

FROM MYTHOLOGY TO SOCIAL POLITICS:
GOETHE'S *PROSERPINA* WITH MUSIC
BY CARL EBERWEIN

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The monodrama, *Proserpina* (1786), by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), is little known in literary or musical circles today. Until Wolfgang Rihm's recent musical realisation of Goethe's text for soprano, choir and chamber orchestra (2008), the monologue (with choral interjections by the Fates) was largely unperformed and neglected in Goethe philology.¹ In direct contrast to the resounding silence of this reception is the considerable meaning the melodrama held for the poet, its composers – Baron Karl Siegmund von Seckendorff (1744–1785) and Carl Eberwein (1786–1868) – and contemporary audiences. That Goethe was preoccupied with this little masterpiece for almost forty years makes this neglect by

¹ Lorraine Byrne Bodley's edition of *Proserpina: Goethe's Melodrama with Music by Carl Eberwein* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007) was performed in Dublin (National Concert Hall, Earlsfort Terrace, D2) on 30 November 2007 by the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonic Choir conducted by Gerhard Markson, with the German actress Elfi Hoppe as Proserpina. Byrne Bodley's piano reduction was performed in London (Guildhall School of Music and Drama) on 13 November 2009; her orchestral edition of Goethe's *Proserpina* was again performed by the Thüringer Symphoniker Saalfeld-Rudolstadt on 5 June 2010 in the Heidecksburg castle (Rudolstadt, Germany), with a repeat performance on 11 June in the Schlosskapelle Saalfeld (Germany). The premiere of Rihm's settings took place on 2 May 2009 in the Rococo theatre in Schwetzingen (Germany). For reviews of the performance, see Alexander Dick, 'Orgasmus mit dem Granatapfel', *Badische Zeitung*, 4 May 2009 <<http://www.badische-zeitung.de/klassik-rezensionen/orgasmus-mit-dem-granatapel--14567587.html>>, accessed 5 December 2015; Uwe Schweikert, 'Schönheitstrunken gegen die Wand', *Opernwelt*, 7 (2009), 9 and *Opernwelt Jahrbuch* (2009), 36 and Christine Lemke-Matwey, 'Proserpina: Plötzlich Prinzessin', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 4 May 2009 <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/buehne-alt/oper-proserpina-ploetzlich-prinzessin/1502986.html>>, accessed 5 December 2015.

scholars all the more astonishing. Why has this miniature masterpiece been forgotten? What can this mythical tale tell us about changing conceptions of gender identity in the nineteenth century? How does the interplay between myth and musical setting reflect the social and cultural context? And what can the literary and musical reception of this ancient myth mean for us today?

The revival of mythography and the remaking of *Proserpina*

The story of Proserpina's rape² by the god of the dead and her mother's overwhelming grief resonates with such intense feeling that it resounds with contemporary audiences. Children find in the myth their worst nightmare come to life: forced separation from their mother at the hands of an abductor. Adults find in it a representation of their own experiences of traumatic loss and grief. Women find their life experiences and emotional responses valorised rather than dismissed because both are presented in the myth as a serious viable subject for narrative. The resonance of the myth extends far beyond the personal to the cultural, the locus of so much post-modern inquiry. Tracing the Proserpina myth from its shadowy beginnings in pre-recorded history to its earliest written narratives and beyond, we discover this mythical text is a fascinating inscription of religious, social and cultural history. It is a palimpsest that unveils central changes in the relationship between human beings and the natural world, as well as major shifts in the economy of social power over the millennia.

The earliest written narratives of the Proserpina myth, from which all subsequent versions derive, animate a watershed cultural event: the replacing of the predominant matriarchal worship of the Great Goddesses of the earth (Demeter, Persephone) in ancient Greece by the patriarchal worship of the Olympian gods. These versions of the myth vivify the social codes of patriarchy, codes that have been passed down to Western societies as part of their Hellenic heritage. One of the patriarchal values reproduced in the myth is male dominance of women: the separation of daughter and mother through male agency, the violation of the girl, and the mother's anger are all played out against a backdrop of the politics of patriarchy. The strong response of Western women to the Proserpina myth arises in large part from its mythical presentation of women's struggle to

² Proserpina is the Roman version of the Greek Persephone; throughout the course of this chapter, I have used the Roman nomenclature as the chapter examines Carl Eberwein's setting of Goethe's *Proserpina*.

gain identity and voice in societies dominated by men.³ In all ages this mythical narrative provides an ideal nexus for reflecting upon the slow, difficult alteration in the position of women in society and, in particular, the relationship between the mother and daughter.

As Margot K. Louis notes, '[i]nterest in goddesses generally revived in the early nineteenth century because of the cultural shifts created by Romanticism':⁴ the great challenge of replacing the Christian mythos that had dominated the imaginative core of Western culture until the late eighteenth century; the reviving reverence for the material world and its seasonal cycles; the celebration of the Eternal feminine; and the profound connection between German mythography and musical literature. In addition to the religious and social upheavals inscribed in the Proserpina myth, we can also trace a corresponding epistemological change. As Elizabeth T. Hayes identifies, '[t]he rationalist, Apollonian epistemology underlying patriarchal cultures embodies a deep distrust of all things non-rational – the natural, the physical, the intuitive, the emotional' – all of which are equated with an inferior feminine 'other'.⁵ In the Proserpina myth we find a paradigmatic form for 'the restoration of the non-rational to a position of equality in the consciousness'.⁶

Clearly the socio-cultural and political resonance the Proserpina myth held in the Romantic period is the reason that Western artists in this and other eras have re-enacted it again and again in the visual, poetic, dramatic and musical arts. The story is primarily known to us through literature. The deeply religious Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, Ovid's secularised version of the tale in *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, and Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* are the most influential sources. From these sources writers have repeatedly recreated the 'images' of the archetype, and recurrent narrative patterns, imagery and symbols reappear. As Hayes identifies:

In the strictest Jungian sense, the Proserpina myth is one of many literary images of the archetype. In critical practice, however, the classical-period myth, as the original written narrative of the Proserpina story, is the prototype for all later Proserpina narratives. [...] In literary works modelled

³ For further discussion of this theme, see Elizabeth T. Hayes, 'The Persephone Myth in Western Literature', in Elizabeth T. Hayes (ed.), *Images of Persephone: Feminist Readings in Western Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 2.

⁴ Margot K. Louis, *Persephone Rises, 1860–1927. Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), ix.

⁵ Hayes, *Images of Persephone*, 2.

⁶ *Ibid.* 3.

even loosely on the Proserpina myth, the recurrent narrative patterns and symbols become the ground for negotiation of meaning among writer, text and reader.⁷

Like all texts, literary and musical images of the Proserpina myth are located within identifiable cultural constructs that can be examined for their political implications. The image of Proserpina reflects where its author and composer situate themselves within – or outside of – those cultural constructs, particularly on issues of gender politics. Just as it is essential in mythography to see how a myth operates within its cultural context, it is essential in musicology to see how a mythical allusion operates within that text's cultural context. The text borrows from the myth and comments on its significance and malleability within its own cultural context. The intertextual play between myth and image informs and shapes the reading of the image, as Goethe's and Eberwein's readings vividly demonstrate.

Goethe's *Proserpina*: The meaning of death and the value of life

Many reasons have been proffered for Goethe's preoccupation with the myth of Proserpina. Wilhelm Bode identifies *Proserpina* as the poem which Goethe wanted to write – on Wieland's mediation – to mark the death of Gluck's beloved niece, Nanette.⁸ Hartmut Reinhart connects the monodrama with the unhappy marriage of the Duchess Luise⁹ and also suggests that Goethe wanted to write a star role for Corona Schröter (1751–1802),¹⁰ who first performed the monodrama in the ducal theatre of Weimar. Nicholas Boyle identifies in the melodrama an undercurrent of mourning for Cornelia Goethe, who died suddenly on 8 June 1777 at the age of twenty-six.¹¹ Goethe's reaction to the loss of his sister was one of

⁷ Ibid. 5.

⁸ Wilhelm Bode, *Die Tonkunst in Goethes Leben*, ii (Berlin: Mittler, 1912), 80.

