

JOURNAL OF
Music
RESEARCH ONLINE

A JOURNAL OF THE MUSIC COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

Sound Theology: Musical Morality in the Opera *Seelewig*

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The classic human conflict between the spirit and the flesh is a recurrent motif in early sacred opera. Emilio de' Cavalieri's *La Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo* (Rome, 1600) (libretto by Padre Agostino Manni), for instance, dramatizes Christianity's traditional view that the soul must learn to resist worldly temptation. Cavalieri's opera inspired a number of works with similar plots, among them a German Jesuit drama entitled *Ein gar Schön Geistliches Waldgetichte genant die Glückseelige Seele* (1637).¹ This work was the direct model for *Seelewig* (text by Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, music by Sigmund Theophilus Staden, Nuremberg, 1644), the earliest fully extant German opera.²

Seelewig appears in the fourth volume of Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (1644) (literally, "Ladies' Conversation Games"), an eight-volume discourse among fictional members of Nuremberg's noble and patrician literati on a wide variety of topics.³ The *Gesprächspiele* crystallizes in idealized form the sorts of discussions that took place in Germany's literary societies, including Nuremberg's Blumenorden an der Pegnitz ([Pascal 1968: 73](#)), which Harsdörffer founded in 1644 with Johann Klaj. Despite *Seelewig*'s origins in the didactic *Gesprächspiele* — a publication that Michael Spitzer calls 'a pedagogical regime dressed up as a humanistic parlor game' ([Spitzer 2004: 164](#)) — the opera was clearly conceived as a work to be performed, and not just as a theoretical manifesto. Harsdörffer's many practical suggestions regarding costuming and set design make this clear enough. The function of 'conversation games' adds further evidence; as Mara Wade points out, 'like all other games, riddles, and plays, *Seelewig* was meant to be an exercise for noble and patrician youth. Not only were they supposed to watch such plays, but they were also intended to participate in them' ([Wade 1990: 62](#)).

Though it seems likely that there were such private performances, perhaps under the auspices of the Blumenorden, only two stagings of the work are known to have occurred in the seventeenth century: at Wolfenbüttel in 1654 and at Augsburg in 1698 ([Wade 2001](#)). Harsdörffer may have foreseen, or at least hoped for, a performance at Wolfenbüttel. Duchess Sophie Elisabeth of Braunschweig-Lüneburg staged the work there for the seventy-fifth birthday celebration of her husband, Duke August of Braunschweig-Lüneburg, to whom Harsdörffer dedicated Volume 4 of the *Frauenzimmer*



Gesprächspiele (Volume 5 is dedicated to Sophie Elisabeth) ([Wade 1990: 110](#)). *Seelewig* seems to have influenced a number of later works through the Wolfenbüttel connection. Sophie Elisabeth herself wrote plays with similar content, and the ducal couple's son and heir Anton Ulrich co-created (with either Sophie Elisabeth or Johann Jakob Löwe) Singspiele 'reminiscent of Harsdörffer's *Seelewig*': *Amelinde* (1657) and *Selimena* (1663) ([Wade 1990: 111, 116, 268–9](#)). Harsdörffer's work thus resonated beyond the Blumenorden, and can even be said to have made an impact on the broader development of German opera. As Wade notes, "in all historical discussions of early opera Wolfenbüttel's importance to the development of opera and the professional theater in German-speaking lands is invariably stressed" ([Wade 1990: 265](#)).

Performances of German opera before *Seelewig* were rare, to say the least. The only widely known precursor was the adaptation of Rinuccini's *Dafne* by Martin Opitz and Heinrich Schütz, premiered in Torgau in 1627 (the score is now lost). Harsdörffer in fact claims publication bragging rights, stating that the likes of his opera '(as regards the music)' had 'not yet appeared in print in Germany' ['die beygefügte Waldgedicht angehört / dergleichen / (was die Music betrifft ...) in Teutschland noch nicht in Druck kommen'] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 43](#)).⁴ Whether or not Harsdörffer knew of the German *Dafne* (this is unclear), the source of his pride likely lay in *Seelewig*'s distinctively Germanic conception. The advancement of German language, culture, and virtues was, after all, a foundational ideal of the Blumenorden ([Newman 1990: 53–4](#)).

And indeed, *Seelewig*, no mere adaptation, is a freshly conceived work. Though the opera resembles its Catholic antecedents in a number of ways — not least in its didactic story about the earthly sojourn of the human soul and in its pastoral-allegorical conventions — the work contains elements unique to its Central German context. Wade views the work as a kind of 'literary contrafacture' in which Catholic themes like the mystical marriage of the soul and its progress, via good works, toward salvation are 'revised' to appeal to Protestant sensibilities ([Wade 1990: 133–5](#)).

Italian Models and the Irony of Influence

In a sense, some of the inspiration for *Seelewig*'s distinctiveness was found, ironically, in Harsdörffer's Italian models. To be sure, the most prominent Italian forerunner, Cavaliere's *La Rappresentazione*, had little direct influence in German-speaking lands in the first half of the seventeenth century: performances of the work in this period apparently occurred only in Rome. Yet the combination of Christian morals and spectacle held special appeal for the German Jesuit movement, which produced stage works to counter the didactic (and, ultimately, political) effectiveness of Protestant drama in the north ([Warrack 2001: 7–10](#)). The story of the body and soul, already widely known in Italy beyond Cavaliere's treatment ([Wade 1990: 323](#)), was, with its unambiguous moral lesson, particularly well suited for the broad audiences of the Jesuit productions.

The anonymous German Jesuit work upon which *Seelewig* is based — *Ein gar Schön Geistliches Waldgetichte genant die Glückselige Seele* (printed in Breslau in 1637) — was itself a translation of an Italian drama: Nicolò Negri's *L'Anima felice, favola boscareccia* (Rome, 1606) ([Wade 2001, Winkler 2003](#)). It is not clear when or where — or even whether — the *Waldgetichte* was performed. As Wade points out, there were few if any professional theaters in Germany at the time; any performances would have taken place at court or, more likely, in a Catholic school. That the play ends with a moral pronouncement, not with the chorus and ballet customary at court, bespeaks a religious school connection ([Wade 1990: 125](#)). Harsdörffer was familiar with school dramas at least since his student days at the University of Altdorf in the early 1620s ([Keller 1977: 50](#)), and presumably kept abreast of new productions and publications in the 1630s and 1640s. He makes a point to mention the *Waldgetichte*, or something very similar to it, in the second volume of his *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*, through the voice of the 'wise matron' ['kluge Matron'] Julia von Freudenstein, one of the imaginary participants in the conversation games: 'among the new plays I especially liked the spiritual forest poem of the Glückseligen Seele' ['Unter den neuen Schauspielen hat mir das Geistliche Waldgedicht / von der Glückseligen Seele sonderlich gefallen'] ([Harsdörffer 1968, II: 322](#)).



