].” Manuel Borutta / Nina Verheyen, *Vulkanier und Choleriker? Männlichkeit und Emotion in der deutschen Geschichte 1800–2000*, in: id. (Ed.), *Die Präsenz der Gefühle. Männlichkeit und Emotion in der Moderne*, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 11–40, here p. 13.

strong narratives of masculinity were to be broken up. This is particularly emphasised by the authors mentioned in terms of issues of masculinity and emotionality who note that the time period between the end of the eighteenth century and the early twentieth century was not just a “wellenförmige[s] Auf und Ab maskuliner Gefühlsproduktion und -reduktion” (a wavelike up and down of masculine emotional production and reduction).<sup>13</sup> These thoughts, breaking apart narratives of masculinity, affect reflections on heroism and gender, not only because around 1800, heroism as a gender model seemed to be linked (at least implicitly) to heteronormativity.

The following explanations are not to be understood as a re-fixing of the idea of heteronormativity in the gender discourse before and around 1800. I am not interested in corroboration of heteronormativity in this field, but rather in differentiation. This differentiation can succeed if representations of masculinity (and of femininity) are analysed with regard to their codes of the heroic. Therefore, no coincidence of masculinity and the heroic is reinforced, but the interest clearly focuses on how the heroic was used to stabilise, but also to criticise, contradict and redesign the mechanisms of gender – either as a criticism of the dichotomous sex model or also as corroboration, namely whenever heroic femininity or unheroic masculinity was held up to ridicule.

Giving two brief insights into the discourse, I mean to emphasise the differences between these examples: regionally, medially and even intentionally. This is why the two examples will not be taken for comparison but are regarded as two different forms of the discourse. With the first example, I would like to look ahead to the role of music in the masculinity discourses: In his early life, the caricaturist George Cruikshank made some caricatures in which music (or rather: scenes of musical practises and musical listening) plays an important role. One of them is entitled *Humming-birds or a Dandy Trio* (Image 1). We see three young men in an English salon. We see them singing and dreaming and abandoning themselves to music. The conspicuous attributes refer to a discourse conducted intensively before and around 1800, which found a symbol in the figure of the ‘lovesick swain’. Now these three men are on no account ‘swains’ but rather veritable dandies. And even “humming-birds” in the caption refers to a type of bird more likely to be exotic than domestic. The figure of the ‘lovesick swain’ is thus broken in a number of ways and staged as an illusion to which the three men abandon themselves; it stands for a discourse about the ‘healthy’ individual often discussed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century: the individual who is in a humoural balance in accordance with the doctrine of the temperaments and humours. Any imbalance, however, was interpreted as an excess of a certain temperament, and thus also as

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., here p. 20. For criticism, see also Reckwitz, Umkämpfte Maskulinität (Fn. 10), and Martina Kessel, Heterogene Männlichkeit. Skizzen zur gegenwärtigen Geschlechterforschung, in: Friedrich Jäger [et al.] (Ed.), Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften, Vol. 3: Themen und Tendenzen, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 372–384.



Image 1: George Cruikshank (etcher) and John S. Sheringham (draughtsman), *The Humming-Birds or A Dandy Trio*, from the *Cruikshankiana* series, published by Thomas McLean, London, etching, 1835, 229 × 328mm, BM Satires 13446 ii/ii; Cohn 212, 1216 ii/ii; Reid 895 ii/ii; Reid 895 ii/ii; Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria.

an illness. Melancholy<sup>14</sup> in particular, as an excess of ‘black humours’, was considered problematic for men, as it stood – besides for a large number of other connotations, e.g. the romantic genius – not least for the loss of manliness. The loss of manliness caused by melancholy was perceived as a social disorder, so that the ‘lovesick swain’ – while ‘lovesickness’ was seen as “one of the most problematic kinds of malady”<sup>15</sup> – can also be interpreted as an attack on social order.