⁹ Karl Richter et al. (eds.), *Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, 2/i: *Erstes Weimarer Jahrzehnt 1775–1786*, ed. Hartmut Reinhart (Munich: Hanser, 1998), 625; hereafter referred to as *Münchener Ausgabe: MA*. See also Wolfgang Kayser, 'Anmerkungen des Herausgebers zu *Proserpina*' in *Goethes Werke – Hamburger Ausgabe* ed. Erich Trunz, iv: *Dramatische Dichtungen II* (Hamburg: Beck, 1981), 599; hereafter referred to as *HA*.

¹⁰ Kayser, 'Anmerkungen des Herausgebers zu *Proserpina*', 626.

¹¹ Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and his Age*, i: *The Poetry of Desire (1749–1790)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 314. For further readings of this

dark despair. ‘Dunckler zerrissner Tag’ (Dark lacerated day), he wrote in his diary.¹² Weeks later, in a letter to Augusta Stolberg he wrote: ‘Alles geben Götter die unendlichen | Ihren Lieblingen ganz | Alle Freuden die unendlichen | Alle Schmerzen die unendlichen ganz’ (The gods give everything | to their favourites | Boundless joy | Infinite sorrow).¹³ And to his mother he confided: ‘Mit meiner Schwester ist mir so eine starcke Wurzel die mich an der Erde hielt abgehauen worden, dass die Äste, von oben, die davon Nahrung hatten auch absterben müssen’ (With my sister I have had so great a root struck off which bound me to the earth that the branches up above that had their nourishment from it must die also).¹⁴ The poet’s search for solace in art is suggested by the manic creativity of the ensuing months in which he worked simultaneously on the prose edition of *Iphigenie* (1779); a reworking of Aristophanes’ *Die Vögel* (The Birds, 1780); on the satirical play *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* (The Triumph of Sensibility, 1778); and on the conclusion of Book One of *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung* (Wilhelm Meister’s Theatrical Mission, 1779). In these months Goethe not only wrote the first versions of the lyric poem *An den Mond* (*Füllest wieder’s liebe Tal*) (To the Moon, 1778), the gnomic hymn *Harzreise im Winter* (Harz Journey in Winter, 1778), and the ballad *Der Fischer* (The Fisherman, 1778), but also compiled the first collected edition of his poems.¹⁵ When one takes into account the multifaceted nature of his positions as Court Minister, Privy Councillor and Director of the Weimar Court Theatre, the prolificacy of these months becomes even clearer. It was against this backdrop that his first prose edition of *Proserpina* was conceived.¹⁶

interpretation, see Edwin Redslob, ‘Goethes Monodram, “Proserpina” als Totenklage für seine Schwester’, *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, NF 8 (1943), 252–269.

¹² Entry dated 16 June 1777, in *Goethe Tagebücher*, ed. Jochen Golz, i (Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1998), 121. All translations in this article are the author’s own.

¹³ Goethe to Augusta Stolberg, 17 July 1777, in Sophie von Sachsen (ed.), *Goethes Werke*, iv/5: *Goethes Briefe. Weimar Schweiz Weimar: 1. Januar 1779 – 7. November 1780* (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1888), 165; hereafter referred to as *WA*.

¹⁴ Goethe to his mother, Katherina Elizabeth Goethe, 16 November 1777, *ibid.* 186.

¹⁵ Goethe, *Erste Weimarer Gedichtsammlung* (1778).

¹⁶ The Frankfurt edition of Goethe’s *Proserpina* follows the first publication of the text in the accompanying booklet for the Weimar Court performance on 31 January 1778. See Dieter Borchmeyer et al. (eds.), *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, i/5: *Dramen II*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer and Peter Huber (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988), 65–68; hereafter referred to as *Frankfurter Ausgabe: FA*. The most recent

The desire Goethe harboured to erect an artistic memorial to his sister Cornelia¹⁷ coincided with the public discovery of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in 1777, when a fifth-century copy was found in a Moscow stable.¹⁸ This anonymous text (Homeric in style, not in authorship), which dates to the sixth or seventh century BC, provided the poet with a vessel into which he could pour his grief. Since his work on the Promethean complex and first reflections on the *Iphigenie* theme, the subversion of heavenly powers was, for the poet, a central concern of human existence. As early as autumn 1774, Goethe articulated very forcefully the revolt against divine arbitrariness in *Prometheus*, the insurgent tone of which reverberates in the prose edition of *Iphigenie*, where he writes: 'Es fürchte die Götter das Menschen-Geschlecht sie haben Macht und brauchen sie, wie's ihnen gefällt' (Let the human race fear the gods. They have power and use it as they please).¹⁹ This theme of divine despotism is central to *Proserpina*, where his primary concern is demonstrated in the title figure, whose destiny 'die sie unauflöslich dem Orcus verhaftet' (imprisons her inextricably in the underworld) and which 'plötzliche Entscheidung in ihrem Innersten fühlt' (she feels as a sudden deep decision in her).²⁰ Such passages reflect an Epicurean vision of the gods as represented by the Roman materialist Lucretius in *De rerum natura* (On the Nature of Things),²¹ who believed that as pain is produced by the operation of natural law it is immaterial to blame the gods, who are indifferent to human suffering.²²

Pluto's embrace of Proserpina is one of many depictions of rape by the Olympian gods whereby the heroine is portrayed as a victim. The Proserpina myth lent itself to numerous treatments²³ more particularly in the vis-

edition of Goethe's text in the Munich edition of Goethe's works follows its second publication in the *Teutscher Merkur*, 1778. See *MA*, ii/1, 161–164.

¹⁷ See *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, *HA*, ix, 228–229.

¹⁸ Nicholas James Richardson, 'Introduction', in Nicholas James Richardson (ed.), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 65–66.

¹⁹ *WA*, i/39, 386 (prose version).

²⁰ Goethe, 'Proserpina', *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode*, 30 (April 1815), n.p.n., and Goethe, 'Proserpina', *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände*, 136 (8 June 1815), n.p.n.

²¹ Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, II. 1–6 and III. 18–22.

²² See Louis, *Persephone Rises*, 14–15.

²³ Pausanias, for example, recounts a tale of Demeter's rape by Poseidon. In an effort to escape the pursuing god, Demeter turned herself into a mare, but Poseidon turned himself into a stallion and raped her, begetting a daughter and steed, Arion. Another variant has Demeter raped by Zeus when she appealed to him to save her from Poseidon. In her effort to escape Zeus, Demeter changed herself into a cow, but Zeus changed himself into a bull. Orphic mythology contains a similar rape,

ual arts,²⁴ thus giving us not only multiple representations of the rape itself, but also a detailed narrative of the conflicts that different periods recognised in the myth and of the solutions they proposed. Underscoring the realism of Bernini's *Ratto di Proserpina* (Rape of Proserpina, 1622) and Girardon's *Enlèvement de Proserpine par Pluton* (Abduction of Proserpina by Pluto, 1699) is the truncated narrative of a man's victory over a woman's resistance to love. Beyond the eroticism of these representations, the artistic fascination with the rape scenes embodied a compelling fantasy of order in relationships between men and women. In that respect the myth of Proserpina holds particular significance, for it is one of the few myths setting rape in a sociopolitical context: that of the family which Jupiter illegitimately created with Ceres, on the one hand, and, on the other, that of the political alliance the god instituted with his brother Pluto to gain power. In contrast to the visual arts and early literary sources, only in the literature of the *fin-de-siècle* and the early modernist period does it become common again to represent Proserpina as a rape victim. Goethe's portrayal of Proserpina *after* the rape by Pluto and her abduction into the underworld enables the poet to place the heroine's confinement and struggle to make sense of her existence at the centre of his melodrama.

