Elsa’s Reason

On Beliefs and Motives in Richard Wagner’s Lohengrin

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Abstract

Once Wagner’s most popular opera, Lohengrin has suffered scholarly neglect in the postwar period. This essay reengages with the work from the novel perspective of game theory analysis. Centering on Elsa’s breach of the Frageverbot, it offers a rigorous epistemological study of the opera’s main characters. Against traditional interpretations of the heroine’s fatal decision, we propose a complex and psychologically more satisfactory account. Elsa asks the forbidden question because she needs to confirm Lohengrin’s belief in her innocence, a belief that Ortrud successfully eroded in Act II. This novel interpretation reveals Elsa as a rational individual, upgrades the dramatic significance of the Act I combat scene, and signals a hermeneutic return to the heart of opera criticism, the drama itself.

For an opera titled after its male hero, Lohengrin surprisingly revolves around a tragic spouse. Elsa enters the stage wrongfully accused of a crime, spends half of her presence in Acts II and III torn by doubt, suffers public humiliation on her way to the altar, breaks her marital vow, and practically brings down the curtain with her onstage collapse. Wagner’s engrossing vision of the ‘absolute artist’ is brilliantly realized through the contrast between a knight so perfect that he is condemned to the passivity of a respondent (even his Frageverbot is dictated from above), and a dreamy maid burdened with the opera’s two vital decisions:
invoking the knight to defend her innocence, and later breaking her ignorance pledge of his origins. Indeed, on Elsa’s promise to keep clear of the forbidden question Wagner hinges the two sources of suspense fueling the drama: the uncertainty about her guilt (Act I) and the growing speculation about Lohengrin’s ‘Nam und Art’ (Acts II, III).

Conviction and doubt lie at the heart of Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (‘Lohengrin suchte das Weib, das an ihn glaubte’ [Lohengrin sought the woman who believed in him]1) and naturally call for an epistemological analysis of its characters’ beliefs. What is certain and what remains conjectural? How much does each character know about the others? What do they know about what the others know about themselves? And in what way does each arrive at conclusions and translate them into actions? Such questions already have been asked by literary critics and game theorists exploring drama and fiction.2 Steve Roth’s analysis of the ‘Mousetrap’ in *Hamlet* – where the noun ‘belief’ appears twice as frequently as in any other of Shakespeare’s play – shows that, against common perception, Hamlet does not actually gain knowledge of his father’s murder. His proceeding to exact revenge ‘despite of knowing


that he can never truly know’ renders *Hamlet* the first modern tragedy.\(^3\) In his path-breaking monograph *I Know that You Know that I Know*, George Butte studies belief systems in (among others) Jane Austen’s novels, pointing to the ‘deep intersubjectivity’ in beliefs about beliefs (commonly referred to as higher or second-order beliefs).\(^4\) Lisa Zunshine explores Richardson’s *Clarissa* and Nabokov’s *Lolita* from the perspectives of theory of mind or metarepresentation (thinking about other people’s thoughts and distinguishing informational layers in fiction).\(^5\) More recently, economists have applied game theory to study drama and opera. Analysing episodes of the TV series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, Benedikt Löwe, Eric Pacuit, and Sanchit Saraf propose a formal algorithm to track the characters’ belief systems and uncover building blocks of fictional narratives.\(^6\) Closer to music, Heike Harmgart, Steffen Huck, and Wieland Müller use counterfactual analysis to explain Tannhäuser’s disruptive behavior at the singing contest in Wagner’s eponymous opera, identifying the hero’s dilemma once the contest is underway.\(^7\)

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\(^4\) George Butte, *I Know That You Know That I Know: Narrating Subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie* (Columbus, 2004).


\(^7\) ‘Tannhäuser’s Dilemma: A Counterfactual Analysis’, ELSE working papers #315. See also their paper ‘The miracle as a randomization device: A lesson from Richard Wagner’s
In an age where reality and fiction tend to mix freely, cognitive literary criticism promises to enrich opera hermeneutics by interrogating character behavior. Game theory especially allows us to probe the state of knowledge and set of strategies for each character in a closed system of human interaction, thus leading to a deeper understanding of human conflict, the root of all drama. Although not any opera is amenable to this type of analysis, those of Wagner demonstrate the highest integration of music and drama. Lohengrin, in particular, offers a test case, as its waning postwar popularity rests considerably on dissatisfaction with its dramatic properties. The knight’s affirmation of love-at-first-sight

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8 Evaluating game theory in 1960, mathematician/psychologist Anatol Rapoport found that it ‘stimulates us to think about conflict in a new way’ and, at the very least, it has an impact on our thinking processes: Fights, Games, and Debates (Ann Arbor, 1960), 242.


10 Unlike popular fiction, high drama explores the high order beliefs of characters. Löwe, Pacuit, and Saraf find that almost all the plots of CSI are entirely built around problems of first-order beliefs (who did what).

11 For the opera’s contradictory elements, see Carl Dahlhaus, Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1979), 35-48. The allegation that Hitler’s title ‘Führer’ was inspired by the opera’s finale and the lavishly produced revival of Lohengrin by
for Elsa (Act III scene 2) is contradicted by the mercenary *quid pro quo* of their marriage, and his declining the title of Duke (Act II scene 3) casts doubts on his long-term commitment to Brabant. Moreover, Elsa’s martyrdom is hardly tolerable in a period of female assertiveness and the knight’s tender feelings for his ‘lieber Schwan!’ (Act I scene 3), which Wagner exposes with an orchestral *Generalpause*, yield knowing smiles among gay and straight listeners alike. Above all, the opera’s bleak ending, with both heroes departing and leaving the stage to first-timer Gottfried is hardly attractive to audiences exposed to spectacular or comforting finales in other dramatic genres. If anything, Wagner’s creative struggle with this finale shows a conscious thinking about his characters.  

**Elsa’s (rational) choice**

Since Elsa makes the dramatic vortex of the opera, this essay concentrates on her beliefs and behavior. Wagner literature presents a rather simplistic view of her asking the forbidden question. Critics have blamed either Lohengrin’s cruelty and the impossibility of his demand,  

13 or Elsa’s emotional instability.  

14 Absence of knowledge of his identity leads her to

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fears of either being abandoned or unable to help him in need. Against these predictable explanations the game theory analysis presented here offers a psychologically deeper and

‘Lohengrin is the artist ... who descends to earth in search of self-fulfillment, only to find disillusionment and annihilation’: ‘The ‘Romantic operas’ and the turn to myth’, in Grey, *Cambridge Companion to Wagner*, 71.