The connection between *Seelewig* and this play is nowhere more evident than in the names of the characters ([Wade 1990: 127](#)):

<i>Waldgetichte</i> (1637)	<i>Seelewig</i> (1644)
Seele (nympha)	Seelewig (Nymfe)
Sinn (pastor)	Sinnigunda (Nymfe)
Gewissen (matrona)	Gwissulda (Matron)
Vornunft (regina)	Herzigild (Verstand, Vernunft; Nymfe)
Sathan (satyrus)	Trügewalt (Satyro, Waldgeist)
Widerhahl (echo)	Echo (Widerhall)
Welt (pastor sumtuosus)	Ehrelob (Schäfer)
Lust (pastor)	Reichimut (Schäfer)
Lache (pastor)	Künsteling (Schäfer)

In other respects, though, *Seelewig* more closely resembles Cavalieri's opera. It is through-composed, for one thing, whereas the *Waldgetichte*, an adaptation of a play, likely involved only incidental singing ([Wade 1990: 121](#)). For another, it is in three acts like *La Rappresentazione*, rather than in five acts, like the *Waldgetichte*. *Seelewig*'s echo scenes, most prominently in Act 3, Scene 4 (see [Example 6](#)), seem similarly indebted to Cavalieri's score ([Kirkendale 2001: 277](#)). Harsdörffer might possibly have encountered *La Rappresentazione*, at least in print, in 1629, during his 'peregrinatio academica', or 'Bildungsreise' — his grand tour through Western Europe and Italy (see [Keller 1977: 21–33](#), regarding this tour). Cavalieri's score had been published in 1600, and presumably circulated. The work was certainly much in discussion. Indeed, there was considerable controversy over who had first developed the *stile rappresentativo* — Cavalieri in his sacred opera or Peri and Rinuccini in their *Euridice* (Florence, 1600).

Such discussions involving language and music were central concerns of the academies that Harsdörffer made a point to visit while in Italy. The most important of these visits for Harsdörffer's creative development was his stay at the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena from the fall of 1629 until the spring of 1630 ([Keller 1977: 24](#)). Here Harsdörffer came into contact not only with important poets, but also with composers like Claudio Saracini and Agostino Agazzari. The latter was the composer of *Eumelio* (Rome, 1606), a *dramma pastorale* that also left an imprint on *Seelewig*. Peter Keller points particularly to *Seelewig*'s 'pastoral garb' ['Schäfergewand'] in this connection ([Keller 1977: 71](#)).

Academies like the Sienese Intronati also provided important humanistic models in the development of an intellectual vernacular. These organizations fostered both an interest in 'the intellectual heritage of antiquity', as Jane Newman puts it, and a belief that 'modern linguistic practice' was 'at least equally authoritative as ancient practice' ([Newman 1990: 37](#)). The latter in turn prompted debates about the comparative authority of particular dialects, reflecting a growing 'regional chauvinism that declared vernacular languages equal to Latin in expressing universal knowledge' ([Newman 1990: 46](#)).

The legitimization of local tongues held special appeal to the founders of German language societies. The advancement of German had, of course, begun earlier, most prominently with Martin Luther's 'blessing' of the tongue. To members of the Blumenorden, the linguistic connection to Luther was not merely of historical interest. There was in fact a marked 'spiritual tendency' in the organization to promulgate an essentially Protestant outlook. Luther was regarded by Johann Klaj, for example, as a model for 'spiritual correctness in German' ([Newman 1990: 117](#)). Klaj even considered Luther's 'redemption of the vernacular' as 'part of a divine plan that guaranteed the restoration of the German language to perfection every one hundred years in a form appropriate to the time' ([Newman 1990: 118](#)).

The authoritative basis for this integration of religious and linguistic interests was essentially the belief that German was an Adamic tongue, a 'primary language' ['Hauptsprache'], as Harsdörffer argues in his *Poetischer Trichter*, which arose in Biblical times ([Newman 1990: 73](#)).⁵ If language itself had originated with Adam naming the animals in the Garden of Eden — a common idea among theorists of language in the Baroque — then the positioning of German as a Hauptsprache both guaranteed its legitimacy and established a nativist-linguistic framework for exploring questions of God and his relationship to humankind. With its drama of humanity's Fall, the Garden was the ideal 'location' for such an exploration. After all, it was here that humankind both lost perfection and gained reason, along with its



instrument, language. It was also because the Garden was about origins that Harsdörffer was able to build on the concept of language as first a sonic, rather than visual, form of communication. Whatever Harsdörffer wanted to posit regarding spirit and matter could best be grasped in aural terms.

The sound-spirit connection was itself nothing new, of course. Marsilio Ficino had developed a “music-spirit” theory’ in 1489, as Barbara Hanning notes. Hanning continues:

According to Ficino (and later, Girolamo Mei), the peculiar power of music (and poetry) resides in the fact that, unlike other sensual stimuli, it is carried by air, which is also the medium of the *spiritus*. It follows that hearing is superior to the other senses because the ear, containing air and thus capable of receiving the movements of music, transmits these movements to the *spiritus*, which, being itself movement, can impart them in turn to the soul ([Hanning 1980: 27](#)).

Ficino was instrumental in the establishment of the Accademia Platonica of Florence (founded c. 1462), later known as the Accademia Fiorentina, a direct descendent of the Fruchtbbringende Gesellschaft of Anhalt-Cöthen, to which Harsdörffer belonged before founding the Blumenorden. Harsdörffer thus would have known something of Ficino’s thought. However, he and his fellow ‘Pegnitz shepherds’ [‘Pegnitzschäfer’] employed the music-spirit connection in the service of a particularly Protestant point of view.

Painting the Cosmos: *Klangmalerei* in the Nuremberg Poetic School

Much critical ink has been spilled over the preoccupation with sound evidenced in the poetry of Harsdörffer and his Nuremberg colleagues. Literary critic Wolfgang Kayser, for instance, articulates a generally held view that Harsdörffer’s ‘tone painting’ [‘Klangmalerei’] was an essentially decorative musical principle ([Kayser 1962: 433](#)). The idea is that poetic music, inasmuch as it consists of semantically non-representative tones, is fundamentally ornamental. Such *Klangmalerei* can indeed be problematic, for inevitably the poet who delights in sound *per se* will have to make choices, at least occasionally, between clarity of meaning and beauty of tone. Herbert Cysarz also finds that ‘the poetic and the musical [in this poetry] often do not complement and support each other’ ([Cysarz 1979: 113](#)). And indeed, the sonorities of the Nuremberg school, as Cysarz points out, were even ‘ridiculed often enough by contemporaries’ ([Cysarz 1979: 113](#)).