Goethe's melodrama also bears testimony to the poet's intimate knowledge of German musical theatre. Firstly, Goethe's plot closely mirrors contemporary melodramatic forms, whose libretti were drawn from Greek mythology or from the Roman circle of legends. Secondly, Proserpina is the perfect protagonist of nineteenth-century melodrama, whose heroines traditionally resemble the static figures of baroque opera. Through a retrospective view into happier times, often childhood, and the call for help to parents, they declaim their sorrow without hope of bettering their situation, without the possibility of independent action. Unlike the early versions of the Proserpina myth, Goethe's heroine will never leave Hades. The poet's adaptation of the Proserpina myth, therefore, shares the tragic ending of the melodrama, which avoids the *lieto fine* of opera serie – the sudden turn of events, where everything is resolved at the last moment and a happy ending ensues – and instead corresponds to a short tragedy, where the moment of *catharsis* fails in favour of excitement of emotions.

Goethe's decision to present Proserpina's plight as a theatrical interior monologue intensifies the lamentable position of his heroine. In his highly experimental text Goethe sought new forms of expression on the basis of

occurring when both Demeter and Zeus had changed to snakes, from which union Proserpina was born.

²⁴ See, for example, the Proserpina realisations by Dürer, Niccolò dell'Abbate, Rubens, Rembrandt, Tiepolo and Bernini.

'inner monologue' without outer dramatic action, thus the stream of consciousness of a lyrical 'ich'. As in *Iphigenie*, prose and verse versions of Proserpina's monologue exist. A comparative glance at the opening of both (almost-identical) texts illustrates the poet's intention to render everyday speech into a more heightened form of expression (see Table 1):

1777 Original prose version	Halte! Halt einmal Unselige! Vergebens irrst du in diesen rauhen Wüsten hin und her! Endlos liegen sie vor dir die Trauergefilde, und was du suchst liegt immer hinter dir. Nicht vorwärts, aufwärts auch soll dieser Blick nicht steigen! Die schwarze Höhle des Tar- tarus umwölkt die liebe Gegenden des Himmels, in die ich sonst nach meines Ahnherrn froher Wohnung mit Liebesblick hinauf- sah. Ach! Enkelin des Jupiters, wie tief bist du verloren! –
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1786 Revised in verse form	Halte! Halt' einmal, Unselige! Vergebens irrst du in diesen rauhen Wüsten hin und her! Endlos liegen sie vor dir die Trauergefilde, Und was du suchst, liegt immer hinter dir.
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Nicht vorwärts,
Aufwärts auch soll dieser Blick nicht steigen!
Die schwarze Höhle des Tartarus
Verwölkt die lieben Gegenden des Himmels,
In die ich sonst
Nach meines Ahnherrn froher Wohnung
mit Liebesblick hinauf sah!
Ach! Tochter des Jupiters,
Wie tief bist du verloren! –

Stop! Stop, you poor wretch! In vain you wander
Here and there in these inclement wastes!
Endless the fields of sorrow lie before you
And what you seek forever lies behind you.

Neither forward
Nor upward shall this glance rise!
The black cave of Tartarus enshrouds with
Cloudy cover the dear regions of heaven
To which I would
Look up to see with loving eyes
My ancestor's happy dwelling!
Alas, daughter of Jupiter,
How deeply you are lost! –

Table 1. Goethe, *Proserpina* as Interior Monologue

While the only textual alteration is the exchange of the verb ‘umwölkt’ (cloudy) to ‘verwölkt’ (withered) (line 8), Goethe’s revised free verse, without metrical scheme, acquires a dynamic syncopated movement that goes beyond declaimed recitative to a form of reflective expression as the heroine shifts suddenly back and forth between past and present. Goethe had a lifelong preoccupation with the musical efficacy of his literary works, and the progressive nature of this interior monologue is a central example.

Goethe’s *Proserpina* and the bonds of sympathy

Goethe’s *Proserpina* has three distinct work phases. The text for the first working, written in prose between June and December of 1777, was published in an accompanying booklet to the first performance given by court amateurs on 31 January 1778, to mark the birthday of Duchess Luise, wife of the reigning Duke.²⁵ A repeat performance took place on 10 February of the same year. A copy of this first edition appeared in the February edition of Wieland’s *Teutscher Merkur*²⁶ and in volume 9 of the Berlin *Literatur- und Theater-Zeitung*. The same text also appeared in volume four of *Goethes Schriften* published by Himgurg in Berlin the following year.

The second stage in the literary and performance history of this text commenced in 1779 when Goethe reworked the prose edition into the free rhythms characteristic of the melodramatic hymns of the Frankfurt years. The text was inserted into Act IV of his satirical drama, *The Triumph of Sensibility*, a play within a play, anticipating a form adopted in Strauss and Hoffmannsthal’s *Ariadne*, where a serious and a comic piece are simultaneously combined. The stage direction leading into *Proserpina* – ‘Vorbereitende Musik, ahnend seltnen Gefühle’ (Preparatory music expressing strange forebodings)²⁷ – which marks this transition, was observed in the score composed for the premiere by Baron Karl Siegmund von Seckendorff. Seckendorff’s handling of *Proserpina*’s monologue differed from the strict form of contemporary melodrama, in which purely declaimed passages alternated with orchestral passages, in that it contained passages of melodramatic treatment with arioso songs. Goethe also intensified the

²⁵ The only remaining copy can be found in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (Sign.: Rar.1600); for further details see: Waltraud Hagen, ‘Der Erstdruck der *Proserpina*’, in Ernst Grumach (ed.), *Beiträge zur Goetheforschung* (Berlin: Akademie, 1959), 78 and *FA*, i/5, 958. Luise’s birthday is 30 January; the performance took place the following day.

²⁶ See also footnote 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

dramatic component of the text through the exchange between Proserpina and the Fates, which follows Gluck's use of the chorus in his opera, making this early work a hybrid mixture of musical forms. Bode's recognition of *The Triumph of Sensibility* as 'ein Festspiel mit Gesängen und Tänzen' (a festival piece with songs and dances)²⁸ acknowledges the musical context of this early work, which is rooted in the tradition of the satirical Shrovetide play – comparable to the *Jahrmarttsfest zu Plundersweilern* (Lumerville Fair) – and belongs to the lively *Empfindsamkeitsparodien* of the Weimar court. The premiere of Goethe and Seckendorff's melodrama was given by the *Liebhabertheater* 'als selbständiges Drama' (as an independent drama) on 10 June 1779 in the Auditorium of Schloss Ettersburg,²⁹ with the professional singer and actress Corona Schröter in the title role.³⁰ Goethe wished to make use of Schröter's abilities to declaim the text and sing the arioso passages, thereby realising his ideal intermingling of music and drama in an early *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Although he published this poetic version in volume four of Göschen's collected edition of Goethe's works in 1787, in the early 1820s he regretted this 'dramatic whim' in the *Tag und Jahresheften* because, 'frentlich in den Triumph der Empfindsamkeit eingeschaltet [...] ihre Wirkung vernichtet [wurde]' (criminally placed in *The Triumph of Sensibility* [...] its effect was [then] destroyed).³¹

Almost four decades after the first performance, the third and final stage occurred in 1814–1815, when Goethe took up the melodrama once again. This time the initiative came from the composer Carl Eberwein,³² who enquired if he could write a new setting of the melodrama, to which the poet readily agreed. The poet recounted with excitement to Count von Brühl the 'neue Verkörperung dieses abgeschiedenen Theatergeistes' (new incarnation of this departed theatre spirit),³³ and in his essay on *Proserpina*

²⁸ Bode, *Die Tonkunst in Goethes Leben*, i, 80.

²⁹ For further information on the performance practice of the *Liebhabertheater* see Gabriele Busch-Salmen (ed.), *Goethe-Handbuch Supplemente*, i: *Musik und Tanz in den Bühnenwerken* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2008), 232–235.

³⁰ Hans-Dietrich Dahnke and Regine Otto (eds.), *Goethe-Handbuch*, iv/2: *Personen, Sachen, Begriffe L-Z* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1998), 964–966.

³¹ *FA*, i/6, 953.

³² Franz Carl Adalbert Eberwein (1786–1868) – son of the Weimar *Hof*-, *Stadt- und Landmusik*us, Alexander Bartholomäus Eberwein – was at that time musical director at Goethe's house, chamber musician in the court orchestra and in the Herderkirche, and was later appointed Director of Music and Director of the Opera in Weimar.

