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Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven

Martin Nedbal

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Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven

This book explores how the Enlightenment aesthetics of theater as a moral institution influenced cultural politics and operatic developments in Vienna between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Moralistic viewpoints were particularly important in eighteenth-century debates about German national theater. In Vienna, the idea that vernacular theater should cultivate the moral sensibilities of its German-speaking audiences became prominent during the reign of Empress Maria Theresa, when advocates of German plays and operas attempted to deflect the imperial government from supporting exclusively French and Italian theatrical performances. Morality continued to be a dominant aspect of Viennese operatic culture in the following decades, as critics, state officials, librettists, and composers (including Gluck, Mozart, and Beethoven) attempted to establish and define German national opera. Viennese concepts of operatic didacticism and national identity in theater further transformed in response to the crisis of emperor Joseph II's reform movement, the revolutionary ideas spreading from France, and the war efforts in facing Napoleonic aggression. The imperial government promoted good morals in theatrical performances through the institution of theater censorship, and German-opera authors cultivated intensely didactic works (such as *Die Zauberflöte* and *Fidelio*) that eventually became the cornerstones for later developments of German culture.

Martin Nedbal is Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Kansas. He has published numerous articles on Central European opera, particularly the works of Mozart, Beethoven, Smetana, and Dvořák. His research has been supported by grants from the American Musicological Society and the Austrian Scholarship Foundation.

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Series editor's preface

Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera provides a centralized and prominent forum for the presentation of cutting-edge scholarship that draws on numerous disciplinary approaches on a wide range of subjects associated with the creation, performance, dissemination, and reception of opera and related genres in various historical and social contexts. The series includes topics from the seventeenth century to the present and from all geographical locations, including non-Western traditions.

In recent years, the field of opera studies has not only come into its own but has developed significantly, going beyond traditional musicological approaches to reflect new perspectives from literary criticism and comparative literature, cultural history, philosophy, art history, theater history, gender studies, film studies, political science, philology, psycho-analysis, and even medicine. The new brands of scholarship have allowed a more comprehensive and intensive interrogation of the complex nexus of means of artistic expression operative in opera, one that has meaningfully challenged prevalent historicist and formalist musical approaches. Today, interdisciplinary, or as some prefer cross-disciplinary, opera studies are receiving increasingly widespread attention, and the ways in which scholars, practitioners, and the public think about the art form known as opera continue to change and expand. *Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera* seeks to move this important trend forward by including essay collections and monographs that reflect the ever-increasing interest in opera in non-musical contexts.

In *Morality and Viennese Opera in the Age of Mozart and Beethoven*, Martin Nedbal addresses the unexplored field of operatic didacticism, by which he means the elements through which opera composers and librettists attempted to transform their spectators into well-behaved and sensible human beings in the late eighteenth century. Nedbal traces the repertoire of theatrical troupes, institutions, authors, and critics from around the 1760s through the early 1800s; and through a cultural historical approach he connects the preoccupation with moral instruction in Viennese *Singspiele* to contemporary German debates about the social and political functions of theater. He thus sheds new light on the aesthetic, political, and social background of such well-known operas as Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Die Zauberflöte* as well as Beethoven's *Fidelio*, making a real and lasting contribution to the understanding of a significant and fascinating operatic repertory.

Roberta Montemorra Marvin

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Preface

This book began as a study of several intensely moralistic moments in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Die Zauberflöte*. By moralistic elements, I originally meant those aspects of the operas in which the composer and his librettists attempted to promote to their audience various kinds of behavior that eighteenth-century intellectuals considered as beneficial for a well-ordered society, e.g., compassion, truthfulness, fidelity, and self-control. Gradually, I realized that moralistic thought was involved not only in the expansion of certain musical and dramaturgical elements within the operatic works, such as the presentations of moral maxims, but also in avoiding content that was considered immoral because it was sexually suggestive or promoted vice. In order to understand how the standards of decorum were constructed, I needed to investigate the ways in which Viennese theaters were administered and controlled. The interest in the administration of Viennese theater led to a detailed exploration of how the Habsburg court and the Austrian state were involved in theatrical matters—in particular, a thorough re-examination of the history of Viennese censorship. The stress on theatrical morality, moreover, resonated with eighteenth-century debates about German national identity, both in Vienna and German-speaking lands in general. As the following chapters show, German intellectuals often viewed intense uprightness in theatrical works as an expression of one of the most unique qualities of the German character, its noble spirit.

My study has shown that moralistic concerns were particularly important for the authors of German-language opera in late eighteenth-century Vienna. As a result, although I discuss French and Italian works produced in Viennese theater in the second half of the eighteenth century, the main focus of this book is on German-language opera, or *Singspiel*. The scope of the study also quickly grew beyond its initial focus on Mozart, and includes probes into the works of his more or less familiar contemporaries and successors, such as Christoph Willibald Gluck, Ignaz Umlauf, Franz Xaver Süssmayr, Wenzel Müller, Peter Winter, and Ludwig van Beethoven. I conclude with a study of Beethoven's *Fidelio* because this opera in many ways represents a culmination of the late eighteenth-century Viennese debates and theories about moralistic national theater. Many of the ideas about German identity and national theater were expounded in writings about

spoken plays, rather than opera. But in Vienna, it was *Singspiel* that became the most prominent and influential forum for defining German national culture.