Harsdörffer himself made no apologies for the sound of his verse. On the contrary, he set considerable store by the way in which it would be heard. His high regard for the sense of hearing led to such pronouncements as the following, on the qualities of poetry relative to its sister art, painting: ‘Poetry [is] nothing other than a natural picture that is painted with properly artistic word colors; painting, however, [is] a silent poem, and proper to the planning stages of poetry’ [‘Die Poeterey (ist) nichts anderes, als ein natürliches Gemäld, welches mit kunstschicklichen Wortfarben ausgestrichen wird; die Mahlerey aber ein stummes Gedicht, und zu vorgedachter Dichtkunst gehörig’] (Quoted in [Cysarz 1979: 106](#)).⁶ Poetry can portray aurally, through the careful manipulation of ‘word colors’, what painting represents visually. Clearly, for Harsdörffer and the Pegnitzschäfer, sounds in and of themselves — even the sounds that were perceived (and criticized) as superfluous to semantic meaning — had expressive import. They were the stuff of artistic representation.

True to their cultural-linguistic imperatives, the Pegnitzschäfer regarded German sounds as uniquely capable of such expression. This belief rested on the notion that the roots of the language were to be found in nature. In the third volume of the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*, Harsdörffer argued that the German language ‘speaks with the tongues of nature’ ([Kayser 1962: 47](#)), and listed (through various players in the conversation games) the following verbs, among others, as derivations from, or imitations of, animal sounds ([Harsdörffer 1968, III: 312–3](#)):

Goose – ‘schnattert’
Snake – ‘zischet’
Pig – ‘gruntzt’
Rooster – ‘krehet’
Lion – ‘brüllet’



- Ox – ‘blökt’
- Bear – ‘brummet’
- Horse – ‘rinschet’
- Stork – ‘klappert’
- Sheep – ‘bleket’
- Duck – ‘qwaket’
- Chicken – ‘kluket’
- Dog – ‘bellet’

Harsdörffer also connected German words to wind and storms: in our language, says Vespasian von Lustgau (another ‘player’ in the conversation games), ‘nature as it were speaks herself: when it thunders, it seems to me that I hear the clouds forming this word’ [‘Die Natur gleichsam selbst ausspricht: als es donnert, mich bedunkt, ich höre gleichsam die Wolken dieses Wort formen’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, III: 310](#)).⁷ In addition, clouds ‘krachen’, the wind ‘prauset’ and ‘sause’, and hail beats down with a lot of ‘Gepressel’, according to various other participants in the conversation ([Harsdörffer 1968, III: 310](#)). Harsdörffer also seems to have connected certain linguistic sounds with non-physical parts of reality. Sounds that were capable of painting spirit, however, were not based on the principle of imitation. This was logical enough — ‘spirit’ refers to something more fundamental than material objects and forces. It might be represented, but it cannot be imitated, exactly. To this end Harsdörffer draws a sharp aesthetic distinction between poetry, however musical, and music *per se*.

The latter he clearly regarded as the artistic analogue of the soul. Its ‘center is in heaven’ [‘Der Music Mittelpunct ist in dem Himmel’], he writes ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 92](#)).⁸ Music is ‘here on earth the echo or resounding of heavenly joys’ [‘Die Music ist hier auf Erden der Echo oder Wiederhall der himmlischen Freuden’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 91](#)),⁹ just as the human soul is a reflection of the divine spirit. Indeed, without music, writes Harsdörffer, his Waldgedicht *Seelewig* would be ‘a dead work’ [‘ohne welche es ein todes Werk ist’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 43](#)). Poetry, on the other hand, is connected to the intellect. As the ‘richest in thought among all the arts’ [‘die Sinnreichste unter allen Künsten’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 92](#)),¹⁰ it, like the intellect itself, can be put to both good and bad purposes. So while Harsdörffer generally praises the joining together of music and poetry, through which the ‘most beautiful thoughts’ of poetry are brought to a ‘place of honour’ [‘die schönsten Gedanken an ihre Ehrenstelle’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 92](#)),¹¹ he also admits here of the possibility of misuse, which would be to the disadvantage of music ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 92](#)):

Julia von Freudenstein:	Ist aber nichts zu Nachtheil der Music aufzubringen?	But is there nothing to bring up to the detriment of music?
Vespasian von Lustgau:	Nichts anders als der zufällige Misbrauch	Nothing other than accidental misuse

Harsdörffer’s example is of the sirens, ‘who have an almost divine voice, but lead a devilish life’ [‘Dieses ist zu verstehen von denen Syrenen ... die eine fast Göttliche Stimme haben / aber ein Teufflisches Leben führen’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 93](#)).¹² Music itself is blameless, he seems to be saying; intention, which has its seat in the intellect and directs poetry, can be detrimental to music.

By ‘music’ Harsdörffer could only mean here a sonic entity or art form not dependent on words for its existence. He does not speak of poetry being a disadvantage to itself. Thus, in other passages from the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* dealing with music — particularly as it relates to metaphysics — Harsdörffer emphasizes the sort without words. God’s word, not to be understood as human language, is likened to the ‘call of trumpets alone flowing through the air, and without the blow of swords conquering many places’ [‘Der Posaunen Ruf nur durch die Lufte wallet / und ohne Schwertesstreich obsieget manchem Ort’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 86](#)).¹³ Harsdörffer also gives the examples of the ‘sound of trumpets’ bringing down the ‘walls of Jericho’ [‘Von der Posaunen Schall die Mauren zu Jericho eingefallen’] and the ‘wondrous sound of harps protecting one from the evil spirit, and [being] a great comfort in danger and need’ [‘Der Harfen Wunderklang dem bösen Geiste wehret / und ware Trostes voll in Fährlichkeit und Noht’] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 86](#)).¹⁴

Even more interesting is Harsdörffer’s curious reversal of the verdict in the musical contest between Apollo and Pan, and by association the myth of Apollo and Marsyas. In both ancient stories, Apollo easily triumphs with his string instrument, a kithara or lyre, over his



adversary, who plays a syrinx, aulos, or pipes. Harsdörffer's reversal occurs in the discussion about Pan, Perseus, and Bacchus that immediately precedes the presentation of *Seelewig*, in Volume 4 of the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*. Here Julia von Freudenstein asserts that there are two kinds of music: one 'of divine wisdom' and one 'of human reason', and that 'Pan has the former', while 'Apollo the latter' ['Der Music ist zweyerley: Göttlicher Weissheit / und Menschlicher Vernunft; Diese hat Pan; jene Apollo'] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 65](#)).¹⁵ Pan's pipes are a reflection, as it were, of God's voice, whereas Apollo's strings represent the height of human abilities. The ancient associations of Pan's instrument with unmeasured passion, inebriation, and facial disfigurement (cheeks puffed up from blowing) are gone here. Missing too is the judgment of Pan's inferiority due to the fact that, unlike Apollo, the piper cannot sing while playing. Indeed, Pan's music is considered superior precisely because it intones something more fundamental than language and poetry, the tools of reason.