Music plays an important role in this discourse<sup>16</sup> inasmuch as it is considered the means capable of fostering this disorder, as already investigated by Amanda Eubanks Winkler for the seventeenth-century English stage. She emphasises: “Music, like a beautiful woman, communicated directly to a man’s passions, which, overstimulated, supplanted his reason – the hallmark of masculinity – thereby reducing the ravished man to a womanish (i.e., overwrought) emotional state.”<sup>17</sup> Especially for men, music was considered a potential risk to self-control; thus, an excess of musical enjoyment was interpreted not only as anti-rational but as a downright attack on manliness. The ‘effeminate’ behaviour in practicing music was considered particularly problematic, with the focus especially on singing: “If the lovesick swain has completely lost his reason, he sings himself, his musical outburst making clear his effeminacy and irrationality.”<sup>18</sup> Music is an art form that renders man feminine. First and foremost, ‘effeminate behaviour’ was seen as problematic: “If the erotomaniac has not succumbed to madness, his musical outpourings of grief are foisted upon a young boy servant, an acceptable ‘feminine’ mouthpiece for the lovesick gentleman’s lament.”<sup>19</sup>

Another sheet by Isaac Cruikshank, father of George Cruikshank (see Image 2), shows a similar situation, once again linking the admiration of music, especially opera, to effeminacy: We get a look into a private opera box where a dandy has fainted and is leaning back in a chair. Three other dandies support him and a fourth closes the curtain which marks the line between the private box on the one hand and the public sphere of stage and auditorium on the other. Beyond the curtain – in the public sphere – we can see a castrato opera singer gesturing and performing on stage. The fourth supporter, who holds the curtain, imitates the singer, the stage figure of a hero. Another supporter holds a bottle of *Eau de Cologne* to the fainter’s nostrils and says, “I dread the consequence! that last Air of Signeur Nonballenas

<sup>14</sup> Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann gives a deep insight into the diversity of manifestations of melancholy around 1800, particularly reflecting the connex to music and the musician (especially: composer/genius): Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann, ‘Ein Mittel wider sich selbst’. Melancholie in der Instrumentalmusik um 1800, Kassel [et al.] 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Amanda Eubanks Winkler, *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note: Music for Witches, the Melancholic, and the Mad on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage*, Bloomington, IN 2006, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> See Wald-Fuhrmann, ‘Ein Mittel wider sich selbst’ (Fn. 14).

<sup>17</sup> Winkler, *O Let Us Howle* (Fn. 15), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Image 2: Isaac Robert Cruikshank, *A Dandy Fainting or An Exquisite in Fins*, published by George Humphrey, London, hand-coloured etching, 1818, 241 x 345mm, Chicago, Art Institute.

has thrown him in such raptures, we must call in Doctor – immediately!” The sheet caricaturises the

effeminacy and performed exaggerations of the ‘dandy’ as a type, and strengthens associations between the pursuit of fashion, the cultivation of art and aesthetic experience, and femininity or transgressive sexuality. [...] This print connects dandies to artistic commodification, effeminacy, and homosexual desire.<sup>20</sup>

These two caricatures direct our attention towards the fine links between stage and audience in general, between presentation and representation, but also between the representation of the effeminate and non-heroic eighteenth-century dandy and the representation of the heroic on stage: The dandy on the left imitates the gesture of the castrato on stage, thus imitating the gesture of the heroic. The contradiction between the representation of the heroic (on stage) and the helpless imitation of the heroic (in the opera box) makes us laugh. Both gestures, however, are marked by gender codes: on stage, the focus is on the castrato, in the opera box, on the homosexual dandy. In this discourse, music – as a practice as well as a stage performance – plays an eminent role even discernible as visual code.