³³ See Goethe's letter to Graf von Brühl on 1 May 1815, *WA*, iv/25, 293.

Goethe wrote of the ‘Wiederbelebung dieser abgeschiedenen Production’ (revival of this former production).³⁴ With this production Goethe could amend its insertion into *The Triumph of Sensibility*. Goethe commented on this new edition in the *Tag- und Jahreshefte 1814*:

Das Monodrama, *Proserpina*, wurde nach Eberweins Composition, mit Madame Wolff eingelernt, und eine kurze, aber höchst bedeutende Vorstellung vorbereitet, in welcher Recitation, Declamation, Mimik und edelbewegte plastische Darstellung wetteiferten, und zuletzt ein großes Tableau, Pluto’s Reich vorstellend und das Ganze krönend, einen sehr günstigen Eindruck hinterließ.³⁵

The monodrama *Proserpina*, with Eberwein’s setting, was rehearsed with Madame Wolff and a brief but highly significant performance was prepared in which recitation, declamation, mime, noble movement and visual representation vied with one another; and finally, a great tableau representing Pluto’s realm and crowning the whole production made a very favourable impression.

Evidently, Goethe was convinced that this ‘brauchbares Musterstückchen’ (useful little model play)³⁶ was the dissemination and accomplishment of his conception of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In addition to the new score and the declamatory and mimetic gifts of the actress, Amalie Wolff,³⁷ considerable time and money were spent on the costumes and set design. Rehearsals took place over several months and Wolff’s ‘leidenschaftliche Lamentoso’ (passionate Lamentoso) was widely acclaimed.³⁸ In a report on its produc-

³⁴ *WA*, i/40, 106. See also Flodoard Frhr. von Biedermann (ed.), *Goethe Gespräche*, ii: *Vom Erfurter Kongress bis zum letzten böhmischen Aufenthalt; 1808 November bis September 1823* (Leipzig: Biedermann, 1909), 226–229.

³⁵ *WA*, i/36, 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Amalie Wolff-Malcolmi (1780–1851) – student of Goethe’s first *Proserpina*, Corona Schröter – wife of the actor Pius Alexander Wolff, was, like her husband, permanent staff in Goethe’s theatre company until their departure to Berlin in 1816. In his essay on *Proserpina* (1815), Goethe stressed the importance of the rhythmic declamation: ‘Daß...Recitation und Declamation sich musterhaft hervorthun müsse, bedarf wohl keiner weiten Ausführung; wie denn bei uns deßhalb nichts zu wünschen übrig bleibt’ (That ... recitation and declamation have to distinguish themselves as exemplary, needs no extensive performance which doesn’t mean to say that there is nothing left to be desired), *WA*, i/40, 111. In this respect Goethe was very happy with Amalie Wolff’s performance.

³⁸ Effi Biedrzyński, *Goethes Weimar: Das Lexicon von Personen und Schauplätze* (Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1992), 488; see also Ulrike Müller-Harang, *Das*

tion, Goethe proclaimed to Zelter: 'Wir haben diesem Werklein noch wunderlich eingeheizt, daß es als Luftballon steigen und zuletzt noch als Feuerwerk zerplatzen kann' (We've put some real heat into this little work, so that it can rise up like a balloon and can then explode like a firework).³⁹

What exactly was meant by that is evident in a letter to Zelter on 17 May 1815:

Meine *Proserpina* habe ich zum Träger von allem gemacht, was die neuere Zeit an Kunst und Kunststücken gefunden und begünstigt ist: 1) Heroische landschaftliche Decoration; 2) gesteigerte Recitation und Declamation; 3) Hamiltonisch-Händelische Gebärden; 4) Kleiderwechslung; 5) Mantelspiel; und sogar 6) ein Tableau zum Schluß, das Reich des Pluto vorstellend, und das alles begleitet von der Musik [...] welche diesem übermäßigen Augenschmaus zu willkommener Würze dient.⁴⁰

I have made my *Proserpina* the carrier for everything which modern criticism finds and favours in a work of art: 1) the heroic and decorative landscape; 2) heightened recitation and declamation; 3) Hamiltonian-Handelian gestures; 4) change of costume; 5) change of scenery; and 6) even a tableau for a finale that represents the realm of Pluto – all this, accompanied by the music you know [...] which serves as welcome spice for this immoderate feast of the eyes.

Goethe's list is by no means cosmetic: each of the listed elements is part of an organic perception and realisation of the score as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The *Proserpina* myth is orchestrated at all levels (mythopoetic, musical, dramatic, visual, choreographic) to move the audience to sympathy. He intentionally sought 'die Richtung, in welcher sich Autoren, Schauspieler und Publikum wechselweise bestärken' (the direction in which authors, actors and audience mutually support one another).⁴¹ The premiere took place on 4 February 1815, to mark the birthday of Weimar's heir apparent, Karl Friedrich, as recorded in the performance booklet.⁴² The performance was so successful that three further performances were scheduled and en-

Weimarer Theater: zur Zeit Goethes (Weimar: Verlag der Klassikerstätten zu Weimar, 1991), 72, and Dieter Borchmeyer, 'Kommentar zu *Proserpina*', in *FA*, i/5, 950 and 952.

³⁹ Goethe to Zelter, 23 January 1815, *WA*, iv/25, 169.

⁴⁰ Goethe to Zelter, 17 May 1815, *ibid.* 328.

⁴¹ Goethe to Brühl, 1 May 1815, *WA*, iv/23, 292.

⁴² 'Zum Geburtsfeste des Durchlauchtigsten Herrn Erbprinzen von Weimar', *WA*, i/17, 321–322.

quiries came in from other theatres. For their benefit, Goethe published an account of his performance intentions⁴³ for *Proserpina* in Cotta's *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* on 8 June 1815.⁴⁴ Bertuch also issued this essay along with a revised edition of Goethe's text in volume 30 of his *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode*.⁴⁵ Yet it was not without regret that Goethe noted that 'diese Idee [des Gesamtkunstwerks]' (this idea [of *Gesamtkunstwerk*]) must remain 'auf dem Weimarischen Theater mehr angedeutet als ausgeführt' (on the Weimar stage more hinted at than realised).⁴⁶ It was not possible to realise his conception of it in a small court in Weimar, where the financial means were limited, but he urged the importance of realising it in a large-scale theatre.⁴⁷ That was evident in the intention, 'damit eine gleiche, ja eine erhöhte Vorstellung dieses kleinen Stücks auf mehreren Theatern statt haben könne' (that a similar though more elevated representation of this little play may be given in several different theatres).⁴⁸ Goethe was ahead of his time. Nothing came of such performances.

It is illuminating to note that at the time Goethe was preparing for the performance of Eberwein's musical realisation of his melodrama, he was also preoccupied with performance plans for *Faust. Part One*. He was all too aware of the difficulties of a scenic realisation when he wrote in a letter of May 1815 'er steht gar zu weit von theatralischer Vorstellung ab' (it is a long way from being a theatrical performance) under the impression of the recent performance of *Proserpina*.⁴⁹ Years before, for a domestic performance of *Faust* scenes in 1809, Goethe had experimented with the pictorial art of the Chinese shadow play, a fashionable form at that time. Both experiments illustrate the poet's desire to transcend the boundaries of contemporary performance practice in the musico-dramatic arts. Goethe was very conscious of revolutionising the theatre conventions of his day. In conversation with Eberwein about the staging of their new realisation of *Proserpina*, he confided how he wanted to stage this melodrama 'in einer Weise ... wie man noch nichts Ähnliches gesehen habe' (in a way that

⁴³ Goethe's diary entry for 6 May 1815 notes, 'Dictirt. Proserpina', *WA*, iii/5, 160.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Boyle, 'Preface' in Byrne Bodley (ed.), *Proserpina. Goethe's Melodrama with Music by Carl Eberwein*, xviii.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Justin Bertuch, *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode*, 30 (1815). Cited in Theo Buck, *Goethes Monodrama "Proserpina": Eine Gesamtdeutung* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2012), 40.