Julia's fellow *Gesprächspieler* Degenwert von Ruhmeck affirms this: 'Pan loves the echo because nothing is more like him than the repetition of his voice, and this is the best knowledge, which the natural speech of the world most truthfully investigates, repeats and clearly lets be heard' ['Pan liebet den Echo / weil nichts ist das ihm ähnlicher / als die Wiederholung seiner Stimme / und ist dieses die beste Wissenschaft / welche der Welt natürliche Rede getreulichst erforschet / widerholet und vernemlich hören läst'] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 65](#)). Pure sound is, as the echo of the god, higher than reason and the language that is derived from it. Harsdörffer nonetheless valued poetry, and language itself, as human means by which the divine word could be 'investigate[d]' and 'repeat[ed]'. Clearly, pure sound as divine metaphor is comprehensible to rational thought only when incorporated into ordinary language. Harsdörffer's *Klangmalerei*, then, has two sides to it, reflecting this duality of the material and the spiritual. Thus the words representing the 'tongues of nature' display a heavy concentration of consonant sounds. One gets a sense in words like 'krachen', 'grunzt', 'zischet', and 'Gepressel' that vowels function merely to separate different consonant sounds. In fact, their imitation of natural sounds seems more successful when these words are pronounced, as far as is possible, without vowels.

Words representing spiritual things, on the other hand, tend to emphasize vowels — the kinds of sustained tones produced by Pan's pipes. Language becomes a kind of allegory for human life: consonants are matter, vowels are the spirit (of divine origin) that animates matter. The more one favors consonants over vowels, the further one is from God. Animals and inanimate objects are effectively without soul. Completely spiritual beings — pure, unarticulated vowels — are incomprehensible to humans, whose being *qua* human depends upon both spirit and matter. The perfectly formed word, echoing the perfectly formed human, will favor vowels over consonants.

These ideas are displayed in a pair of Liedlein that appear, complete with melody and bass line, in Volume 4 of the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*, before the presentation of *Seelewig*. The first of these songs ([Example 1](#)), setting a translation of a 'didactic story' ['lehrreichen Mären'] by Cervantes, is disparaged by the *Gesprächspieler* Reymund Discretin as a disgraceful misuse of the 'noble art of verse'. 'Instead of a morning prayer pleasing to God', he complains, the shepherdess (standing in for 'Die Poeterey') 'offers a juicy love song' ['Wie schändlich wird die edle Reimkunst mißbraucht: an stat eines Gottgefälligen Morgengebets / läst diese Dirne ein üppiges Buhliedlein hören'] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 50](#)).¹⁶ Clearly, Reymund Discretin disapproves of Cervantes' promotion of worldly passion. As can be seen, the musical setting, by Sigmund Staden, minimizes the listener's perception of vowels. The quick tempo and generally short note values tend, rather, to stress consonant sounds. That is, the speed at which most words must be sung means that a greater percentage of time will be spent on consonant sounds than on vowel sounds. With its reiterated rhythms, this is dance-like music of the worldly type, well suited to the secular nature of its text.

The second Liedlein ([Example 2](#)) is provided by Reymund Discretin to exemplify the proper use of poetry. The poet — Harsdörffer, of course — transforms the pastoral ideal of earthly love in the first song into the 'goodness' ['Gütigkeit'] of the Lord, which 'the pious flock as well as the wicked pack enjoy in abundance' ['der samt der Frommen Schaar die böse Rotte gar mit Überfluß geniesset'].¹⁷ The musical differences between the two songs are readily apparent. The longer note values ensure that the vowel sounds dominate the consonant sounds in practically every word. Even words with a preponderance of consonant sounds, like 'gnädiglich', are treated in such a way as to bring out their respective vowel sounds, or inner essences. Keller also implies that the triple meter underscores the song's sacred

Example 1: *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* IV, Liedlein 1. 

Die Poeterey



Müt - ter-lein was wolt ihr sag - en? Mich trifft es am mei - sten an: Weiß ich nicht was

6
heißt ein Mann des - sen Herr - schaft man mus tra - gen? Um - sonst

10
ist eu'r Huht und Wacht nem ich mich nicht selbst in Acht.

Mother, what do you want to say? It concerns me the most:
If I do not know what a man is, whose power must be borne?
In vain is your guard and watch, if I do not take care myself.

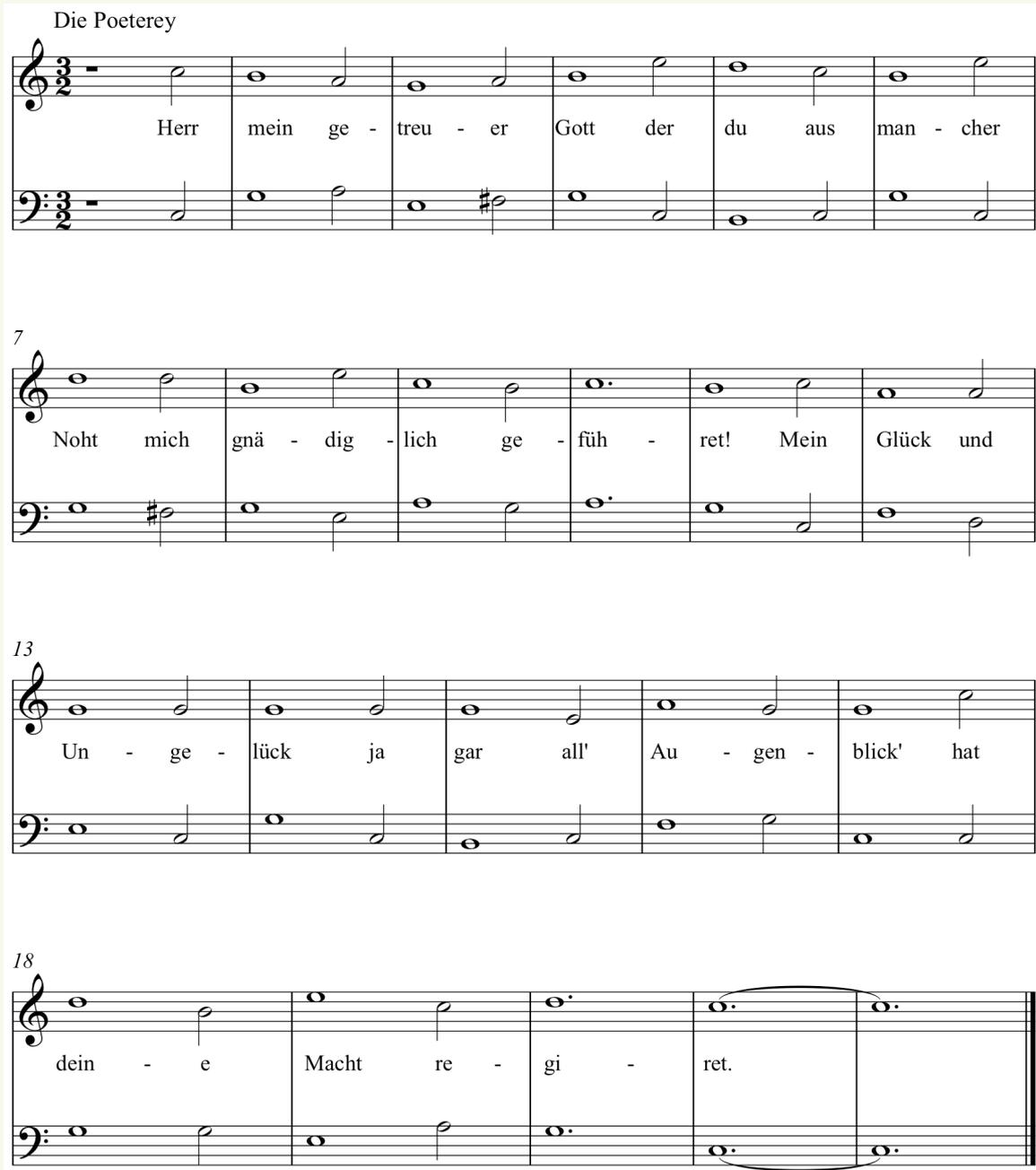
nature, and argues that the predominantly white notes are employed to create a visual contrast to the first song, with its shorter, black notes. In any event, the poet and composer clearly made a concerted effort to correct the perceived hedonism of the first song (Keller 1977: 69).¹⁸