My second example regards two operas which were first performed in Vienna and Hamburg and which are linked by the exemplary function the older one had for the other. Especially when compared, they are suited for shedding light on questions of heroism, sensitivity and their musical or operatic representation around 1800: on the one hand, Wolfgang Amadé Mozart’s *Zauberflöte* (which premiered in 1791 in Vienna), in particular the figure of Tamino, and on the other, Louis Spohr’s opera *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*, with a libretto by Johann Friedrich Schink, based on Francisco Antonio de Bances y López-Candamo, a Spanish writer of the seventeenth century. This opera was first performed in Hamburg in 1811. In *Der Zweikampf*, the male protagonist is named Enrique, and it is no coincidence that he seems to be related to Tamino, albeit as a counter-image elevated to heroic stature, particularly as many contemporaries recognise Spohr’s strong affinity to Mozart. Spohr himself writes in his autobiography:

[The reviewer] Schwencke wrote a comprehensive, very favourable review of the opera in which he even managed to skilfully counter the opponents’ well-founded claim that it contained many reminiscences of Mozart’s operas, as he admitted that the shape of the musical pieces as well as the entire facture were, in fact, reminiscent of Mozart, but, at the same time, tried to make this count as a virtue.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Romantic Circles Gallery, *A Dandy fainting or – An Exquisite in Fits. Scene a Private Box Opera*, <http://www.rc.umd.edu/gallery/dandy-fainting-or-%E2%80%93-exquisite-fits-scene-private-box-opera%E2%80%94>, 7 June 2018.

<sup>21</sup> “[Der Rezensent] Schwencke schrieb eine ausführliche, sehr lobende Beurteilung der Oper und wußte in dieser selbst die wohlbegündete Behauptung der Gegner, daß sie viele Reminiszenzen aus den Mozartschen Opern enthalte, mit Geschick zu bekämpfen, indem er zwar zugab, daß die Form der Musikstücke sowie die ganze Faktur an Mozart erinnere, dies aber zugleich als einen Vorzug geltend zu machen suchte.” Louis Spohr, *Selbstbiographie*, Kassel/Göttingen 1860/1861, Vol. 1, p. 147.

In comparing the opening scenes of both operas, this borrowing from Mozart's *Zauberflöte* becomes clear, as does, however, the clearly different heroic contouring of the male protagonist: Tamino has to battle a serpent, but does not take it on. He does not undertake the heroic act but is overwhelmed by his emotions (fear). In his stead, the three ladies slay the beast while Papageno is trembling with fear, too. And anyone who, up to this point, still doubts Tamino's status a sensitive hero will be convinced no later than in the "Bildnis-Arie". But what does 'sensitive hero' mean?

Following Andreas Reckwitz's reflections on modern subject culture, the second half of the eighteenth century establishes a subject culture that attempts to reform the handling of sensitivity. This special focus on emotionality does not represent, as Reckwitz convincingly contends, any contradiction to the central idea of the Enlightenment, namely rationality. On the contrary: the revaluation of rationality makes it advisable to rethink emotionality, particularly in dealing with the self and in dealing with the other. Here, *control*, or better, emotional culture, plays an essential role. Johann Georg Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* (1771) states the following:

[...] he [man] must not lose sight of the general rule of wisdom, which is not to overstep the *measure of sensitivity*. For as much as the *lack of sufficient sensitivity is a great imperfection*, insofar as it renders man stiff and idle, as much is it *harmful in abundance*, because it renders him soft, weak and unmanly. This important warning not to carry things too far seems to be required by some of our German poets in particular, who in every other respect are among the best. They seem to suffer from the delusion that the temper can never be stimulated enough. They would escalate pain into madness and desperation, repulsion into the utmost extreme of horror, any pleasure into frenzy, and every tender feeling into the dissolution of all senses. This is aimed precisely at making man into a miserable, weak thing, so overpowered by pleasure, tenderness and pain that no efficiency of power remains him, that all fortitude and all manly courage escape him.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, at the close of the eighteenth century, clear trends can be observed in the guise of, as Reckwitz summarises:

a rationalisation of the modern self which assumes a wide range of different emotions (lust, fear, wrath, grief, empathy, etc.) to be problematic and attempts to either control or altogether suppress them, and a degendering of this self, i.e. a subjectivisation in which 'gender'