⁴⁶ *WA*, i/40, 109.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Goethe to Zelter, 17 May 1815, *WA*, iv/25, 330.

⁴⁹ Goethe to Brühl, 1 May 1815, *ibid.* 293.

nothing like it had been seen before).⁵⁰ With this staging of *Proserpina* Goethe endeavoured to bring forward a new art form. In this respect, his monodrama is part of a multifarious search to test and develop expanded artistic possibilities of theatrical forms of expression. Proserpina's dramatic and dramaturgic stream of consciousness was another important gesture. Without doubt, Goethe's *Proserpina* was groundbreaking preparation for the dramatic development of modern theatre: *Proserpina* must be seen as an experiment in a theatre of consciousness.

Queen of Darkness: From Goethe to Eberwein

For Eberwein – who was not yet thirty when he composed *Proserpina* – the collaboration with Goethe was an ennobling experience. Years previously, Zelter had made a reserved judgement after Eberwein had been recommended to him as a pupil by Goethe: 'Er muß sehr zusammen bleiben wenn ihm nun noch etwas gelingen soll' (He must remain very focussed if he is to have any success).⁵¹ Some years later Zelter again remarked: 'Es gehört eine offne weite Quelle von Genie dazu für einen Künstler sich ganz selber zu beschäftigen und sich selber seine Wege zu weisen: so ergiebig ist sein Talent nicht aber er scheint mir der Mann zu werden der macht was man eben braucht' (It takes a great fountain of genius for an artist to occupy himself completely and to find his own way. Eberwein's talent is not so rich, but he appears to me to be the man who does what one needs).⁵² What Goethe 'needed' was a composer who was able to assimilate his philosophical justifications for the synthesis of text and music⁵³ and translate these ideas into his composition. Eberwein's efforts to compose music that allied itself closely to the intimate nuances of the text resulted in a highly dramatic setting, that was exquisitely moulded to the inflections of Goethe's language. This ambition is subtly signalled in the title page of Eberwein's autograph score for *Proserpina* where the composer's name is placed after the poet's – rather like the first song collections of Hugo Wolf, whose respect for poetry led him to place the name of the poet ahead of his own.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Conversation with Carl Eberwein, 29 May 1814, in Biedermann (ed.), *Goethe Gespräche*, ii, 227.

⁵¹ Zelter to Goethe, 12 November 1808, cited in Lorraine Byrne Bodley, *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 121.

⁵² Zelter to Goethe, 11–23 October 1809, cited in *ibid.* 127.

⁵³ *WA*, i/40, 109.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Wolf's earliest collection of Goethe settings, Op. 3, the manuscript for which is held in the City Library Vienna.

Eberwein's music underscores the furiously hypertense emotionality of Goethe's drama as Proserpina is torn between the horror of the present and memories of the past, between outbursts of despairing hatred and an almost sisterly turning towards Tantalus, Ixion and the Danaïdes (lines 58–86): the darkest mythological figures to tread the Weimar stage in 1815. When discussing contemporary settings of the poet's works, scholars often lapse into regret that Goethe did not have someone of comparable rank at his side for musical collaborations. Yet Eberwein's willingness to go along with Goethe's wishes was an advantage here: the selfless striving of the young composer to satisfy the poet's intentions is everywhere apparent in the score and it is the nearest thing we have to a 'composition by Goethe'.

While the level of public interest in Goethe and Eberwein's *Proserpina* was a corollary to the progressive nature of the melodrama, it also clearly reflects a collective psychological processing of the practice of male sexual and political domination of women's destinies in nineteenth-century Germany. Astute members of the audience at the premiere in Weimar would have found in Goethe and Eberwein's version of the Proserpina myth a tale of judicious sexual politics in a monarchical world. In the first performance of the melodrama Goethe had distanced himself and his audience from the work's disquieting message and social critique by placing it in *The Triumph of Sensibility*. In Eberwein's rendering, such questions of gender identity are codified in the music and staging, where political imperatives, marital practices, and aesthetic catharsis converge to give the myth of Proserpina an unusual timelessness.

Eberwein's melodrama musically realises the gender portrayal so central to Goethe's text. In the broad G minor chords at the beginning of the work there are echoes of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the clarinet almost takes on the quality of a *vox humana* as it begins to sing immediately thereafter. The contrast between the dark world of Hades and the young woman Proserpina is immediately symbolised in the opening bars of the allegorical overture, a musical symbol of the precarious forces in which conflicting forces are held (see Ex. 1).

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
(1749 - 1832)

Proserpina

Carl Eberwein
(1786 - 1868)

Adagio

Flutes 1.2. *f*

Oboes 1.2. *f*

Clarinets in Bb 1.2.* *f* *p*

Bassoons 1.2. *f* *p*

Horns in F 1.2.* *f*

Trumpets in C 1.2.* *f*

Tenor Trombone 1
Tenor Trombone 2 *f*

Bass Trombone *f*

Timpani
in D & G *f*

Adagio

Violin 1 *f*

Violin 2 *f*

Viola *f*

Violoncello
Double Bass *f*

*suoni reali

Example 1. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Overture, bb. 1–6

Proserpina's railing against her fate finds its musical counterpart in the agitato themes of the Allegro, which follow the slow introduction (see Ex. 2) and the innocent reverie of the second musical idea, again introduced by the clarinet, lends itself to association with the title figure and the childhood memories she begins to entertain (see Ex. 3).

33 **Allegro assai**

Vln. I *p*

Vln. II *p*

Vc. Db. *p*

38

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vc. Db.

42 **Adagio**

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vc. Db. *p*

Example 2. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Overture, first subject, bb. 33–46

Cl. *solo*

Vln I *p*

Vln II *p*

Vla *p*

VC

81

82

83

89

The image displays a musical score for a section of Goethe's *Proserpina*. The score is arranged in a system with five staves: Clarinet (Cl.), Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (VC). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (measures 81-82) features a Clarinet solo, marked *p* (piano). The Violin and Viola parts also begin with a *p* dynamic. The VC part provides a steady accompaniment. The second system (measures 83-88) continues the instrumental textures. The third system (measures 89-90) shows further development of the musical themes. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with various dynamics and articulations.

2

Example 3. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Overture, second subject, bb. 77–100

Eberwein's use of the clarinet is highly symbolic: it announces Proserpina's innocence. A good example of this is the passage where she cries out to her mother, which is preceded and answered by a clarinet solo (bb. 383–397). Through these musical gestures – which gain symbolic meaning through Goethe's text – Eberwein announces his familiarity with the programmatic overture. It is evident that Eberwein had also closely studied Georg Benda's duodrama *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1775), for here, too, in *Proserpina*, the beginning of the melodrama interrupts the music (b. 260), and for a time, the music simply punctuates the text (bb. 260–272). Proserpina's double imperative, 'Halte, halt einmal, Unselige' (Stop! Stop, you poor wretch) bears the urgency of her quest, which is answered in the change from autonomous music to music which supports, dramatically direct in its juxtaposition of different aesthetic levels (bb. 260–271). As in Benda's *Ariadne*, the orchestra re-enters at passages where Proserpina recognises what has happened to her. A key example in this opening passage is the crucial sentence, 'Und was du suchst, liegst immer hinter dir' (And what you seek always lives behind you), which announces all hopes are lost, musically affirmed in the perfect authentic cadence in the tonic (see Ex. 4, bb. 264–265).

260 *Proserpina:*

Halte! Halt einmal,
Unselige! Vergebens
Irrst du in diesen rauhen
Wüsten hin und her!

Endlos liegen vor dir
die Trauergefilde und was du suchst,

*Stop! Stop, you poor wretch!
In vain you wander
Here and there
In these inclement wastes!*

*Endless the fields of sorrow
lie before you and what you seek*

A (*quasi recit.*)

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db

p

262

Adagio *fz* Allegro

Fl.
Cl.

p

Pros.

liegt immer hinter dir.
forever lies behind you.

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db

Adagio Allegro

p *f*

p *f*

p *f*

p *f*

Tutti

Example 4. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, bb. 260–266

In addition to the allegorical overture, Eberwein composed four intensely atmospheric instrumental passages, at psychologically crucial moments of the story, the first, an Arcadian oboe passage just before Proserpina recalls her childhood innocence (see Ex. 5).