14 For Carl Dahlhaus ‘The condition Lohengrin lays down is impossible of fulfilment; Elsa would have to ask him his name, even without Ortrud’s interference’: Dahlhaus, *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, 39. Similarly, Kurt Pahlen calls Lohengrin’s demand ‘inhumane’ and ‘bordering on the impossible’ and finds Elsa’s breach ‘typically female’: *Richard Wagner: Lohengrin: Einführung und Kommentar* (Mainz, 1982), 261. Other writers emphasize Elsa’s fear of loss. In Ernest Newman’s account, she fears that ‘as by magic he had come to her, so by magic he may be taken from her’: *The Wagner Operas* (Princeton, 1949), 159. Dieter Borchmeyer argues that her dread of the numinous ‘inspires in Elsa an insane and self-destructive desire to know her husband’s true identity’: *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner* (Princeton, 2004), 150. Issues of certainty and identity have also been raised. Nike Wagner, for example, claims Elsa ‘must ask the question’ since love requires ‘sensual certainty’ and is not ‘an abstract emotion’: *Wagner Theater* (Frankfurt, 1998), 87; and Barry Emslie argues that Lohengrin’s conditions ‘cannot be reconciled with the mundane nature of marriage’ and that Elsa, by asking the question, ‘asserts the importance of the sexual couple as a collective identity over that of the single male hero’: ‘The domestication of opera’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 5 (1993), 171. In an alternative reading, finally, Slavoj Zizek proposes that Elsa ‘intentionally asks the fateful question and thereby delivers Lohengrin whose true desire, of course, is to remain the lone artist sublimating his suffering into his creativity’: ‘“There is no Sexual Relationship”: Wagner as a Lacanian’, *New German Critique*, 69 (1996), 30.
dramatically more powerful one, which also upgrades the significance of the Act I combat scene. Elsa asks because her ignorance of her husband’s identity raises doubts about his belief in her innocence. This second-order belief (Elsa thinking about her spouse’s thinking about her) reveals that she has a theory of mind, showing that there is ample sophistication in her emotional turbulence.

This novel perspective draws support from Wagner himself, whose prose draft of the libretto has Elsa explicitly conditioning Lohengrin’s belief in her innocence upon her own belief in his mission: ‘So wie du an meine Unschuld glaubst, glaub’ ich an deine hohe Sendung!’ At the time, just after Lohengrin’s arrival and before the trial-by-combat that will determine her fate, Elsa had no reason to doubt his identity: the knight had duly responded to her call and was willing to risk his life for her innocence. She had faith and was certain. A master psychologist, whose cognitive sophistication Wagner heightens with a progressive musical idiom, Ortrud understands that without breaking the two interlocked beliefs she will never get rid of Elsa and her omnipotent knight. Indeed, her first attempt to shake Elsa’s faith, by invoking the fear of loss and abandonment, fails resoundingly:

ORTRUD

Wohl daß ich dich warne,
zu blind nicht deinem Glück zu trau’n;
daß nicht ein Unheil dich umgarne,

15 Dokumente und Texte zu Lohengrin, 213. For a survey of Wagner’s changes from the prose draft to the final libretto, see Ernest Newman, Wagner Nights (London, 1949), 117-25.

16 See Graham G. Hunt, ‘Ortrud and the Birth of a New Style in Act 2, Scene 1 of Wagner’s Lohengrin’, The Opera Quarterly, 20 (2004), 47-70. Her superior understanding of psychology presumably generates from her pagan beliefs. Tales of multiple gods are psychologically more sophisticated than the deliberations of a single all-powerful god.
laß mich für dich zur Zukunft schau’n.

ELSA

Welch’ Unheil?

ORTRUD

Könntest du erfassen,
wie dessen Art so wundersam,
der nie dich möge so verlassen,
wie er durch Zauber zu dir kam!

ELSA

Du Ärmste kannst wohl nie ermessen,
wie zweifellos mein Herze liebt!
Du hast wohl nie das Glück besessen,
das sich uns nur durch Glauben gibt!
Kehr’ bei mir ein, laß mich dich lehren
wie süß die Wonne reinster Treu’!
Laß zu dem Glauben dich bekehren:
es giebt ein Glück, das ohne Reu’.

[ll. 544-559]

[ORTRUD

It were well I should warn you
not to trust too blindly in your happiness;
lest some misfortune should befall you,
let me look into the future for you.
ELSA

What misfortune?

ORTRUD

Have you never reflected

that he of such mysterious lineage

might leave you in the same way

as by magic he came to you?

ELSA

Poor woman, you can never measure

how free of doubt is my heart!

You have indeed never known the happiness

that only faith can give.

Come in with me! Let me teach you

how sweet is the bliss of perfect trust!

Let yourself be converted to faith:

it brings happiness without alloy!]

Elsa resists the attack because her faith in the knight is grounded in their pact. He proved his belief in her innocence by winning the combat, and so she believes in his high mission and their happiness. In the following soliloquy, Ortrud swiftly updates her strategy. Her failure to instill doubt in Elsa’s mind becomes a lever for a renewed and more powerful assault, as it inflated Elsa’s confidence. Which dreamy maid could possibly teach happiness and ‘perfect trust’ to an older and experienced woman?

ORTRUD

Ha! Dieser Stolz, er soll mich lehren,

wie ich bekämpfe ihre Treu’:
gen ihn will ich die Waffen kehren,
durch ihren Hochmuth werd’ ihr Reu’!

[ll. 560-563]

/ORTRUD
Ha! This pride of hers shall teach me
how to undermine her trust!
Against it I will turn her own weapon:
through her pride shall come her pain!]

To know something is one thing; to be able to teach it is to know that you know it. Until now Elsa was faithful and certain; from the moment she rejects Ortrud’s ludicrous suggestion she also knows that she is faithful. What she cannot realize is that her inflated self-assurance makes her more vulnerable to another attack. Indeed, Ortrud’s assault in Act II scene 4 is unexpected and shattering, as it combines private betrayal (Elsa: ‘I was misled by your deceit’), a breach of social protocol (the wife of an exiled man challenges in public space Brabant’s heiress) and public accusation that, if true, exposes a state conspiracy (Brabant cannot be ruled by an impostor knight and a murderess Elsa).

/ORTRUD
Weil eine Stund’ ich meines Werth’s vergessen,
glaub’st du, ich müßte dir nur kriechend nah’n?
Mein Leid zu rächen will ich mich vermessen,
was mir gebührt, das will ich nun empfah’n.

/ELSA
Weh’! Ließ ich durch dein Heucheln mich verleiten,
die diese Nacht sich jammernd zu mir stahl?
Wie willst du nun in Hochmuth vor mir schreiten,
du, eines Gottgerichteten Gemahl?

ORTRUD
Wenn falsch Gericht mir den Gemahl verbannte,
war doch sein Nam’ im Lande hochgeehrt;
als aller Tugend Preis man ihn nur nannte,
gekannt, gefürchtet war sein tapf’re Schwert.
Der deine, sag’, wer sollte hier ihn kennen,
vermagst du selbst den Namen nicht zu nennen?
[...]
Kannst du ihn nennen? Kannst du uns es sagen,
ob sein Geschlecht, sein Adel wohl bewährt?
Woher die Fluthen ihn zu dir getragen,
wann und wohin er wieder von dir fährt?
Ha, nein! Wohl brächte ihm es schlimme Noth;
der kluge Held die Frage drum verbot!
[...]

ELSA
Du Lästerin! Ruchlose Frau!
Hör’, ob ich Antwort mir getrau’!
So rein und edel ist sein Wesen,
so tugendreich der hehre Mann,
daß nie des Unheil’s soll genesen,
wer seiner Sendung zweifeln kann!
Hat nicht durch Gott im Kampf geschlagen
mein theurer Held den Gatten dein?
Nun sollt nach Recht ihr alle sagen,
wer kann da nur der Reine sein?

[...]