<sup>22</sup> "[...] die allgemeine Regel der Weisheit muß er [der Mensch] nicht aus den Augen lassen, daß er das *Maß der Empfindsamkeit* nicht überschreite. Denn wie der *Mangel der genugsaamen Empfindsamkeit eine große Unvollkommenheit* ist, indem er den Menschen steif und unthätig macht, so ist auch ihr *Uebermaß sehr schädlich*, weil es ihn weichlich, schwach und unmännlich macht. Diese wichtige Warnung, die Sachen nicht zu weit zu treiben, scheinen einige unsrer deutschen Dichter, die sonst unter die besten gehören, besonders nöthig zu haben. Sie scheinen in dem Wahn zu stehen, daß die Gemüther nie zu viel können gereizt werden. Den Schmerz wollen sie gern bis zum Wahnsinn und zur Verzweiflung, den Abscheu bis zum äussersten Grad des Entsetzens, jede Lust bis zum Taumel, und jedes zärtliche Gefühl bis zur Zerfliessung aller Sinnen treiben. Dieses zielt gerade darauf ab, den Menschen zu einem elenden schwachen Ding zu machen, das von Lust, Zärtlichkeit und Schmerzen so überwältigt wird, daß es keine wirksame Kraft mehr behält, dem alle Standhaftigkeit und aller männliche Muth fehlt." Empfindung, in: Johann George Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, Vol. 1, Leipzig 1771, pp. 311–316, here p. 313. Emphasis in the original.

does not represent a central aspect of differentiation, and which instead subjects every person to certain performance criteria, in independence of this and other features of origin.<sup>23</sup>

To put it another way: besides naturalising the gender gap, the idea arises that emotional control is key to each subject – independent of his or her sex. The consequence of this idea admittedly is the convergence of the sexes, specifically in emotional situations. Fear is thus not weak or ‘unmanly’, but rather – in the spirit of the sensitive *hero* – the appropriate reaction to the monster. Even the *strength* of Tamino’s emotions is still too uncontrolled in the first scene. During the following trials of initiation, he must learn to control them. Thus, the trials can be understood as exercises in finding the right “Maaß der Empfindsamkeit” (measure of sensibility) between “Mangel” (lack) and “Uebermaß” (excess). Along this “Maaß”, Tamino is able to develop his own masculinity as a ‘sensitive hero’, which is not represented by physical power but by the right balance of sensitivity.

It is worth taking another look – before drawing the comparison to Spohr – at the consequences this form of sensitive emotional culture had for the female counterpart. Opera stages at all times were full of female heroines. But what changes when the male character is a ‘sensitive hero’? In line with Reckwitz’ idea of a *de-gendering* of the emotions, female figures could indeed be furnished with character traits which hitherto had a clear male connotation. But degendering does not mean the dissolution of gender, rather its renegotiation and reorganisation. Thus, while for the male character this degendering brings up a diversity of emotions, the female character is much more guided into middle-class moral standards: all these heroines can be traced back to a heteronormative accuracy of fit; the goal that the women are heroically struggling for is marriage or partnership. Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio*, for example, where one could easily comprehend this process, bore the alias title *Die ehrliche Treue* in its first version from 1805; in its second version, the opera was called *Leonore oder Der Triumph der ehrlichen Liebe*. On the other hand, however, the sensitive emotional culture raises difficulties for the female figures because they remain in a far narrower frame of emotions whenever they do not venture into the heroic. Pamina is a very clear example of this: even her attempted suicide is conceived not as a moment of strength but as an inappropriate “Uebermaß” (excess) of the emotion of grief.