272 **B** Andante 1. solo

275 *p*

278

281

284 *p*

287

Example 5. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, bb. 272–289

Here Proserpina's remembrance of herself as a young woman reaching out to gather a flower is a symbol of 'the very essence of cosmic sexuality'.⁵⁵ The brevity of this episode means we are never allowed to forget 'what lies beyond the veil of loveliness, what this individual woman has suffered'.⁵⁶ Just as Goethe symbolises this in the changing landscapes to which she alludes – the 'öden, felsigten Gegend' (desolate rocky region) of Hades (line 8), in comparison to the 'blumenreichen Thälern' (valleys rich in flowers) and 'lieben Gegenden des Himmels' (dear regions of heaven) of the past – so does Eberwein's music endorse the shocking contrast between the beauty of his protagonist and her recollection of total happiness which held the seeds of calamity which she has endured. Here, in this opening declamation, Proserpina is on the threshold of sexual maturation but swiftly discovers a sexual underworld 'as she becomes vulnerable to sexual predation'.⁵⁷ Her reminiscence of the past and apostrophe to her playmates with a double interjection 'O Mädchen, Mädchen' (O maidens, maidens) (lines 14–35, bb. 272–297) contrast with the swift tempo alteration in the poetic and musical metre for a brief account of the rape

⁵⁵ Louis, *Persephone Rises*, 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 72.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 72.

scene (lines 36–44, bb. 298–318). The epic proportions of Goethe's literary forerunners are offset by Goethe's concision and outer restriction of this dramatic course of events. Only the hectic carriage of the horses of Arcus and the merciless God of the Underworld interest the poet, who subtly alludes to an abuse of power through rhetorical coupling of 'Wegerissen' (torn) (line 36) and 'heruntergerissen' (torn down) (line 45) and Proserpina's own bitter recognition of her fate as Queen of Hades (lines 45–49). As in the opening bars, Eberwein endorses the permanency of her fate in a restatement of the *Grundgedanke* (fundamental idea), the resounding G minor chords (bb. 319–324) answered by the opening clarinet melody, a theme of lost innocence. Proserpina's empathy with the lost souls of the dead with whom she wanders through the grim courts of Hades offers a potent image of loss. A third statement of the opening musical gestures (bb. 326–332) affirms Goethe's Proserpina has seen too deeply into life to hold it dear.

In the second instrumental passage, Proserpina, accepting her fate, longs to help the damned of the Underworld: Tantalus, Ixion, and the Danaides, all of whom endure harsh penalties of guilt. Her empathy with Tantalus mirrors her own situation: the threefold statement of 'Leer und immer leer' (Empty and always empty) (lines 70, 72 and 75, bb. 343, 344 and 346), a metaphor for the emptiness that fills her own soul. Here the idea of bailing water inspires a string background recalling the characterisation of melodrama in Mozart's letter: 'bisweilen wird auch unter der Musik gesprochen, welches alsdann die herrlichste Wirkung thut' (sometimes there is speaking *under* the music, which then has the most wonderful effect) (see Ex. 6).⁵⁸

The swift change of subject, as Proserpina describes her abductor, is characteristic for the dramatic stream of consciousness, which forms a literary and musical kaleidoscope of subjective reflections and associations.⁵⁹ The cruelty of her rapist, Pluto – who is also her uncle and is supported by the collusion of her father Zeus, who ignores his daughter's cries for help – is musically realised in an Allegro assai passage (bb. 298–318), where the brutality of the male gods is contrasted with the suffering of mother and daughter in the third instrumental passage.

⁵⁸ W. A. von Mozart, letter to his father, 12 November 1778, cited in Georg N. von Nissen, *Biographie Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1828; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972), 410.

⁵⁹ Volker Klotz describes this episodic structure as 'das Ganze in Ausschnitten' (the whole in extracts) in *Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama* (2nd edn., Munich: Hanser, 1962), 230.

333 Ach, das fliehende Wasser
Möcht ich dem Tantalus schöpfen,

Mit lieblichen Früchten ihn sättigen!
Armer Alter!
Für gereiztes Verlangen gestraft!

Pros. *Oh, I would like to draw the fleeing water
For Tantalus!* *Satisfy him with sweet fruits!
Poor old man,
Punished for provoked craving!*

Vln. I *Andante** solo *pp*

Vln. II *pp* solo

Vla. *pp* solo

Vc. Db. *pp* solo

pp

337 In Ixions Rad möcht ich greifen,
Einhalten seinen Schmerz!

Aber was vermögen wir Götter
Über die ewigen Qualen!

Pros. *I would like to stop Ixion's wheel
And put an end to his pain!* *But what can we gods do
Against eternal punishment!*

Vln. I *Allegro* *rallentando*

Vln. II *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. Db. *p*

* This section down to figure [E] is basically *Andante*, apart from bars 337-38. The couplet 'In Ixions Rad möcht ich greifen, /Einhalten seinen Schmerz' must coincide with these two *Allegro* bars. Otherwise a certain liberty can be taken with the placing of the text in order to allow the meaning and the significance of the words to come across in performance.

Example 6. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, bb. 333-340

Here the clarinet solo introduces Proserpina's plea to her mother. The portrayal of maternal and filial love is orchestrated at all levels (lyrical,

musical and visual) to move the audience to sympathy before she tastes the forbidden fruit (see Ex. 7).

71

F Andante
Clarinet in A*
solo

Cl. 382

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vcl. *suoni reali

386

Cl.

Pros.

O Mutter! Mutter!
Wie dich deine Gottheit verläßt
Im Verlust deiner Tochter,
Die du glücklich glaubtest,
Hinspielend, hintädelnd ihre Jugend!

O mother! mother!
How your divinity forsakes you
At the loss of your daughter,
Whom you believed to be happy,
Playing, dallying away my youth!

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vcl.

Example 7. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, bb. 382–387

Her fateful action (bb. 479–483) is heralded by a poignant flute solo (see Ex. 8).

Example 8. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, bb. 470–478

Example 8. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, bb. 470–478

The poet's description of this passage in his essay on *Proserpina* – 'Die Erscheinung ihrer Lieblingsfrucht, ein Granatbaum, versetzt ihren Geist wieder in jene glücklichen Regionen der Oberwelt, die sie verlassen' (The appearance of her favourite fruit, a pomegranate tree, transports her mind back to those happy upper regions which she has left)⁶⁰ – is brilliantly observed in Eberwein's setting. In the 1815 premiere the audience was informed by the stage setting that the pomegranate tree is of great significance, for it was the only living prop to enliven the macabre stage scenery. Proserpina's surprise at finding fruit in a barren landscape is conveyed through the double adjective and interrogative: 'Seltsam! Seltsam! | Find' ich diese Frucht hier?' (Strange! Strange! | Do I find this fruit here? lines 179–180). The antecedent phrase of Eberwein's flute solo (bb. 470–478) musically realises the stage direction – 'sie bricht den Granatapfel ab' (she plucks the pomegranate) – in which an ancient, multifaceted cult symbol of love, sexuality, fertility, seduction, love and death is brought into play. The pomegranate is a symbol of seduction – we recall the golden apples of

⁶⁰ *WA*, i/40, 107.

Hesperides and the biblical parable of the apple of temptation – and as the poet comments in his essay, Proserpina ‘kann sich nicht enthalten, von dieser Lieblingsfrucht zu genießen, die sie an alle verlass’ne Freuden erinnert’ (cannot stop herself from enjoying this favourite fruit, which reminds her of all the joys she has left behind).⁶¹ Following Goethe’s strophe (b. 478), Eberwein’s consequent flute phrase (bb. 479–486) musically illustrates the poet’s second stage direction: ‘Sie ißt einige Körner’ (she eats some seeds), which bind Proserpina to the underworld. By tasting the seeds, she transgresses the law of fasting which rules the underworld, thereby preventing her from returning to the land of the living. Proserpina’s immediate recognition that she is consigned to hell finds its musical outlet in Eberwein’s score (bb. 487–507), where she rails against her fate, the archetypal symbol of the pomegranate being central to the musical import. As a symbol of temptation, the ‘Biß des Äpfels’ (bite of the apple) brings knowledge. Proserpina’s rhetorical questioning – ‘Warum den Apfel? | O verflucht die Früchte! Warum sind Früchte so schön, | Wenn sie verdammen?’ (Why the pomegranate? | O curse the fruits! Why are the fruits so beautiful | if they bring damnation?) – emphatically punctuated by the orchestra (bb. 520–527), is a musical final renunciation of an unjust higher order; her concluding monologue in the coda (bb. 508–598), a musical realisation of this process of self-knowledge.