ORTRUD

Ha! Diese Reine deines Helden,
wie wäre sie so bald getrübt,
müßt’ er des Zaubers Wesen melden,
durch den hier solche Macht er übt!
Wagst du ihn nicht darum zu fragen,
so glauben alle wir mit Recht,
du müßtest selbst in Sorge zagen,
um seine Reine steh’ es schlecht!

[II. 635-677]

[ORTRUD]

Because for an hour I forgot my position
do you think that I must only cringe before you?
I intend to have revenge for my suffering;
I demand what is mine by right!

ELSA

Ah! I was misled by your deceit
when last night you crept lamenting to me.
How can you now arrogantly walk before me,
the wife of one condemned by God?
ORTRUD

Although false judgment has condemned my husband,

his name was highly honoured in the land;

he was called the crown of all virtue,

his valiant sword was known and feared.

But yours, who here can know him

if you yourself may not call him by his name?

[...]

Can you name him? Can you tell us

whether his lineage, his nobility, is well attested,

from whence the waters brought him to you,

when he will leave you again, and for where?

Ah no! It would bring disaster on him –

so the crafty hero forbade the question!

[...]

ELSA

Slanderer! Wicked woman!

Hear, if I can trust myself to answer!

So pure and noble is his nature,

so virtuous this exalted being,

that none who can doubt his mission

shall ever be free from ill-fortune.

Did not my dear hero, with God’s help,

strike down your husband in the combat?

Now let all say, in justice,
which alone can be innocent?

[...]

ORTRUD

Ha, how soon would this innocence
of your hero be besmirched
if he had to reveal the magic craft
by which he wields such power here!
If you do not dare to question him
we shall all believe, with right
that you yourself falter in misgiving,
and have little confidence in his innocence!]

Launched as an unprovoked attack against Lohengrin’s honesty, Ortrud’s disruption (before the house of God, of all places) has cognitive effects. By introducing an alternative explanation for his victory she forces Elsa – indeed, everyone present – to confront two scenarios: either her savior won by valor, thus proving her innocence, or he cheated through magical means (‘Zaubers Wesen’), which makes possible that, after all, he did not believe in her innocence. In the following scenes, Elsa gradually realizes that without revealing his identity she cannot verify his ‘hohe Sendung’ upon which her belief in his belief in her innocence really depends.\(^\text{17}\) What underlies her turbulence in the Act III duet is this concern

\(^{17}\) Richard Jones’ *Lohengrin* at the Bavarian State Opera (2009) seems to adopt a similar reading. The knight is shown to be using magic in the combat (and also in his final confrontation with Friedrich). Visibly shaken by this, Elsa rushes to a room where she has kept a ‘missing person’ poster of her brother. Through Elsa’s staring at it, Jones illustrates the nexus between Lohengrin’s ‘Nam und Art’ and the question of her own guilt in the case of the missing brother.
for her innocence in the *mind* of her spouse. What once was a simple mindset of unshakeable faith in God and her savior has turned, with Ortrud’s cognitive manipulation, into a world of multiple and conflicting possibilities and uncertainties. The price of saving her marriage (not asking the forbidden question) is to live knowing of Ortrud’s alternative explanation without *ever* being able to test it. The price of restoring her Act I certainty (asking the question) is to risk her marriage (note, however, that the knight never specified the consequences of her vow breach, which leaves open the possibility that she might be forgiven). We can represent her dilemma as follows:

**Elsa’s strategy**

| Don’t ask the forbidden question | NO | YES/ NOT QUITE |
| Ask the forbidden question      | YES | MAYBE          |

By choosing the second, Elsa proves that she is both human and a thinker; and that her mental stability (the need to know) outweighs her emotional pain (the fear to lose). If she is devastated in the finale, at least she does know her departing husband’s identity, which confirms to all Brabant and to herself that he won the combat fairly, thus proving her innocence. Her objective being fulfilled, she, too, is free to depart the world, though in the way humans do (collapsing *entseelt*).
Bayesian updating and the trial-by-combat

Elsa’s martyrdom is first and foremost mental, we propose. Quite suddenly, she passes from a cognitive state of absolute knowledge to that of stochastic belief, predicing on alternatives that inform her decision-making. To understand her condition, let us ponder on the ultimate consequences of Ortrud’s scenario: if the knight cheated, then Friedrich was presumably the real winner. If so, his charges against Elsa were just and she was guilty, which is, of course, impossible for her to accept, for she knows of her innocence. The only solution for this impasse would be to consider trial-by-combat as being inherently flawed, which then would cast doubt on the existence of divine justice and, ultimately, of God. In short, Elsa’s entire worldview would collapse. The judicial duel concluding Act 1 thus turns into a focal point in the minds of everyone except Lohengrin, and deserves to be examined as something more than a piece of spectacular action or a formal counterweight to the wedding procession in Act III.

In medieval times, trial-by-combat or judicial duel was reserved for cases where the truth of a matter could not be ascertained otherwise, such as murders without witnesses. It was accepted that, because of the high stakes involved (losing one’s own life), one was submitting his case directly to God’s hands to receive either victory or death regardless of his physical attributes. As this ‘wager of battel’ involves a winning and a losing agent, it qualifies as a zero-sum bet and can be further illuminated through a class of celebrated results in game theory called agreement theorems. The basic logic of these theorems is grounded in the observation that, if somebody is willing to bet against us, he must have different

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18 For a historical background of this judicial procedure, see Vickie L. Ziegler, Trial by Fire and Battle in Medieval German Literature (Rochester, 2004), 7-10.
information from ours. And this we need to take into account when we update our beliefs.\(^{19}\)

As a result, agents will never trade in a zero-sum environment where one’s gain is the other’s loss, and they will never bet.\(^{20}\) Agreement theorems and the Bayesian updating they rest on allow us to probe the degree of knowledge and strategies of both combatants even before they cross swords.


\(^{20}\) An example from the world of finance: Consider a seller who has an asset of uncertain value and a potential buyer. Both have some private information about what the asset’s value upon eventual liquidation. The information they have may differ such that, initially, the values they attach to the asset may differ. If the buyer has more positive information than the seller he may be more optimistic about the asset’s future value than the seller and, thus, from the outset one might think that they have incentives to trade. But now notice that the sheer willingness of the potential buyer to buy the asset at a price above the seller’s reservation value contains information for the seller. Why would the buyer be willing to buy at such a price if he had not more optimistic information than the seller? Hence, the seller must update his beliefs about the expected value of the asset. At the same time, when the seller’s sheer willingness to sell at a low price contains information for the buyer who must infer that the seller has some more pessimistic information. Hence, he has to adjust his beliefs downward. As can be shown mathematically, this process of belief adjustment will continue until both, seller and buyer, reach agreement about the expected value of the seller and, hence, lose their interest to trade.
Thomas Bayes (1702 – 1761) was a British mathematician and Presbyterian minister who showed, in a posthumously published *Essay towards solving a Problem in the Doctrine of Chances* (1763), how *conditional probabilities* can be computed. If a piece of news arrives, the probability of something being the case has to be recomputed *conditional* on the new information. This very process where a *prior* belief is transformed into a conditional or *posterior* belief is the process of Bayesian updating. Common examples include investors updating their beliefs about the economic potential of companies in response to the arrival of new technologies; voters adjusting their beliefs about a politician’s integrity after hearing rumours about corruption; and lovers pondering how much they are loved back despite a phone that does not ring. New information can arrive as factual knowledge (e.g. updating weather forecast on the basis of new data) or in the form of other people’s beliefs. The latter is the one we will apply to the two combatants in *Lohengrin*.