But let us return to the ‘sensitive hero’ Tamino and his ‘heroic’ counterpart Enrique in Spohr’s opera *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*. It was already mentioned that the beginning of Spohr’s opera is structured in analogy to *Die Zauberflöte*. The analogy affects the scenery, the battle and the introduction of the hero and his

<sup>23</sup> “[...] eine Rationalisierung des modernen Selbst, die Emotionen verschiedenster Art (Lust, Angst, Zorn, Trauer, Empathie etc.) als problematisch voraussetzt und versucht, sie entweder zu kontrollieren oder gar nicht erst aufkommen zu lassen, und ein degendering dieses Selbst, das heißt eine Subjektivierung, für die ‘Geschlecht’ kein zentrales Unterscheidungsmerkmal darstellt und die stattdessen jeden Menschen unabhängig von diesem oder anderen Herkunftsmerkmalen bestimmten Leistungskriterien unterwirft.” Reckwitz, Umkämpfte Maskulinität (Fn. 10), p. 178.

servant. But unlike Tamino's first appearance, Enrigue is energetic and ready for battle: not only does he make fun of his fearful servant Decio, ridiculing him for his timidity, but he battles four poachers, winning confidently and courageously. The music underlines this setting. Enrigue's part is characterised by large intervals in the melodic line and a rather distinct rhythm. Decio as the counterpart is characterised by quick and tremulous notes. In the orchestra we hear the sound of clanking swords (Image 3 a-c). So whilst Tamino as the male protagonist is unambiguously drawn as a sensitive hero, Spohr's Enrigue appears to be virile and pugnacious in the beginning of the opera. He is the Spanish hero contesting for his honour and his love. The emphasis on his nationality is accompanied with a Don Juanism, here standing for bravado and virility. Spohr's contemporaries were thus definitely able to read the opening scene as a superimposition of the Tamino figure with the Don Giovanni figure. The counterpart who registers she has won the fight is Isabella, who appears, however, disguised as a man. Isabella pretends to be Don Rosardo, Prince of Aragon, and on the spot imitates the bearing of the Spanish prince: it is his/her wounded honour that she wants to restore in the duel.<sup>24</sup> The opera's basic conflict arises from this motive of wounded honour, together with the *gender-cross-dressing* figure<sup>25</sup> of Isabella. Especially in this way, there arises a particular gender-contouring and heroic-contouring of the two protagonists Enrigue and Isabella. Princess Mathilde, the second main female figure of the opera, in contrast, is clearly characterised as a sensitive woman.

When we take a closer look at the music, we see that Enrigue and Isabella are 'dressed' musically in a very similar manner, meaning that they both receive distinctive melodic lines with frequent large intervals, strident rhythms, exposed dynamics and an orchestral accompaniment roiling in rapid note values, underscoring the emotional restlessness. (These musical parameters are structured not least in contrast to the Mathilde figure.) As an example, consider the finale of the second act (Image 4 a-c), where we can see how the two figures are similarly managed musically; the scene features the duel between Enrigue and Isabella alias Don Rosardo. Enrigue, Isabella and the men accompanying her reflect on battle as a 'masculine game' in a melodic phrase that jumps from figure to figure without changing its essential structure. Isabella is thus not differentiated compositionally from the other male figures in any way. And as the opera progresses, it is she who takes on the characteristic style of aggressive music or even invokes it: complete with mimicry in sound of clanking swords, march rhythms and, again and again, strikingly large intervals. Isabella approaches thus to the heroic-masculine concept while Enrigue retires: Spohr lavishes him with self-doubt, clearly highlighted in the libretto and just as clearly in the musical score which has plenty of sigh motives, making Enrigue appear

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ute Frevert, *Ehrenmänner. Das Duell in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Munich 1991.

<sup>25</sup> For a wide discussion of gender-cross-dressing figures, see Kordula Knaus, *Männer als Ammen – Frauen als Liebhaber. Cross-gender Casting in der Oper 1600–1800* (Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft; 69), Stuttgart 2011.

die Beine heben,  
k<sup>h</sup>mn' ich nur die Beine heben, fort lief' ich wie schneues Wild!

wir? nun gilts dem Leben!