Sigmund Staden certainly shared Harsdörffer's spiritual and cultural aims. The two probably met as participants in Nuremberg's 'musical society' ['*musikalische Gesellschaft*'], a group of like-minded poets and musicians who gathered to discuss and perform music in private homes (Keller 1977: 26, 28; Wade 1990: 116). Staden's collaboration with poet and theologian Johann Michael Dilherr on a 'historical concert' in 1643 would have caught Harsdörffer's attention, perhaps inspiring him with the prospect of creating a musical allegory (Wade 1990: 117). The composer certainly had a solid reputation in Nuremberg by this time, having been *Stadtpfeifer* since 1627 and, since 1634, concurrently the organist at St Lorenz church. 'With the double salary', notes Samuel, 'Staden was Nuremberg's highest-paid musician' (Samuel 1982: 62). As a member of a prominent musical family, Staden gained early exposure to the music of some of the most highly regarded composers of the era. His father Johann, organist at St Sebald church, likely introduced him to the music of Giovanni Gabrieli. His instrumental teacher in Augsburg, Jakob Baumann, had been employed under Orlando di Lasso in Munich and under Hans Leo Hassler in Augsburg. And his activities as a *Ratsmusiker* (a musician employed by the city council for various civic functions) in Nuremberg proffered access to the music of Schütz, Schein, Scheidt, and others (Keller 1977: 26-7).

Curiously for an instrumentalist, Staden left very little instrumental music. His vocal music betrays little interest in the new Italian style with which many of his colleagues were experimenting. The majority of his surviving compositions, mostly songs, indicate that the composer took rather more interest in a type of music that was indelibly linked to Protestantism: the chorale. He was particularly fond of four-part

Example 2: *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* IV, Liedlein 2. 

Die Poeterey



Herr mein ge - treu - er Gott der du aus man - cher

Noht mich gnä - dig - lich ge - füh - ret! Mein Glück und

Un - ge - lück ja gar all' Au - gen - blick' hat

dein - e Macht re - gi - ret.

Lord my true God, you who have mercifully led me out of much misery!

My happiness and unhappiness, indeed all moments has your might governed.

settings, 'note against note, without a figured bass', as Samuel remarks ([Samuel 1982: 64](#)). As well as producing thirteen funeral pieces in this style, Staden also added nineteen four-part strophic songs (some by his father) to his 1637 edition of Hans Leo Hassler's (1564–1612) *Kirchengesänge, Psalmen und geistliche Lieder*. And in general, Staden seems to have been fond of composing in what Samuel calls 'the German traditions of a syllabic treatment of the text, an unadventurous harmony and counterpoint, and the dominating evangelical songs with their restricted melodic flow and limited forms' ([Samuel 1982: 65](#)). That the composer also supported Harsdörffer's musico-linguistic metaphysics seems evident in the two Liedlein. There are similarly sensitive settings in *Seelewig*, some of which play suggestively on the sonic differences between vowels and consonants.



Sonic Programming in *Seelewig*

The first of these settings is the Prologue, sung by the allegorical figure Music ([Example 3](#)). Some of the more obvious examples of Staden's text sensitivity are the instances of word painting — the ascent on the word 'hoher' in the first measure to the second-highest sung pitch in the entire work (f²), and the octave jump upward to the word 'Himmel' in the second-to-last measure. These moments strongly suggest that Staden worked primarily from the first stanza of the poem in the creation of this admittedly strophic setting. (In the second stanza, for instance, 'hat vor' and 'manchem' correspond respectively to 'hoher' and 'Himmel'.) More subtle are the means by which Staden highlights the third line of the first stanza, the only line that refers to the lower world ('Even though I may not satisfy the mob's desire for impudent boldness'). To begin with, the third line is the only one set to three measures of music rather than four, even though each poetic line is an alexandrine with either 12 or 13 syllables. This musical compression results from two things. First, Staden does not respond musically to the poetic caesura (the pause between the third and fourth iambic feet) in the third line, as he does in the first two, where the arrival on the final (accented) syllable of the third foot is underscored, in each case, by a cadence on F — suggestive of a relative major — and a comparatively long note value (two beats) for the singer.

Secondly, the third line proceeds by generally shorter note values. While the other three lines contain numerous quarter notes, dotted quarter notes and half notes, the third consists mainly of eighth notes, with only one quarter note, one dotted quarter, and, of course, the more sustained note marking the end of the line. This concentration on shorter values minimizes vowel sounds and, appropriately, maximizes the consonants that Harsdörffer associates with the lower world. The glossed-over caesura and the shorter note values work together to highlight not only the poetic line's otherness (with respect to the content of lines one, two, and four), but also its function as a kind of moralistic warning. Another subtlety that sets this third musical phrase apart is that it contains the only moment in the song when a stressed syllable is not co-ordinated with a musical stress, namely on the second syllable of 'genügen'. All other stressed syllables in the song are placed in strong metric positions, or they receive agogic accents, or both. 'Genügen', unlike the word it rhymes with (more or less), 'verliegen', gets it wrong, so to speak, with the unaccented '-gen' falling on a downbeat, on the longest note value in the piece.¹⁹ With this awkward, uncomfortable fit, Staden underscores the idea that one should not take pleasure in the frivolity of this world.

The fourth line then proceeds to indicate the rewards of piety: 'heaven' ['Himmel'] is attained only after the song's most pronounced and consistent statement of musical humility — the descent from c² to d¹. This sudden arrival at 'Himmel' is perhaps suggestive of Lutheranism: in contrast to Catholic notions of salvation through good works, heaven has not been gained here; the voice has not worked its way towards it. Rather, heaven has been granted, so to speak, to the humble, the penitent. This theme will return, writ large, at the end of the drama.