As mentioned above, the trial by combat is a zero-sum game: Lohengrin bets on Elsa’s innocence and Friedrich on Elsa’s guilt. Since only one is expected to survive, both contestants have to be fairly certain about their respective cause. This can happen only if they have uneven access to private information. Indeed, Lohengrin knows for a fact that Elsa did not kill her brother because, omniscience discounted, he was led to Brabant by the supposed murder victim transformed into a swan. Friedrich, on the other side, believes in her guilt based on second-hand evidence, Ortrud’s eyewitness account and his observing Elsa’s behavior during interrogation:

> als ich mit Drohen nun in Elsa drang,
> da ließ in bleichem Zagen und Erbeben

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der gräßlichen Schuld Bekenntniß sie uns seh’n. [ll. 50-52]

[when I questioned Elsa threateningly
her pallor and her trembling revealed to us
her confession of her hideous crime.]

His indirect knowledge is compounded by conflict of interest: the eyewitness happens to be Elsa’s enemy and, by the time of the trial, also his wife; still worse, both benefit from Elsa’s death. This is one reason why he avoids disclosing his source before the King and rushes to propose a duel:

Wess’ ich sie zeih’, dess’ hab’ ich sich’ren Grund:
glaubwürdig ward ihr Frevel mir bezeugt.
Doch eurem Zweifel durch ein Zeugniß wehren,
das stünde wahrlich übel mein Stolz! [ll. 131-134]

[Her offence is proved to me beyond doubt;
but to dispel your doubts by calling a witness
would truly wound my pride!]

In the absence of contradictory evidence and without Lohengrin’s presence, Friedrich has every reason to expect victory. Indeed, no Brabantine volunteers to defend Elsa (‘Ohn’ Antwort ist der Ruf verhallt:’ l. 172 [The challenge dies away unanswered]), prompting Friedrich to boast ‘auf meiner Seite bleibt das Recht.’ (l. 175) [Right is on my side].

The knight’s arrival changes everything. He is a stranger, thus he cannot be evaluated, lands (or rather docks) in a miraculous way and looks pure beyond doubt:

welch’ seltsam Wunder! ...
Ein Wunder ist gekommen!
Ha, unerhörtes, nie geseh’nes Wunder! [ll. 187-194]

[What a strange and wondrous sight! ...
...
A miracle has transpired,
A miracle such as we have not heard nor seen!]

Indeed, the Brabantines advise Friedrich ‘Steh’ ab vom Kampf! Wenn du ihn wagst, / zu siegen nummer du vermagst!’ (ll. 256-257) [Call off the fight! If you challenge him, / you will never succeed in conquering him.] Under Bayesian updating, he should reconsider his commitment to the duel because of Lohengrin’s willingness to fight and everybody’s updated belief that he may not win. Wagner himself describes his deportment as one of inner struggle (‘mit leidenschaftlich schwankendem und endlich sich entscheidendem, innerem Kampfe’: ll. 261/262; in the verse draft, ‘nach heftigem inneren Kampfe’: l. 433). Why does he, then, continue the challenge and agree to fight?

**Friedrich’s beliefs**

We propose that Friedrich’s beliefs change in a subtle way, thus affecting the logic of agreement theorems. His belief ‘Elsa is guilty’, based on Ortrud’s account, is displaced by a belief in his sincerity in believing ‘Elsa is guilty’. Observe that from now on his statements revolve exclusively around his honor and truthfulness (‘ich zu lügen nie vermeint.’: l. 266 [I have never stooped to tell a lie]). The duel is no longer about Elsa’s crime but about his integrity in espousing this belief (‘Herr Gott, verlass’ mein’ Ehre nicht!’: l. 299 [Lord God, let me not be dishonoured!]). Moments before crossing swords with Lohengrin, Friedrich still has something to gain even if he dies: his personal integrity.
### Friedrich’s strategy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fight with Lohengrin</td>
<td>MAYBE</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdraw from the duel</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
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Agreement theorems predict that agents will only bet and knights will only fight if they have either perfect knowledge (such as Lohengrin) or if the zero-sum assumption does not quite hold, that is, if one agent stands to gain something from engaging in the bet regardless of its outcome (such as Friedrich who wants to maintain his sincerity). Friedrich is bound to lose not only because Lohengrin (his divine nature aside) fights for the right cause, but also because he himself replaced the strength of a first-order belief with a reflection upon it. 22 In warfare higher-order beliefs are crucial for winning a battle, but can be fatal for those in the line of fire, who are supposed to act instantly without any reflection. 23 Friedrich’s ‘updating’ has consequences for his post-duel attitude, as we shall see below.

His life being spared by the knight, Friedrich is left to bemoan the loss of his honor (‘Mein’ Ehr’ hab’ ich verloren, / mein’ Ehr’, mein’ Ehr’ ist hin!’: ll. 362-363). Still believing in God’s will (‘Weh’! mich hat Gott geschlagen,’: l. 320), his defeat proves he was wrong and his witness, Ortrud, had lied to him:

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22 On this subject, see Dan Sperber, ‘Intuitive and Reflective Beliefs’, *Mind & Language*, 12/1 (March 1997), 67-83.

23 ‘Many armies got their soldiers drunk before battle. This may have reduced their fighting efficiency, but it also reduced their capacity for rational calculation of self-preservation’:

Was it not your testimony, your story,
that inveigled me into accusing the innocent Elsa?

... And made me, ...
the base accomplice of your lies?

Although she knows of Elsa’s innocence, Ortrud does not believe in God, thus she is not obliged to accept the result as fair. At her lowest point in the opera, she finds recourse in her fertile mind and spins the alternative scenario that will drive Lohengrin off Brabant and will lead to Elsa’s and (accidentally?) to her own husband’s deaths: the knight cheated using magic, thus Elsa is guilty and should be condemned leaving Friedrich to rule Brabant and Ortrud to restore worship of her pagan gods.

The trial-by-combat and Lohengrin’s victory thus beget the mental conflict that will dominate the following two acts. The question is why Friedrich, who has been duped once by Ortrud with catastrophic results is willing to follow her for a second time. A ready explanation is that he has nothing to lose. His honor and lofty position in Brabant vanished, he finds Ortrud’s comforting scenario preferable to the harsh reality of poverty and exile. On a deeper, cognitive level, however, we find in Act II scene 1 that his belief in Elsa’s guilt was actually mounted on his own belief in Ortrud’s honesty and accuracy.
### Friedrich’s mindset

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<tr>
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<th>pre-duel beliefs</th>
<th>test result</th>
<th>post-duel beliefs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ideal</strong></td>
<td>Elsa is guilty</td>
<td>I lose</td>
<td>Elsa is innocent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trial-by-combat is a <em>judicium Dei</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>God punished me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>actual</strong></td>
<td>Ortrud says she witnessed Elsa killing Gottfried</td>
<td>I lose</td>
<td>Ortrud didn’t witness the crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ortrud is a reliable witness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ortrud is dishonest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am an honest man who never lies</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am honest (though gullible)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trial-by-combat is a <em>judicium Dei</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>the trial-by-combat was flawed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Had Friedrich entered the duel with a first-order belief on Elsa, he would have had to accept its outcome as just. Instead, he confronted Lohengrin from a cognitively weak position (accepting a second-hand account and sliding into self-reflexivity), thus opening up his mind to multiple explanations. Of his pre-duel beliefs the one about his honesty cannot be revised because it is based on personal knowledge, thus making the truth of all the rest open to question. This mental crack allows Ortrud to plant the seed of doubt in Act II scene 1.