In the ancient myth as well as in some of the modern versions, one finds examples of conciliation and compromise where deeply-felt loss is turned to gain: the father yields to the distraught mother; Ceres’s anger subsides when Proserpina is allowed to return to earth for six months of the year; Ceres restores to the world the nourishment she had withdrawn; the cycle of the seasons offers a promise of renewal after deprivation and happiness after grief. Goethe and Eberwein’s *Proserpina* offers no such solace. From the opening G minor chords Proserpina’s sinister fate is sealed – a destiny reiterated at the end, where the Fates pay homage to Proserpina as their Queen, knowing it is a role she longs to relinquish. The Fates address Proserpina five times, each time reinforcing her new identity as Queen of Hades. Eberwein subtly captures this dramatic irony in the deliberately simple chorus, of mocking reverence.

⁶¹ Ibid.

DIE PARZEN (unsichtbar)
The Fates (off-stage)
(Orchestra tacet)

K Adagio **CHOIR I**

508 *f*

S
A Du bist un - ser! Ist der Rat - schluß dei - nes Ahn - herrn:
You are ours now! Your an - ces - tor has or - dained it so.

T Du bist un - ser! Ist der Rat - schluß dei - nes Ahn - herrn:
You are ours now! Your an - ces - tor has or - dained it so.

B Du bist un - ser! Ist der Rat - schluß dei - nes Ahn - herrn:
You are ours now! Your an - ces - tor has or - dained it so.

512 *p* *f*

Nüch - tern soll - test wie - der - keh - ren; Und der Biß des Ap - fels macht dich
You were to re - turn here so - ber; And the bite of ap - ple makes you

Nüch - tern soll - test wie - der - keh - ren; Und der Biß des Ap - fels macht dich
You were to re - turn here so - ber; And the bite of ap - ple makes you

Nüch - tern soll - test wie - der - keh - ren; Und der Biß des Ap - fels macht dich
You were to re - turn here so - ber; And the bite of ap - ple makes you

515 *p* *f* *p*

un - ser! Kö - ni - gin, Kö - ni - gin, wir ehr - en dich!
ours now! Queen, we pay ho - mage now, we hon - our you!

un - ser! Kö - ni - gin, Kö - ni - gin, wir ehr - en dich!
ours now! Queen, we pay ho - mage now, we hon - our you!

un - ser! Kö - ni - gin, Kö - ni - gin, wir ehr - en dich!
ours now! Queen, we pay ho - mage now, we hon - our you!

Example 9. Carl Eberwein, *Proserpina*, Melodrama, opening chorus of the Fates, bb. 508–519

By placing Proserpina at the beginning of the monodrama but letting the Fates have the final word, Goethe marks the transition in Proserpina's fate. The *lieto fine* (happy ending) allowed by Horace and Ovid is here

abandoned by Goethe, and Proserpina continues her lamentation without resolution right to the bitter end. It is significant that Goethe and Eberwein's melodrama concludes with the highly symbolic depressed voiced of the dead. What is at stake, of course, moves beyond the mores of sexuality and forces us to confront a patriarchal social order, where women are forced to accept the call of love.

Goethe's *Proserpina* employs all the prerequisites of a good melodramatic text to explore the key issue of gender identity through its musical setting. Firstly, it is written in verse rather than prose and secondly, it abounds in mood and imagery, thus lending itself well to musical description. Goethe also provides the work with a broad sectional frame: a free sonata form with four major sections – an exposition (lines 1–44, where Proserpina bemoans her fate); its modified restatement (lines 45–100); a development section (lines 101–197, where she calls to Ceres and Jupiter in hope); and a recapitulation with further motivic development, where her fate is sealed (lines 198–216) – and an extensive coda (lines 217–272) (see Table 2). The gradual mounting of the story and the music towards one central climax, along with the skilful metamorphosis of the motives, imbues the structure of this melodrama with a sense of dramatic continuity rather than that of an episodic form.

Episode	Mythical Episodes	Lines	Bars
	Exposition (Lamentation)		
1.	Proserpina's self-contemplation	1–13	260–271
2.	Apostrophe to Cyane and Arethusa	14–35	272–297
3.	(a) Rape Scene (b) Queen of Hades	36–44 45–49	298–318
	Modified Restatement (Lamentation)		
4.	Queen of Lost Souls Tantalus, Ixion and the Danaides	50–57 58–77	319–325 326–349
5.	Proserpina stresses her distance to the departed	78–86	350–368
6.	Description of Pluto, the abductor	87–100	369–381
	Development (Apostrophe to Ceres and Jupiter)		
7.	Apostrophe to Ceres Ceres Search for Proserpina	101–119 118–126 132–140	382–397 398–407 408–432
8.	Apostrophe to Jupiter	141–165	433–450
9.	Hope pours the sunrise into the stormy night Bareness of hell	166–169	451–454 455–469
10.	Plucking the pomegranate	179–182	470–478
11.	Desire for Love and tasting its seeds	183–197	479–486

Recapitulation (Fate is sealed)			
12.	Fruit of the tree of knowledge	198–216	487–507
Extended Coda			
13.	The Fates pay homage to Proserpina, Queen of Hades	217–221	508–519
14.	Indictment of Jupiter/Birth of the Self	222–230	520–527
15.	Fates pay homage a second time	231–234	528–532
16.	Proserpina rages against her fate	235–247	533–549
17.	Fates pay homage a third time	248–251	550–558
18.	Hatred of Pluto, the Abductor	252–257	559–566
19.	Fates pay homage a fourth time	258	567–569
20.	Hatred of Pluto, Horror and husband	259–270	570–584
21.	Fates pay homage a fifth and final time, endorsing her role as Queen of Hades	271	585–593

Table 2. Free Sonata Form Structure in Goethe and Eberwein's *Proserpina*

Goethe resolves the tension of music versus drama in a manner akin to that of traditional Italian opera by allowing the music and the text each in turn to dominate and drive home key issues of feminine identity. Accordingly, Eberwein's music commands in the extensive passages where it serves to create mood. These consist of Eberwein's allegorical prologue (bb. 1–259) and following Proserpina's chant of oppression where her fate is introduced – the work's *Grundgedanke* – Eberwein creates an Arcadian setting (bb. 272–289) and three other shorter, intensely atmospheric instrumental passages (bb. 319–324 and 326–332; bb. 382–386 and 470–486), inserted at psychologically crucial moments of the story: the first, Proserpina's song of lamentation; the second, her apostrophe to her mother, and the third, eating the apple of temptation, where her fate is sealed. The 'drama', on the other hand, dominates in five extensive passages of recitation answered by music: Proserpina's abduction (bb. 260–271 and 298–318); Ceres' search for her daughter (bb. 398–432); the re-establishment of hope (bb. 455–468); tasting the forbidden fruit (bb. 487–507), followed by Proserpina's renewed invocation, where the heroine's wrath finds its musical outlet in Eberwein's score (bb. 520–527; 533–547; and 559–592). In all of these passages, scenes are set and narratives unfold. These purely verbal passages, which are inserted into the music, do not injure its structure, for Goethe places them in the four major structural sections of music. A good example of this is found in Eberwein's score for the finale, where Proserpina's presence is felt in her absence as the music keeps accusing

her oppressor (bb. 497–507). The alternation of voice and orchestra initiates poignant cycles of tension that propel the music forward. As Proserpina redoubles her efforts, the music imitates her by redoubling its pace: the melodic rhythms become increasingly rapid and the harmonic rhythm accelerates.