As suggested above, the plot of *Seelewig* charts the progress of the human soul, from an initial state of innocence, through a fall from grace, to its ultimate restoration to a state of blessedness. Particularly prominent among the various other characters are Sinnigunda, representing the sensory world that tempts Seelewig, and Trügewalt, the earthy forest spirit bent on capturing — and, in more than one sense, ravaging — the protagonist. (The name 'Trügewalt' cleverly combines words meaning deception, forest, and force.) Staden used a number of musical techniques to outline the character Seelewig's trajectory, most pointedly in relation to these other characters. Throughout most of the first act, and into the second, Seelewig is painted as pure with respect to the temptations of the senses (Sinnigunda). The musical differences between these two characters are perhaps most explicit in the opening scene of Act 2 ([Example 4](#)).

In order to ensure that no one missed the moral teachings, Harsdörffer provided commentary via the players of the *Gesprächspiele*. Regarding this scene, Cassandra Schönlebin notes that 'Sinnigunda's song leaps and is joyful, [whereas] Seelewig's song is more moderate' ['Das Gesang der Sinnigunda springt und fröhlich / der Seelewig Lied mehr gemässigt ist'] ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 30](#)). Indeed, Sinnigunda sings some wider intervals here, while Seelewig proceeds in largely stepwise fashion. Sinnigunda's song is also dance-like, presumably faster, and contains syncopated passages. Seelewig's song is as careful rhythmically as it is intervallically: she replies to Sinnigunda's lilting dactyls in triple meter with serious alexandrines in quadruple meter,²⁰ distancing herself from Sinnigunda's secular abandon.



Example 3: Seelewig, Prologue. 

Die Music oder die Singkunst. Ein Discant oder Tenor führet die Vorrede.



Mein ho - her A - del Stand lässt mich nicht gar ver - lie - gen,
 Ich muss, ich muss her - für und wei - sen was ich kann.
 Mag ich die Fre - vel - witz des Pö - bels nicht ge - nü - gen,
 so wird mein' Eh - re doch ge - lan - gen Him - mel an.

Music or the Art of Singing.

A discant or tenor leads the introduction.

My high noble standing does not let me lie around at all,
 I must, I must come forth and show what I can do!
 Even though I may not satisfy the mob's desire for impudent boldness,
 Yet my honor will surely reach heaven.



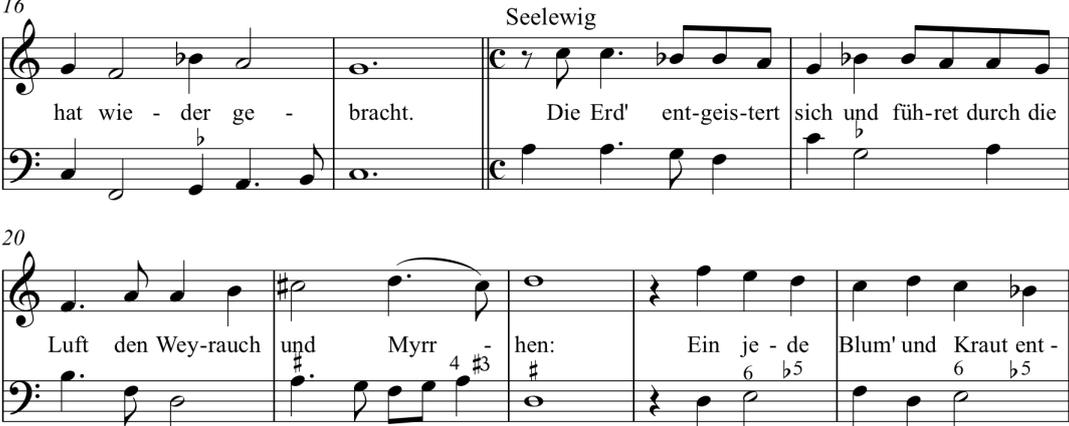
Example 4: *Seelewig*, Act 2 Scene 1. 

Sinnigunda

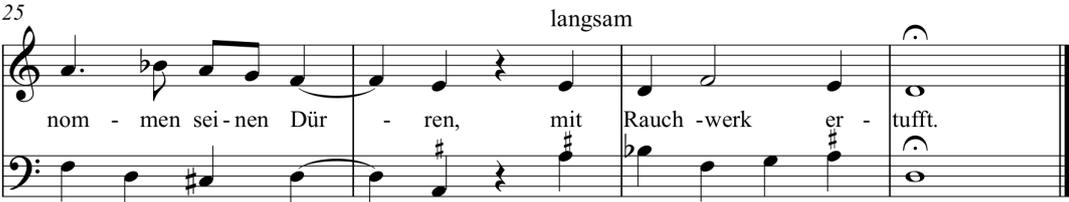


Mei - ne Ge - fähr - tin, wir wol - len be - schau - en die lieb - li - chen Blü - me -
lein, wel - che die Nacht wa - ren ge - schlos - sen in un - se - ren Au - en,
de - nen an - jet - zo das per - len e Tau - en ihr zart - li - che Schö - ne

16 Seelewig



hat wie - der ge - bracht. Die Erd' ent - geis - tert sich und füh - ret durch die
Luft den Wey - rauch und Myrr - hen: Ein je - de Blum' und Kraut ent -
25 langsam



nom - men sei - nen Dür - ren, mit Rauch - werk er - tufft.

Sinnigunda. My companion, let us go see
the lovely little flowers, which tonight
were closed in our meadows,
whose delicate beauty the pearly dew
has brought back.

Seelewig. The earth releases its spirit and sends through the air
incense and myrrh.
Each flower and plant, relieved of its barrenness,
is with misty spirit filled.



The reflection of moral purity is evidenced not only in the turn toward intervallic modesty and rhythmic sobriety (smaller intervals and undancelike rhythms), but also in the privileging of spiritual references. The latter is achieved through the use of longer note values, which favor Harsdörffer's divine vowels. Thus Seelewig's first two-and-a-half measures ("Die Erd" through 'Luft'), appropriately describing earth through consonant-heavy (shorter-valued) descending notes, are followed by three bars whose ascending longer-valued notes paint both the spirit traditionally symbolized by incense and myrrh, and, more literally, the upward path that smoke naturally takes. The focus on spirit then receives further emphasis at the end of the song, where a slower tempo (marked 'langsam') and longer note values stretch out the vowel core of this image even further.

Seelewig's sense of propriety in this scene makes her eventual downfall all the more poignant, and obvious. The hook that secures this downfall is set two scenes later, when Seelewig is tempted by the worldly gifts of some admiring shepherds. By the end of this lengthy scene Seelewig succumbs to temptation. Thus her closing line displays a preponderance of agitated worldly shorter-valued notes ([Example 5](#)).

A comparison of this passage with her song in Act 2 Scene 1 ([Example 4](#)) reveals precisely what Seelewig has lost by accepting the shepherds. The pitch contour of Seelewig's first two-and-a-half measures in the earlier example — the part that describes the earth ([Example 4](#), "Die Erd" through 'Luft') — is replicated precisely (though a fourth higher) at the beginning of this later example ([Example 5](#), 'Ich küsse' through 'befleissen'). Whereas the earlier example then ascends into longer note values (after 'Luft'), the later example continues, for the rest of the scene, to emphasize the rhythmically active, consonant-heavy descending pattern associated with the earth. Gone here is Seelewig's spirit, at least temporarily. Staden underscores the idea that to embrace the material (descending contours) is to reject the spiritual (rising contours).