**Enter the Music**

If anything, the above interpretation upgrades the role of Ortrud, whom Wagner invented specifically as a reactionary figure (*Reaktionärin*). Her addition to the Lohengrin story

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creates two couples, instead of a pair and a villain, thus increasing the opera’s dramatic complexity. Among other advantages, our cognitive perspective exposes a new coupling based on the characters’ state of beliefs. Lohengrin and Ortrud hold absolute beliefs, always know more than their partners, control the flow of information to them (a forbidden question and an alternative scenario), and do survive (though having failed to reach their goals). It is no coincidence that Wagner associates them with two relative keys (A major and F-sharp minor). One even is tempted to find symbolic meaning in the tonic-submediant oscillation in the ‘Grail’ motif and its melodic equivalent in Loehngrin’s statements, as if the 6 scale degree introduces a human variable in the perfection of the A major triad (for instance, in his address to the swan). [Ex. 1] Conscious of his harmonic operations, Wagner rewards Ortrud’s short-lived victory in the end of the opera with the Grail theme appearing on her key until Lohengrin’s prayer breaks her magic spell once and for all, and restores Brabant’s ‘Führer’ with a triumphant perfect cadence on A major. [Ex. 2] Elsa and Friedrich, on the other hand, have to adjust their beliefs throughout the opera, which leads to fluctuating behavior, and

25 Robert Wilson has explored the idea of complementary couples in his production of Lohengrin, where ‘Ortrud and Elsa have mirroring movements to suggest that they represent different aspects of one character’: Mike Ashman, ‘Wagner on stage: aesthetic, dramaturgical, and social considerations’, in Grey, Cambridge Companion to Wagner, 272. From our perspective, this gesture confirms Ortrud as a social chameleon with a wide behavioral range. She is capable of adopting her target’s mentality and subtly manipulating his/her mind.

26 The musical examples are from the vocal score in Karl Klindworth’s piano reduction (Mainz, 1913) available through the IMSLP/Petrucci online library <http://www.imslp.org/wiki/>. Measure numbers refer to the full score edited by John Deathridge and Klaus Döge (Mainz, 1996, 1998, 2000).
both die. Their mental kinship is reflected in their tonal space, A-flat major for Elsa and flat keys for Friedrich in Act I.

Choice of key also underscores the conjugal state of the two couples. Elsa’s A-flat major is the nearest possible to Lohengrin’s A major yet the furthest away in the circle of fifths, the half-tone friction between the two tonal plateaus suggesting the impossibility of a human-divine union.\(^{27}\) In their first encounter, Lohengrin briefly adopts Elsa’s key up to the repeated *Frageverbot*, which brings him back to A. [Ex. 3] Wagner wonderfully frames this episode with two chorus sections in A major, reflecting Lohengrin’s divine aura. In Act III, their brief spell of conjugal happiness finds expression in E major (mm. 306ff), but following their duet’s climax in unison singing (mm. 355-361), the music reverts to Lohengrin’s key (m. 363). He will return to flat key area only prior to his departure, addressing Elsa for the last time (mm. 1298-1368). On the side of the villains, Friedrich’s vocal space of flat keys in Act I is reversed in the following one, a clear sign of his dependence on Ortrud. His full conversion to her key of F-sharp minor comes with their homophonic singing in the revenge duet (mm. 391-418).

Wagner not only invented Ortrud but also endowed her with his most advanced techniques.\(^{28}\) While Lohengrin’s mindset of absolute belief is evident through triadic, folk-like melodies [Ex. 4], Ortrud’s cognitive complexity manifests itself in harmonically open utterances, with emphasis on diminished seventh chords, the use of the orchestra as an index of her seductive power, and specific motifs ‘whose presence evokes a nexus of slithery,

\(^{27}\) For a study of the opera’s literary models on this topic, see Dieter Borchmeyer, *Drama and the World of Richard Wagner*, trans. Daphne Ellis (Princeton and Oxford, 2003), 147-56.

\(^{28}\) Hunt, ‘Ortrud and the Birth of a New Style’, 47-70.
sinister, readily shifting figures.’29 Most prominent of these is that of temptation
(‘Versuchungs-motiv’) formed around a diminished seventh chord. Its appearance in the last
two acts of the opera affirms Ortrud’s successful penetration into the minds of her victims. In
Act II scene 1, we hear it underscoring Friedrich’s admission ‘wie willst du doch
gemeinsvoll den Geist mir neu berücken!’ [would you once again mislead my spirit by your
arcane arts?] (mm. 260-261); moments later, he is under Ortrud’s full control singing the
revenge oath with her in the octave. More prominently, the motif signals the cognitive
assaults against Elsa’s absolute belief in Lohengrin. Her mental poisoning begins with
Ortrud’s warning ‘zu blind nicht deinem Glück zu trauen’ [not to trust too blindly in your
happiness] (m. 761). As argued above, doubt begins its workings (in reduced form of the
motif in Elsa’s signature instrument oboe) after her public confrontation with Ortrud, forcing
her plead to Lohengrin ‘Mein Reiter! Schütze mich vor dieser Frau!’ [My rescuer! Protect me
from this woman!] (mm. 1651-1656) and reaches its climax in Friedrich’s final address to
Elsa ‘Vertraue mir!’ (mm. 2001-2013). The motif reappears in her Act III scene with
Lohengrin, occupying Elsa’s mind in m. 634 and finally overtaking her vocal line in mm.
654-658 (‘Wie soll ich Ärmste glauben, dir g’nüge meine Treu?’ [How can I believe that my
poor trust is sufficient?]). [Ex. 5] Aside from motivic treatment, the intense chromaticism
associated with Ortrud allows her to manipulate harmonically her victims. Consider, for
example, Friedrich’s final glimpse of suspicion in F minor (mm. 364-372), which Ortrud
instantly dissolves by enharmonic modulation into C-sharp major for a return to her native F-
sharp minor key (mm. 374-376). [Ex. 6]

If Elsa’s changing beliefs are evident through the temptation motif, Friedrich’s
confusion is suggested through harmonic and rhythmic means. His mental struggle, after