Blut um Blut! um Le = ben

Bald hift du des To = des

Bald hift du des To des

cresc.

§

Image 3 a: Louis Spohr, *Der Zweikampf der Geliebten. Oper in drei Aufzügen*, piano reduction by Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwenck, Hamburg, c. 1813, except from “No. 1 Introduzione”, p. 20.

21

Leben! wol = len fehn, wol = Ich fehn, wenn es gilt!

Könn' ich nur die Beine heben, könn' ich nur die Beine heben, fort ließ' ich, wie scheues Wild

Bild! bald biss du des To = des Bild! bald biss du des To = des

Bild! bald biss du des To = des Bild! bald biss du des To = des

Bild! bald biss du des To = des Bild! bald biss du des To = des

Bild! bald biss du des To = des Bild! bald biss du des To = des

Bild! bald biss du des To = des Bild! bald biss du des To = des

Bild! bald biss du des To = des Bild! bald biss du des To = des

S

Image 3 b: Ibid., p. 21.

[Image 3 c; Ibid., p. 22.

84. Galton.  
Ha! da find Freja schon.  
Wohlan dann! zu Werke.  
Verüchten wir beide des Männerzumes!

RECIPIENT:  
Stärke, ich liebe das kekke das männliche Spiel.

Enriquie.  
Be =

Isabelle.  
Gaston.

reit es zu wagen ent= hblöfs' ich den Degen. Ich wer = fe dem Kampfe, der droht, mich ent = gogen.

wie Sie be = lieben, mir wär's nicht zu viel, nach Ih = rem Be = lieben, mir wind's nicht zu viel.

Image 4 a: Ibid., excerpt from "No. 9 Finale" [act 2], p. 84.

85

*Gaſton.*

*Mabelle.*

*Enrige.*

*Ich.* hab' ihm ge : ſo : = dert. Ich wer : de mich ſchla : = = gen. Ich

*bit : te dic* Her : ren ſich erft zu ver : tra : gen; mit wem ich he : gin = ne den rühm : liichen Straus, ich

*Enrige.*

*Mir* ga : ben Ihr Wort — Sie; mir mü : fren ſie's hal : = ten; mit

*bit : te die* Her : ren ſich erft zu ver : tra : gen; mit wem ich he : gin = ne den rühm : liichen Straus; ich

S

Image 4  
b: Ibid., p. 85.

[Image 4 c: Ibid., p. 86.]

as a *crying hero* at the moment before the duel (Image 5). In addition, the audience knows that he will be embarking on a duel against a woman, so that – according to duelling rules – the duel cannot lead to a restoration of his honour. By admitting his guilt at the moment of the duel, Enrigue follows the sentimental emotional culture. Unlike Don Giovanni, for whom adherence to the heroic-virile concept of masculinity results in death, Enrigue can confess his guilt, transform his virile heroism into a sentimental heroism and thus win back his beloved Isabella.

That these ambivalent concepts of heroism in the figures of Isabella and Enrigue – on the one hand, the gender-crossing heroism in the female figure, on the other, the changing heroism in the male figure – caused turmoil on stage was extensively described by Spohr in his autobiography:

Long before commencing my work, I had carefully inquired with Herr Schwencke about the vocal range and ability of the Hamburg singers and arranged the major parts of the opera accordingly. However, since I was lacking any experience in this respect, I had neglected to have the singers' personalities described to me, and it had thus come to pass that for Madame Becker, a small and frail figure, I had written the part of Donna Isabella who, dressed as a man, confronts her unfaithful lover at the court of Princess Mathilde and eventually challenges him to duel to the death. So long as she was not familiar with the rest of the opera apart from her own part, Madame Becker was very content and commenced rehearsing the latter with great eagerness. However, as soon as she had read the book, she declared that she could not take the part, as she would end up making a complete fool of herself.<sup>26</sup>