Just as original sin — humankind's fall from grace — brought death into the world, so Seelewig's fall occasions references to human mortality. In Act 2 Scene 6, she cowers in terror before a storm, unable to do anything against its threatening power. Her vocal line here begins with a prominent diminished-fourth descent from B-flat to F-sharp (followed by a semitone rise to G) reminiscent of Monteverdi's "Tu se' morta" ([Keller 1977: 75](#)).²¹ In Act 3 Scene 3, Sinnigunda attempts to lift a subdued Seelewig's spirits with a song about a nightingale. Embedded within Sinnigunda's musical flight (replete with Italianate coloratura) is a direct reference to the only flight (or escape from woe) available to Seelewig: death. At the words 'und gleich eim Totenlied' (and like a dirge) Staden quotes the Protestant chorale 'Wenn mein Stündlein vorhanden ist' — a plea for Christ's aid at the moment of death — which also appears in Staden's 1637 edition of Hassler's *Kirchengesänge* ([Keller 1977: 71–2](#)). The composer highlights the *Affekt* by bookending the quotation with a pair of tetrachord descents in the bass.

Seelewig's fall is also underscored by a lowered tessitura. In her initial state of innocence, she generally sings in a higher range than the other characters. As she succumbs to temptation, her voice descends, first to a range lower than Sinnigunda's — indicating that she has been conquered by the senses — and ultimately to the level of Trügewalt, the lowest-pitched, most worldly character. Thus, in Act 3 Scene 4, the forest spirit echoes Seelewig's pitches, in the same octave ([Example 6](#)).²² Seelewig has sunk as far as she can. This makes her restoration to grace in the final scene (Act 3 Scene 6), then, all the more striking ([Example 7](#)).

The return to her original state (and tessitura) is quite sudden. While she is playing a game of blind man's bluff in Act 3 Scenes 5 and 6 (and just as Trügewalt is about to ravage her) the character Gwissulda — the conscience — tears the ribbon from Seelewig's eyes and charges her to

Dank, lob, und singe Gott,
daß er dich nicht verlassen in solcher Fährlichkeit.

Thank, praise, and sing to God,
that he has not left you in such danger.



Example 5: *Seelewig*, Act 2 Scene 3, end. 

Seelewig

Ich kü - sse die Ge - schenk und wer - de mich be - fleis - sen hin - ge - gen

4
Lieb' und Gunst euch sämt-lich zu be - wei - sen.

I kiss the gifts and will endeavor to show love and favor to all of you.

The character Herzigild (understanding or reason) thereupon adds ([Harsdörffer 1968, IV: 191](#)):

Nachdem das eitle Thun aus deinen Augen weichet,
so scheint in dein Gemüht das ewig Seelenwort,
das Gottes Gnadenhand zu dir vom Himmel neiget,
Erheb nun seine Güt mit loben fort und fort!

After vain doings disappear from your eyes,
then shines in your being the eternal word of the soul,
which the merciful hand of God proffers to you from heaven,
Extol now his goodness with praises continually!

Seelewig at once regains her proper place (and vocal range). A defeated Sinnigunda lies at her feet, half alive and half dead, as Herzigild puts it. Her course is complete, and she has learned her lesson. As suggested earlier, Seelewig's ultimate progress is strikingly different from the Catholic topos of the soul working its way upward, towards heaven. For one thing, her restoration to her former place results not from her own efforts, but, true to Lutheran ideology, through the grace of God alone. For another, Harsdörffer and Staden are not promoting the more thoroughgoing asceticism of Catholicism. As Wade notes:

Whereas 'Seele' in the *Waldgetichte* of 1637 spurns all aspects of earthly existence including clothing, Harsdörffer's Seelewig sings her last solo with Sinnigunda lying at her feet. The Soul has not rejected her humanity completely, but has mastered those aspects which could prove to be hazardous for her spiritual well-being ([Wade 1990: 172](#)).

In Seelewig's final song ([Example 7](#)), and in the closing chorus of angels following it, Staden also consistently emphasizes, through sustained tones, Harsdörffer's divine vowels, musically reinforcing the final message of joy at promised salvation.

Conclusion

In the reception of *Seelewig*, Staden's music has been consistently misunderstood. It has been described as inferior to Harsdörffer's 'intelligent theorizing' ([Warrack 2001: 24](#)), condemned as clumsy and amateurish ([Moser 1959: 396](#)), and even defended for its adherence to the principles of the *seconda prattica* ([Harris 1980: 70](#)).²³ Yet Staden surely contributed to the creation of *Seelewig* with a strength equal to that of Harsdörffer. His music articulates — in a way that language alone, ironically enough, cannot — Harsdörffer's conception of the sounds of language corresponding to different realms of reality, i.e., sacred vs secular. He also uses word-painting, vocal tessitura, and melodic contour to support the work's theological stance. And he succeeds, through the masterful manipulation of



these techniques, in propagating a particular moral vision aligned with the Lutheranism practiced by the poets of the Nuremberg school. Staden in fact established a means by which German composers might plausibly negotiate a central problem facing German humanists in the seventeenth century, namely how to create a dramatic work on the foundation of a uniquely German ideology. Despite its generic dependence on foreign models, *Seelewig* resonates, in its sonic core as well as in its theoretical precepts, with the linguistic, artistic, and theological ideals of its German humanistic authors.

Example 6: *Seelewig*, Act 3 Scene 4: echo scene. 

Seelewig
 Wer kann denn trös - ten mich? Wer hö - ret was ich klag?
 Sinnigunda
 Trügewalt --in Wiederhall verstell.
 Sie - he, dort aus
 ich sag
 4 #3 #
 6
 Mein Freud ist
 je - nem Ort gibt das E - cho Ge - gen - wort.
 6 6
 10
 nun da - hin! Wer macht sie mir be - wusst?
 hin? Lust
 4 #3 #

- Seelewig. Who can comfort me?
- Trügewalt *in echo*. Me.
- Seelewig. Who hears what I lament?
- Trügewalt. Do tell.



- Sinnigunda. See, there from out of that place the echo gives answer.
- Seelewig. My joy is now gone.
- Trügewalt. Gone?
- Seelewig. Who will make it known to me?
- Trügewalt. Desire ...

Example 7: *Seelewig*, Act 3 Scene 6, excerpt. 

Seelewig

Ach, star - ker Wun - der - gott, der du durch man -

- che Noht mich gnä - dig - lich ge - füh - ret! Es ist kein Un - ge - lück

Oh, strong God of miracles, you who have mercifully guided me through much misery! It is no misfortune ...