29 Thomas S. Grey, ‘Leitmotif, temporality, and musical design in the Ring’, in Grey,
Cambridge Companion to Wagner, 88.
being advised to withdraw from the duel, manifests as irregular palpitation of clusters of seconds moving gradually upwards. [Ex. 7] Relevant to our cognitive perspective are also two musical parallels. The ascending chromatic line in the flute in Act I prepares us for Elsa’s vision of her savior sung in her native A-flat major. Wagner describes her demeanor as confident (‘Elsas Mienen gehen von dem Ausdruck träumerischen Entrücktseins zu dem schwärmerischer Verklärung über.’ mm. 350-54), signaling a state of absolute belief, which Ortrud and Friedrich will later attack. The same gesture is repeated only once in the opera, in Act III, at the conclusion of Elsa’s love duet with Lohengrin. This time the ascending line leads to A major, Lohengrin’s key. The two instances frame Elsa’s period of absolute belief, one where she has the resources to fight doubt. Indeed, after the second gesture the deterioration of her mindset is rapid and irreversible. [Ex. 8] Another musical parallelism with cognitive effects is the call ‘Elsa’. It cannot be a coincidence that Ortrud’s first call to her is on the notes of the Frageverbot with practically identical accompaniment. As if intuiting the fatal consequences of her befriending Ortrud, Elsa responds ‘Wie schauerlich und klagend ertönt mein Name durch die Nacht!’ [How sinister and mournful is the sound of my name in the night!] When Lohengrin calls her by name in Act III, he inadvertently evokes the moment, as the sudden harmonic change from sharp to flat key and Elsa’s reply show ‘Wie süß mein Name deinem Mund entgleitet!’ [How sweetly my name glides from your lips!] But since her encounter with Ortrud led her to doubt, she now continues ‘Gönnst du des deinem holden Klang mir nicht?’ [Must you refuse to let your own be heard?] In other words, Ortrud ingeniously appropriates the Frageverbot to induce Elsa to breach it. [Ex. 9]

Concluding remarks

This essay proposes a critical reengagement with Wagner’s most neglected opera in postwar years. Introducing social science and game theoretic methodologies in opera hermeneutics,
we subject *Lohengrin*’s main characters to a rigorous epistemological analysis, studying their beliefs and decision-making strategies. In particular, we employ novel methodological tools in opera criticism to trace the cognitive state of the opera’s two dramatic variables, Elsa and Friedrich, as they move from one reversal of fortune to another. Their fluctuating behavior involve complex higher-order or self-reflective beliefs and are a key to a deeper understanding of Elsa’s choice, which stands at the core of the opera.

Elsa asks the forbidden question because she needs certainty about Lohengrin’s belief in her innocence. Only by finding out his true ‘Nam und Art’, his true reason for fighting for her will be revealed. She may fear that asking the forbidden question may have terrible consequences, but not asking it will leave her in permanent agony, as she will live with someone whom she suspects of suspecting her of murder. This is the most unsettling result of this epistemological study, as it offers a radically different, psychologically convincing answer to the central question that drives two thirds of the *Lohengrin* plot. At the same time it offers a much more modern view of Elsa who not simply passively accepts the verdicts of others about her guilt or innocence but instead makes an active choice to prove her innocence. The analysis also upgrades the dramatic role of the combat scene in Act I, the outcome of which becomes a fixed point of reference for the rest of the opera.

We find that this approach yields substantial benefits for multiple recipients. Students and critics can probe with precision the dramatic coherence of operas and the psychological depth of their characters. Opera singers and directors can analyze character motivation with reliable accuracy and deepen their engagement with the performed material. Not least, spectators and listeners can use a powerful tool to explore the internal world of the operatic canon and better appreciate dramatic nuances. Above all, this perspective reflects Wagner’s own vision for an all-embracing music drama. Much as the artist has to ‘completely step outside himself, to grasp the inner nature of an alien personality with that completeness...
which is needful before he can portray it,\textsuperscript{30} so a spectator can better identify with Wagnerian heroes if he engages with their state of mind. Indeed, Wagner’s understanding and use of the orchestra as a universal current out of which emerge individual utterances and upon which float ideas as leitmotifs practically invites for a cognitive opera criticism whether this appears as Wolzogen’s leitmotif guide or a rigorous analysis like the one undertaken here.

Example 1

**Lento.**

**Langsam.**

LOBENGRIN (with one foot still in the boat, bends towards the swan).

LOBENGRIN (mit einem Fuss noch im Nachen, neigt sich zum Schwan).

My thanks be thine, oh trusty swan!

Nun sei be dankt, mein lieber Schwan!

Back o'er the spreading water glide;

Zieh' durch die weite Fluth zu ruck,

dahin, wo her mich trug dein Kahn,

land where alone doth abide!

Daly and well thy koor wieder nur zu unserm Gluck! Drum sei getreu dein

(The swan slowly turns the boat round and swims away up the stream; Lohengrin gazes sadly after it for a while.)

(Der Schwan wendet langsam den Nachen und schwimmt den Fluss zu ruck; Lohengrin sieht ihm eine Weile wehmütig nach.)

Fare well!

Leb wohl!

Fare well, beloved swan!

Leb wohl, mein lieber Schwan!
Example 2

Adagio. (She remains drawn up in an attitude of savage desperation.)

Sehr langsam. (Sie bleibt in wilder Versuchung hoch aufgerichtet stehen.)

Lohengrin, who has gained the bank has heard Ortrud fully and now sinks on his knees in silent prayer. All gaze upon him in intense suspense. The white dove of the Grail hovers down over the boat; Lohengrin perceives it; with a look of gratitude he springs up and
Example 2

(At the sight of Godfrey Ortrud sinks down with a shriek. — Lohengrin springs quickly into the boat and the dove, seizing the chain, draws it off. — Elsa gapes with rapture upon Godfrey who (Ortrud sinkt bei Gottfried's Anblick mit einem Schreie zusammen. — Lohengrin springt schnell in den Kahn, den die Taube an der Rette gefasst hat und augenblicklich fortzieht. — Elsa blickt mit letzter
come forward and makes obeisance to the King: all look at him with surprise and delight, the men of Brabant bowing the knee in homage to him. — Godfrey hastens to Elsa's arms: she, after a short outburst
Freudiger Verklärung auf Gottfried, welcher nach vorn schreitet und sich vor dem König verneigt: Alle betrachten ihn in seligem Berstaunen, die Brabantier sezen sich klagend vor ihm auf den Knie. — Gottfried eilt in Elsa's Arme, diese,
of rapture, turns hastily towards the shore where Lohengrin is no longer visible.)

nach einer kurzen freudigen Entrückung, wendet hastig den Blick nach dem Ufer, wo sie Lohengrin nicht mehr erblickt.)
Example 3

(turning more towards Elsa)

(Oh, er wendet sich etwas näher zu Elsa.)

see if it were shame or glory in her cause to fight! Then
sandt: nun lasst mich seh'n, ob ich zu recht sie treffen an! So

> dim.  pp

Tell me, Elsa of Brabant!
Sprich denn, Elsa von Brabant!

if I my championship should grant, wilt thou
Wenn ich zum Sieger dir er nannt, willst du

trust my protecting arm?
Von oh ne Bang' und Grauen dich meinem Schutz ze anver.

Poco più animato.
Etwas bewegter.

Poco più animato.
Etwas bewegter.

larm?

My brave preserver!

Mein Held, mein Retter! Nimm mich hin! Die geb' ich

(Elsa who, since perceiving Lohengrin, has remained motionless and as if spellbound, now seems reawakened by his address and throws herself at his feet in overwhelming rapture.)