At the same time Goethe and Eberwein are able to introduce many short verbal interjections into the music again without destroying its flow. They accomplish this in two ways: either by placing the words directly after unresolved chords that are strong enough to require resolution even after the interruption (bb. 369–381), or by shaping Proserpina's lines in the manner of a narrative, with the familiar stereotyped chordal outbursts (bb. 398–442). Similarly, the effective insertion of intense passages, such as the procession of lost souls in hell (bb. 333–349 and 358–368), shows that the composer does not necessarily destroy the dramatic effect of a text, as many early composers of melodrama believed. Introduced at those psychologically crucial moments, such passages heighten rather than weaken the drama, while aiding the integration of music and text. Goethe and Eberwein construct those passages in which the words and the music are heard simultaneously also in two general ways: by allowing the music to prevail (bb. 319–324; 382–386; and 470–486) or to be of equal importance to the text (bb. 333–349). The first way produces a result for Goethe that is reminiscent of an aria, for the music is moulded into long attractive lyrical lines, where the individual words are less important than their general verbal context.

Eberwein's tonal symbolism also plays a defining role in exploring the gender themes of Goethe's narrative. The three G minor chords that herald Proserpina's fate (bb. 1–6) resound at each recognition of her fate: that she is now Queen of Hades (bb. 319–324 and 326–332). The pastoral scene where Proserpina plays with her companions is composed as an Andante in the 'innocent key' of C major (bb. 272–290). Proserpina's recollection of her abduction defines A flat as Eberwein's tonality for hell (bb. 298 f.); the music returns to this key after Proserpina eats the pomegranate seeds, which seals her fate (bars 487–488). The Larghetto passage where Proserpina calls on Jupiter, is composed in E major (bb. 433 f.), the same key as the music for Sarastro, the father of all men, in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Eberwein alludes to this key in passages associated with Hades, subtly suggesting Jupiter's role as accomplice (b. 559). The Fates and the inhabitants of Hell – Tantalus, Ixion and the Danaides – are anchored in B flat major (bb. 333–336; 508–519; and 528–532); the semitonal ascent from B flat (via B flat minor) to B minor to C major symbolises Proserpina's transitory hope that she might help the dark figures of the

underworld (bb. 333–343). Proserpina’s loss of hope – both here and in the Adagio section defined by the horns – is ironically anchored in a major tonality, E flat major (bb. 350 f.).

The other side of Styx: Matriarchy and musical melodrama

Part of the historical significance of Goethe’s collaboration with Eberwein is the poet’s recognition of the important role melodrama played in the cultural dynamics of the nineteenth century, a role that was downplayed or denied outright by most earlier critics. A reading of *Proserpina* that allows for a more complex interpretation of the performance and reception of the genre enables us to situate melodrama as a crucial rather than a peripheral phenomenon of German cultural history.⁶² Nineteenth-century melodrama served as an important space ‘in which the cultural, political and economic exigencies of the century were played out and transformed into public discourses about issues ranging from gender-specific dimensions of individual station and behaviour to the role and status of the “nation” in local as well as imperial politics’.⁶³ Goethe’s use of the *Proserpina* myth to unmask these cultural dynamics points not only to the myth’s structural malleability in voicing contemporary cultural issues, but also to the role it played in ‘resolving’ such hegemonic discourses.

During the nineteenth century, ‘woman’ was central to the preoccupations of artists, despite her unassuming role in the social hierarchy. At the start of the Romantic movement the purveyors of la littérature de prostitution criticised the laws that made a woman a minor for life, subject first to the authority of her father and then her husband, without rights or property for herself. They demanded the re-establishment of divorce and supported a woman’s rights to keep her children if she left her husband. Despite her diminished status, many melodramas revolve around a woman: a man desires her; a man has abducted her; someone has taken a mother’s child; she is expected to marry against her wishes. So, too, violence is everywhere in the genre of melodrama: the heroine in disarray, terrorised by the gesture

⁶² Among the studies that have claimed to anchor melodrama to a specific historic context, Peter Brooks’s *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976; repr. 1995) can probably be singled out as the one that has had the most consequential impact. See also Hayes (ed.), *Images of Persephone*.

⁶³ Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996; repr. 1999), viii.

of a man who has abducted her, is a common figure. Goethe and Eberwein's *Proserpina*, therefore, mirrors the reactionary ideology of contemporary melodrama and contains a fascinating interplay of intersecting cultural and ideological horizons. By enacting the complexities of women's roles in society both artists enabled the audience to identify with the suffering of the heroine and to *perceive* such cultural tensions, even though it may not have been able to translate them into active alternatives. In this melodrama, Goethe and Eberwein deconstruct the traditional reading of the abduction of Proserpina, particularly the validation of social codes that permit and even sanction the destruction of women. Proserpina's lines bring to life the curtailment of women's control over their own destinies because of their vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse. With each melodramatic recitation, Proserpina rages against the values and expectations of a social order that has attempted to define her. Unlike the Greek and Roman representations, Goethe's Proserpina has no one who will negotiate a compromise for her, no one who will call her back from her inward journey. There is no revitalisation at the end, no strong mother who will rescue this Proserpina figure from her entrapment. By the end of the monodrama, she is a lost Proserpina, unreclaimed from hell. In the final stanzas the listener is confronted by the shocking end of her mental and emotional journey – a *dénouement* that is neither psychologically nor socially acceptable. Like many dramatisations before the 1830s, Goethe's melodrama charts these changes in socio-psychological terms, but fails to provide effective answers, true enlightenment, or permanent resolution – experience and reflection tell us that here we have been bequeathed a codified truth in art. Nonetheless Goethe's drama is persuasive and artistically satisfying. The questions are raised in performance, just as the human issues, like the myth, are repeated *ad infinitum*. In this light, the most significant element of Goethe's interpretation of the Proserpina story is the historical reconfiguration of Proserpina's fate, for the moral construct framed by Goethe and Eberwein's melodrama is society's responsibility to women.

Postlude: Life as ritual and the ancient rites

In conclusion, the world represented in Goethe's *Proserpina* provides a fascinating mirror-image of nineteenth-century cultural history. Written in a period that marked the beginning of the bourgeoisie's consciousness of individual self-worth, Goethe and Eberwein's melodrama provided a voice piece for cultural revisions desired by many women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Goethe's preoccupation with what is, per-

haps, 'the central mythic figure for women'⁶⁴ is part of the poet's persistent concern with feminine identity. The resulting melodrama raises questions of identity, explores its breakdown in women, thus tracing profound cultural changes in our attitudes to the material world, to sexuality, to gender and ethics, to religion. What spirituality is, what human society can be: these are questions the myth forces us to confront. Is female fertility abused or guarded by contemporary socio-political and marital institutions? How is it perceived within the sexual politics of the day?⁶⁵ And is fertility with all its possibilities and concomitant vulnerabilities empowering or disabling to women?⁶⁶ Such issues of sexuality, death, religion, and historical memory in music are central to our postmodern world, where many women are removed from their mothers not by sexual initiation but by exposure to a kind of education that enables them to speak a different language. Although written two centuries ago, the melodrama still raises central questions today: 'what does it mean for a culture, for an individual to grow up? Must a daughter grow beyond a mother's sphere? If so, what price is paid and by whom?'⁶⁷ While Goethe and Eberwein's melodrama shows the growth of its protagonist into sexuality and self-knowledge, the heroine in this musical melodrama can also be read, more broadly, as an avatar of the development from childhood to adulthood, from unthinking physicality to reflection, both within an individual and within a society. In effect, the musical melodrama is a tale of 'how the human mind evolves',⁶⁸ its heroine being an artistic embodiment of the religion of Nature the myth affirms: the ephemerality of human life, the finality of death, and the holiness of that which we can enjoy for so short a time.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Susan Gubar, 'Mother, Maiden and the Marriage of Death: Women Writers and an Ancient Myth', *Women's Studies*, 6/3 (1979), 302.

⁶⁵ Louis, *Persephone Rises*, xiii.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For further discussion of these questions, see *ibid.* 49.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 38.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 65.