Madame Becker's refusal reveals that with the concept of a sensitive hero as the counterpart to a strong heroine, firstly, the constellations of characters were fundamentally affected, above all the concepts of the female characters, and secondly, the sensitive hero held particularly high potential for confusion. Similarly to the 'lovesick swain', the genre borders evidently blurred so much in this heroic disposition of the figures of Isabella and Enrigue that the prima donna had to fear for her reputation. And here, the place of performance is not completely insignificant. As Birgit Kiupel has worked out, there was a particularly extensive thematisation of love as war at the Hamburg Opera of the early eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Spohr's

<sup>26</sup> "Ich hatte mich, bevor ich meine Arbeit begann, bei Herrn Schwencke nach dem Stimmumfang und der Fähigkeit der Hamburger Sänger zwar sorgfältig erkundigt und die Hauptpartien der Oper danach eingerichtet. Da es mir aber noch an aller Erfahrung in diesen Dingen fehlt, so hatte ich versäumt, mir auch die Persönlichkeit der Sänger beschreiben zu lassen, und so war es geschehen, daß ich für Madame Becker, eine kleine, zarte Figur, die Partie der Donna Isabella geschrieben hatte, die in Männerkleidung ihren ungetreuen Geliebten am Hofe der Fürstin Mathilde aufsucht und ihn zuletzt in Ritterrüstung zum Zweikampf auf Leben und Tod herausfordert. Madame Becker war, solange als sie von der Oper nichts kannte als ihre Partie, höchst zufrieden und begann das Einüben derselben mit großem Eifer. Sobald sie aber das Buch gelesen hatte, erklärte sie, die Rolle nicht übernehmen zu können, weil sie sich damit total lächerlich machen würde." Spohr, *Selbstbiographie* (Fn. 21), p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Birgit Kiupel, *Zwischen Krieg, Liebe und Ehe. Studien zur Konstruktion von Geschlecht und Liebe in den Libretti der Hamburger Gänsemarktoper (1687–1738)*, Kenzingen 2010.

125

Nº 12. Enigma.

RECHTAT:

All' maestoso

Die Ehre! Ha! wo ist ein Mann, den jemals höher sie ge= götzen?

Stand sie bis jetzt nicht unbescholt? a tempo.

Doch

wer? wer? fiel sie ungeahndet an?

Recit.

fest! zwei felhaft ter Wangen, wenag an scheiden, wen magen - scheiden was ich soll? ich bin entehrt, wenn schmäh'ßt es gegen

ehrt, wenn ich den Kampf verfrage; bei jeder Wahl ist ach — mein Leben schändervoll!

Aria.

Allegro.

Image 5: Ibid, excerpt from "No. 12. Recit: ed Aria", p. 125..

*Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*, a composition commissioned by the Hamburg Opera some decades later, is still in this tradition. The character Enrige is thus a particularly striking example of the configuration of a sensitive hero, and at the same time of its potential for confusion on the opera stage.

### *Image credits*

Image 1: © National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Mr. B. Moore, 1899 (4203.13-3).

Image 2: © Art Institute Chicago. Gift of Thomas F. Furness in memory of William McCallin McKee, 1928.1225.

Image 3: Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwencke, *Introduzione Nr. 1*, vollständiger Clavierauszug aus *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*, Oper in drey Aufzügen von Louis Spohr, Hamburg, 1813, pp. 20-22.

Image 4: Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwencke, *Finale of the 2<sup>nd</sup> act*, vollständiger Clavierauszug aus *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*, Oper in drey Aufzügen von Louis Spohr, Hamburg, 1813, pp. 84-86.

Image 5: Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwencke, *Recitativ und Arie Nr. 12*, vollständiger Clavierauszug aus *Der Zweikampf mit der Geliebten*, Oper in drey Aufzügen von Louis Spohr, Hamburg, 1813, p. 126.