(Elsa die, siedem sie Lohengrin erblickte, wie im Zauber regungslos festgehalten war, stükt, wie durch seine Ansprache erweckt, in überwältigendem wönigem Gefühl zu seinen Füssen.)
Examples 3

Lento.
Langsam.

fection, all are thine!
Alle, was ich bin!

If Heaven will the victory
Wenn ich im Käm pf fü r dich

Elsa.

send me,
siege,

As at thy feet I
Wie ich zu dei nen

Lohengrin.

lowly bend me,
füssen lie ge,

El-sa, if thou thy
El-sa, soll ich dein

lord, declare me,
Gat te heissen,

sempron pp
immer pp

frei.
frei.

Wagner — Lohengrin, Act I
Wagner — Lohengrin, Act I

Example 3

Arms shall tear me, one solemn promise I demand:

These questions ask me never;

Von dir reißen, musst Ernes du ge-lo-ben mir:

Nie sollst du mich be-frag-en.

Brood not upon them ever: from whence I hither came, or what my race and

noch Wissens Sorge tragen, wo her ich kam der Fahrt, nochwie mein Nam' und

Elsa (softly, half unconsciously).

ELSA (leise, fast bewusstlos).

LOHENGRIN (with solemn intensity).

LOHENGRIN (gesteigert, sehr ernst).

Name! Love, never will I ask, believe me! Elsa! El-sa!

Art! Nie, Herr, soll mir die Frag'e kommen! El-sa! Dost thou a-right con-

(still more marked)

(noch bestimmtter)

ceive me? These questions ask me never, brood not upon them ever: from

Nie sollst du mich be-fragen, noch Wissens Sorge tragen, wo.
Example 4

Lento.  
Langsam.

LOBENGRIN (with one foot still in the boat, bends towards the swan).

LOBENGRIN (mit einem Fuss noch im Nachen, neigt sich zum Schwan).

My thanks be thine, oh trusty swan!  
Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan!

Back o'er the spreading water glide; return whence came the boat anon;
Zieh' durch die weite Fluth zu-ruck, dahin, wo her mich trug dein Kahn,

land where alone doth abide!  
kehr' wieder nur zu unserm Glück!  
Drum sei getreu dein

(The swan slowly turns the boat round and swims away up the stream; Lohengrin gazes sadly after it for a while.)
(Der Schwanwendet langsam den Nachenundschwimmt den Flusszurück; Lohengrin sieht ihm eine Weile wehmüthig nach.)

task is done!  
Fare well!  
Fare well, beloved swan!

Dienst ge than!  
Leb wohl!  
Leb wohl, mein lieber Schwan!
Example 4

Lohengrin.

On distant shores to mortal feet for bid den standeth a castle, Monsalvat by name;

In fernem Land, un nahbar eu ren Schritten, liegt ei ne Burg, die Monsalvat genannt;

a gleaming temple in the midst is hidden, so rich not all the world its like could trem.
einlich ter Tempel steht dort in mit ten, so kost.bar als auf Br den nichts be.

frame. Therein a cup, most holy pow er s pos sess sing, is guarded as the kannet; drin ein Ge fass von wander that gem Se gen wird dort als hoch stes

gift of Heaven's love: to be to sin less men a boon and bless ing 'twas Hei lig thum be wacht; es ward, dass sein der Menschen rein ste pfl age, her.
Example 5

Andante moderato.
Mässig langsam.

Fred. (shuddering with hushed and trembling accents).
Friedr. (von Schauer ergriffen, mit leiser, bebender Stimme).

W. Bi.

Thou hasthent sorceress! Wouldst thou again by secret arts al.
Du wirsto de Seherin! wie willst du doch geheimmisch wollen den

Timp.
Pk.

Ortrud (pointing to the Pallas the lights of which are now extinguished).
Ortrud (auf den Pallas deutend, in dem das Licht verlöscht ist).

Lure my soul to evil? The sat. ed re-vell. ers are plunged in sleep;
Geist mir ne be-rücken? Die Schwei. ger streckten sich zur üpp'-gen Ruh;

Cor. Ang.
Enz. H.

Come now and sit by me! The time has come for my pro-phe-tic eye to
setz'dich zur Sei-te mir! Die Stund'ist da, wo dir mein Se-heraug'e

(Frederick approaches still closer to Ortrud and bends
his ear attentively to her.)
(Friedrich nähert sich Ortrud immer mehr und neigt
sein Ohr aufmerksam zu ihr herab.)

Ope for thee!
leuch-t'en soll!

Know'st thou who is the
Weiss du, wer die ser

Str. con sord.
Pp S. gedämpft

PF
trem.
Bel.

Example 5

Più mosso.
Schneller.

Example 5

Poco Andante.
Ziemlich langsam.

Example 5

Poor
Du

Part?
kan!
(Elsa, seized with misgiving, turns away indignantly.)
(Elsa, con drusen erfasst, wendet sich un-willig ab.)

Ortrud, thou canst never measure the feelings in my heart that live!
Aestaste kannst wohl nie er - mesen, wie zwei - fel - los mein Her - ze liebt!

coll’ voce
dem Gesänge folgend

Thou hast indeed not known the pleasure that loving faith alone can
du hast wohl nie das Glück be - sesen, das sich uns nur durch Glau - ben

Tempo giusto e moderato.
Fest in mässig langsamem Zeitmasse.

(kindly)
(freundlich)

give!

En - ter with me!
Kehr’ beimir ein!

Soon thou shalt learn it, the rapturesweet of
Lass’ mich dich leh - ren, wie süß die Won - ne

W. Bi.

Str. 8.
Example 5

ELSA (much agitated, falling on Lohengrin's breast).

ELSA (sehr aufgeregt an Lohengrins Brust stürzend).

LHODENGRIN.

LHODENGRIN.

King.

KÖNIG.

My lord! O my protector! What is it?
Mein Herr! O mein Gebieter! Was ist?

What is the strife?
Was für ein Streit?

darest to bar our path-way to the Minister?
wagst es hier, den Kirchengang zu stören?

The King's Train.

DES KÖNIGS GEFOGLE.

What dispute, whose sound has reached us?
Welcher Streit, den wir vernahren?

LOHENGRIN (perceiving Ortrud).

LOHENGRIN (Ortrud erblickend).

ELSA.

ELSA.

Great Heaven! That accursed witch with thee?
Was seh' ich! Das un- selige Weib bei dir?

Preserve me!
Mein Retter!
Example 5

She is not here. Chide me if I have done wrong. She lay in misery before my eyes. In my distress, I took her in.

Behold, how ill she now returns. How much a trust in thee!


pays my kindness! She taunts me with too deep a trust in thee!
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Example 5
Allegro molto.
Sehr lebhaft.

Elsa.

home's a land of light and joy! O Heav'nh, what hast thou told me! What have thy lips be. her! Hilf Gott, was muss ich hören! Welch Zeugnis gab dein trayed! The truth thou wouldst with-hold me new terrors.

Mund! Du wollest mich be-thö-ren, nun wird mir now invade!

Jamer kund!

The lot thou hast for-saken was high and noble, Das Loos, dem du ent-ronnen, es war dein höchs-tes
Example 5

Glück: du kamst zu mir aus Wonen und sehnest dich zurück!

how can I deceive me? what pow'r have I to hold?

soll ich Ärmste glauben, dir gnüge meine Treu?

long again thou'llt leave me, when love, alas! is cold, when love, a.