ENDNOTES

1. Mara Wade calls the work a 'religious pastoral drama from Silesia' ([1990: 181 n. 19](#)).
2. According to Wade, 'Staden's *Seelewig* was the first pastoral *Singspiel* in German which was not directly translated from an Italian opera' ([Wade 1990: 173](#)).
3. The eight volumes were published by Wolfgang Endter in Nuremberg between 1641 and 1649.
4. All direct references from the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* are from Harsdörffer ([1968](#)). I follow the modern pagination given in this 1968 reprint. All translations from the German, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.
5. Harsdörffer's *Poetischer Trichter* was published by Wolfgang Endter in Nuremberg, 1648–1653. The discussion can be found in book 1: 18.
6. From the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* IV.
7. Vespasian von Lustgau is called 'an old courtier' ['ein alter Hofmann'].
8. The speaker is Degenwert von Ruhmeck, 'a sensible and learned soldier' ['ein verständiger und gelehrter Soldat'].
9. Angelica von Keuschewitz, 'a noble maiden' ['eine adeliche Jungfrau'] speaks these words.
10. Reymund Discretin, 'a well-traveled and well-read student' ['ein gereister und belesener Student'] speaks here.
11. Reymund Discretin speaks here.
12. Cassandra Schönlebin, 'a noble maiden' ['eine adeliche Jungfrau'] speaks. Edith Hamilton makes clear, in her telling of Odysseus's encounter, that it was the words of the sirens that were particularly dangerous: 'He heard [their song] and the words were even more enticing than the melody, at least to a Greek' ([Hamilton 1969: 214](#)). Interestingly, the promise embodied in these words resembles the seductive tactics of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Hamilton continues: "They would give knowledge to each man who came to them, they said, ripe wisdom and a quickening of the spirit. 'We know all things which shall be hereafter upon the earth.' So rang their song in lovely cadences, and Odysseus' heart ached with longing" ([Hamilton 1969: 214](#)).



13. These lines are from the second stanza of the prologue (see [Example 3](#)). In Harsdörffer (1968, IV: 85–97), the text of *Seelewig* is first given without music; after each stanza, the players in the conversation games comment on the poetry and the musical setting.
14. The latter lines are from the third stanza of the prologue. The former line (in this sentence) is part of the commentary on the second stanza, given by Vespasian von Lustgau.
15. In Harsdörffer's construction, 'diese' means 'former'; 'jene' means 'latter', as the following passage, from the same discussion in Harsdörffer (1968, IV: 71), indicates: 'Bacchus ist die Begierde / welche erzeuget wird von einer wahren oder scheinbarlichen Güte: Dieses ist das eiferige Rebsweib / jene das rechte Eheweib des Gemütes' ['Bacchus is desire, which is created by a true or apparent goodness: the former is the zealous wife, the latter the correct wife of the soul']. At first the modern reader may find Harsdörffer's construction here confusing. Grammatically, it is not clear whether 'Dieses' refers to 'Begierde' or to 'Güte'. 'Jene' could likewise refer to either. Semantically, however, there is no confusion. 'Desire' could only be connected to 'zealous wife'; 'goodness' (as opposed to desire) must be the 'correct wife of the soul'.
16. The first Liedlein is found in Harsdörffer (1968, IV: 45–9).
17. This line is from the sixth stanza of the second Liedlein. The entire song is found in Harsdörffer (1968, IV: 51–5).
18. The music is clearly conceived in triple 'meter', despite a 'C' in the uppermost staff of the original. As Geoffrey Chew and Richard Rastall, (2001: 153) note, composers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries occasionally notated pieces in duple meter (in this case quadruple), 'even though their musical sense is triple'. Regarding the visual impact of the songs, Keller writes that 'the sacred and the secular are thus set into opposition in [the] two songs. If we observe the discant, we can determine that the first, secular, song has continuous dotted rhythms in alla breve and with few exceptions everything is written in black notes. The second, spiritual, song has exactly the reverse rhythm and moves in triple meter. It is written entirely in white, half and whole, notes' ['Geistlich und weltlich werden also in zwei Liedern in Opposition gesetzt. Betrachten wir den Diskant, so stellen wir fest, dass das erste, weltliche, Lied den durchgehend punktierten Rhythmus im Allabrevetakt hat und mit wenigen Ausnahmen alles in schwarzen Noten geschrieben ist. Das zweite, geistliche, Lied hat genau den umgekehrten Rhythmus und bewegt sich im 3er Takt. Es ist ganz mit weissen, also halben und ganzen Noten geschrieben'] (Keller 1977: 69).
19. It might be argued that the stressed syllable, '-nü-', does receive an agogic accent relative to the unaccented 'ge-'. Yet this stress is surely overshadowed by the strong metric position and length of '-gen'.
20. There are two alexandrine lines here: line one, "Die Erd'" through 'Luft'; and line three, 'Ein jede' through 'Dürren'. Lines two and four provide contrast, with six and five syllables, respectively.
21. Keller, (1977: 75), also mentions striking resemblances to diminished-fourth passages in Agazzari's *Eumelio* and in Schütz, who used the interval 'in connection with the expression of fear' ['im Zusammenhang mit dem Ausdruck des Fürchtens']. There is also an affective use of chromaticism later in the scene, at Seelewig's words, 'Ach Ach Weh Ach Weh!', as well as earlier in the drama, in Act 2 Scene 3, where Künsteling sings of being 'freed from mourning and weeping' ['befreyet von Trauern und Weinen'].
22. Throughout the rest of the drama, Trügewalt's tessitura is generally quite low, extending as far down as F in Act 1 Scene 2. His uncharacteristically high range in Act 3 Scene 4 accommodates the unison effect with Seelewig.
23. See also Grout and Williams (2003).

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SOUND SAMPLE CREDITS

Sound Samples 1–7 (Examples 1–7): Personal recordings of the author. Lisa Radakovich Holsberg (soprano), Paul F. Mueller (harpsichord), Paul Brantley (cello).

ABSTRACT

Despite its generic dependence on foreign models, *Seelewig* (text by Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, music by Sigmund Theophilus Staden, Nuremberg, 1644) displays a number of features unique to its Central German context. Harsdörffer and the other poets of Nuremberg's linguistic society Blumenorden an der Pegnitz, the intellectual crucible from which *Seelewig* emerged, employed *Klangmalerei* in the service of a distinctly moralistic-didactic poetic outlook. In Harsdörffer's linguistic cosmology, pure, unarticulated vowel sounds (without clear beginnings or endings) seem to represent the eternal soul — 'Seelewig', humankind's divine part — whereas consonants often mimic the physical world. Staden adopted this sensitivity to verbal sonorities in his setting of Harsdörffer's text, as well as using word painting, vocal tessitura, and melodic contour to highlight the work's Protestant theological content.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Richard Kramer, Barbara R. Hanning, Bruce C. MacIntyre, Stephen Blum, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. The author also thanks James Noyes, Paul Kirby, and Ina Surerus for their help with the musical examples and in various other ways.

Keywords. Seelewig, Harsdörffer, Staden, German Baroque opera, Music and Theology, Music and Protestant Theology, *Klangmalerei* in the Nuremberg Poetic School.

Received by the editors 28 May 2010; accepted for publication (in revised form) 18 Aug 2011.

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