Tug wirst dich mir rauhen durch deiner Liebe Reu, durch deiner

las! is cold! Torments thy self dost

Liebe Reu! Was quä lest du mich

LOHENGRIN.

LOHENGRIN.

Torment thy self not vainly!

Halt ein, dich so zu quälen!
Example 7

FRIEDRICH (who has kept his eyes fixed enquiringly upon Lohengrin).

Example 7
Example 7

Wagner — Lohengrin, Act I

Lohengrin.

King

Nun, König,

now arrange the fight!

All arrange themselves as before at the trial.

(Alles beginnt sich in die erste Gerichts-Stellung.)

Then let advance the three Saxon Nobles for Lohengrin.

Poco meno mosso.

(Three Saxon Nobles advance for Lohengrin, three Brabantines for Frederick;)

Etwas weniger schnell.

(Drei sächsische Edle treten für Lohengrin, drei brabantische für Friedrich vor;)

Knights for either champion, and measure well the field of deadly fray!

drei für jeden Kämpfer, und messet wohl den Ring zum Streite!

Frau! Tromb.

Pos.

Piano, ma molto marcato piano, aber sehr gewichtig gestossen.

D. Basso & Basset. Ch. u. Fag.
sighing arose one bitter cry that thro' the
Stöhnen ein Laut so klagevoll, der zu ge-

air went flying; piercing the utmost
walt'gem Tönen weit in die Lüfte

ritard.

sky.
schwoll; ritard.

faded far away; then sleep came gently stealing in
kaum mein Ohr er traf; mein Aug' ist zugefallen, ich

Example 8
Example 8

Wagner — Lohengrin, Act I

Lento.
Langsam.

peace at length I lay.
sank in sü.ssen Schlaf.

CHORUS I.
CHOR I.

Ten.  pp

Is she distraught?
Ist sie ent.rückt?

THE MEN.
DIE MÄNNER.

Ten.  pp

Dreams she?
Träumt sie?

CHORUS II.
CHOR II.

Bass.

Tis wonderful!
Wie wunder.bar!

Lento.
Langsam.

RING (as though seeking to rouse Elsa from her dreaminess).
KÖNIG (als wolle er Elsa aus dem Traume wecken).

El.sa, defend thyself before the judge!
El.sa, vertheidige dich vor dem Ge.richt!

(Elisa's expression changes from dreamy blissfulness to confidence and rapture.)
(Elisa's Mienen gehen von dem Ausdruck träumerischen Ent.rückteins zu dem schwärmerischer Forklä rung über.)

poco cresc.

dim.

Hf.

pp

Vi.

Kb.

Elsa.
Elsa.

Arrayed in shining splendor, a

In lich.ter Waf.fen Schei.ne ein

trem.

24
Example 8

thou believe the feeling which thou, oh love, upon me dost bestow!

glücklich dich zu nennen, gibst du auch mir des Him. mels Se-tig-keit!

(tenderly)
(tärtlich)

When unto thine my heart is softly stealing, raptures I taste that

fühl' ich zu dir so süß mein Herz entbrennen, ath-me ich Won-nen,

Ob.
Vln.
Vi.
Fl.solo.
Fl.
Vln.

Sr.
S.

Elsa.

My heart is softly stealing,
fühl' ich so süß,

mor-tals can not know; when unto thine
die nur Gott verleih;
fühl' ich so süß,

El-sa.

Ww.
Hbb.

is softly stealing, raptures I taste that mortals
so süß mich entbrennen, ath-me ich Won-nen, die nur

soft-ly stealing, süß mich entbrennen,

raptures I taste that mortals

ath-me ich Won-nen, die nur

Ww.
Hbb.

Sr.
Str.

PP Hbb.

St.

dim.

Tb.

Tb.
Example 8

Of wondrous growth is our affection tender! We ne'er had

met yet each the other knew; when Heaven appointed me as thy de-

fend-er, by love directed, to thy side I drew. Thy looks

le-sen, hat Liebe mir zu dir den Weg ge-bahnt. Dein Au -
```
arms shall tear me, one solemn promise I demand:

von dir reissen, musst Eines du ge-lo-ben mir:

These questions ask me never;
Nie sollst du mich be-fra-gen,

brood not upon them ever: from whence I came, or what my race and

noch Wissens Sor-ge tra-gen, wo-her ich kam der Fahrt, noch wie mein Nam' und

ELSA (softly, half unconscious).

LOHENGREN (with solemn intensity).

LOHENGREN (gesteigert, sehr ernst).

name! Love, never will I ask, believe me! El-sa! dost thou a-right con-

Art! Nie, Herr, soll mir die Fra-ge kommen! El-sa! Hast du mich wohl ver-

receive me? These questions ask me never, brood not upon them ever: from

nommen? Nie sollst du mich be-fra-gen, noch Wissens Sor-ge tra-gen, wo-
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Example 9

(Frederick withdraws, and disappears in the background.)
(Friedrich entfernt sich und verschwindet im Hintergrunde.)

coolness I would borrow to hide my blushes, my
Kühlung wähen der Wang in Liebe, in
thee!
dir!

blushes, the blush of love!
Liebe, in Liebe erglüht!
O hide them!
In Liebe!

Ortrud (aloud, wailingly).
Ortrud (aus, mit klingen dem Ausdruck).

Who calls?
Wor ruft?

Elisa.
Elisa.

Ortrud.
Ortrud.

night!
Nacht!

Hast thou forgot my very voice? Wilt thou dis.
Ist meine Stimme dir so fremd? Willst du die
Example 9

Più lento.
Langsam.

Più mosso.
Lebhaft.

Sempre animando.
Immer lebhaft.

Is this but love, then?
Ist dies nur Liebe?

Ah! how shall I ever discern the word by
Wie soll ich es nennen, diesen Wort, so uns.

which it were expressed?
Tis like thy name, too, to be spoken never
sprechlich wonnevol, wie, ach! dein Name, den ich nie darf kennen,

but in eternal mystery to rest!
bei dem ich nie mein Hückesten nen nen soll!

My name! how
Wie süß mein

LOHENGRIN (caressingly).

LOHENGRIN (schmeicheln).

El... sa!

El... sa!

(hesitating)

(suchtig)

sweetly from thy lips it glid eth! Must thou refuse to let thine own be
Name deinem Mund entgleitet! Gönnt du des deinen hol den Klang mir

22
Example 9

heard? Only when privacy of love abideth, thou shalt al-
nicht? Nur, wenn zur Liebe still wir geleitet, sollst du ge-

low me to pronounce the word. Whisper when all men sleep; ne'er to the

staten, dass mein Mund ihn spricht. Ein sam, wenn Nie. mand wacht; nie sei der

LOHENGRIN.
LOHENGRIN.

My dearest wife! Mein sü. sses Weib!

Andante animato.
Ruhig bewegt.

worlds ears shall the secret creep! Welt er zu Ge. hör ge. bracht!

LOHENGRIN.
LOHENGRIN.

Dost thou not breathe as I the scents of flowers?

Ath. mest du nicht mit mir die sü. ssen Düf. te?

Cello. Vel. *