Most scholarship on opera in Mozart's Vienna has focused on the non-German genres, particularly Italian opera. But the work by the scholars of *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, and *opéra-comique* in late eighteenth-century Vienna has been immensely helpful and influential on my own research. Many of these researchers also contributed to the main arguments in this book by commenting on papers that I delivered at various conferences and by answering my questions and giving suggestions during meetings in Viennese cafes and elsewhere. For inspiration, comments, and suggestions, I am particularly indebted to Janet Paige, John Rice, Edmund Goehring, Ian Woodfield, Bruce Alan Brown, Jessica Waldoff, Peter Hoyt, and Dorothea Link.

I also own a great debt to the institutions that supported my research in Vienna. A scholarship from the Österreichischer Austauschdienst supported my trip in the summer of 2011, and in 2013, the American Musicological Society sponsored my research with the William Holmes/Frank D'Accone Endowment Grant for Travel and Research in the History of Opera. I am also grateful to the University of Arkansas, which contributed to my stay in Austria in 2012 through the Robert C. and Sandra Connor Endowed Faculty Fellowship. Students and colleagues at the University of Arkansas, furthermore, provided a stimulating environment for work. Numerous libraries and research institutions provided invaluable help—I am particular thankful to the staff of the Interlibrary Loan Department at the University of Arkansas, the Vienna City Library, the Music and Theater Departments of the Austrian National Library, and the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna. Many thanks also to the employees and associates of the Don Juan Archiv in Vienna, especially Michael Hüttler, Johannes Schweitzer-Wünsch, Reinhard Eisendle, and the director, Hans Ernst Weidinger.

I am much indebted to those who read and provided helpful commentary on portions of this work at various stages. Many thanks to Ralph P. Locke for his continual encouragement as a dissertation advisor and a mentor, and to David Thurmaier for his intense and patient involvement in the gradual growth and transformations of this project. For reading the book chapters, I am also thankful to Janet Paige, Estelle Joubert, Adeline Mueller, Jennifer Ronyak, Kira Thurman, Cindy Kim, Srdjan Atanasovski, Laurence Hare, Kristen Turner, and the anonymous readers. I also wish to extent my appreciation to Derek Jenkins for his assistance in preparing the musical examples. Finally, I am grateful to Roberta Marvin and Laura Macy for their assistance in the publication of this book.

Introduction

Opera and didacticism in early-modern German culture

Morality, decorum, and didacticism have been important aspects of opera since the genre's beginning in the late sixteenth century. Even from the earliest operatic works based on the Orpheus myth, individual characters and groups of characters turn to the audience to deliver instructional reflections drawn out of onstage occurrences; for instance, the chorus of spirits in the scene where Orpheus loses Eurydice for the second time in Act IV of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, promoting the humanistic ideal of rational self-control of one's passions.[1] These earliest works also show that the text and music of operas as well as their performed content often depended on the standards of decorum and propriety at the performance locale. Many early operas, for example, used castrati in female roles because it was considered immoral for women to publicly appear on the stage.[2] Similarly, early operatic adaptations of the Orpheus myth replaced the gruesome and tragic endings of the story that appeared in Virgil and Ovid with more pleasing and educational ones.[3] Many librettists and composers of the Italian Baroque therefore focused on two kinds of moralistic concerns: didactic instruction—i.e., the promotion of what was considered positive patterns of behavior—and restrictive propriety—i.e., the excision of any content deemed inappropriate for an audience's moral well-being. This emphasis on morality remained an important feature of musical theater for at least the next two centuries, but it became particularly prominent in certain German-language operas produced in Vienna in the late eighteenth century. This monograph explores the social, cultural, and political background of the intensely moralistic Viennese German opera tradition, and follows its development throughout the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German scholars and critics frequently view didactic fervor and moral uprightness as a defining feature of German opera. Most often these commentators point to the German operas of Mozart and Beethoven (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Fidelio*) as the initial expression of this purportedly unique national trait. In his 1930 history of German opera, Ludwig Schiedermair claims that in *Fidelio* Beethoven was able to overcome the conventions of French revolutionary operas, to imbue them with the "German spirit," and represent "pure humanity" and "a great moral ideal."[4] Several decades before Schiedermair, Hans Michel Schletterer pointed to Mozart's German operas, especially to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, as the model for future German composers of musical comedies. In his 1863 history of German opera, Schletterer

stressed that the content of *Die Entführung* was "noble, dignified, clear, natural, and deeply felt," as opposed to the works of Mozart's nineteenth-century German successors who were under the spell of Offenbach and his "dirty French vaudevilles … products of a debauched and corrupt time, filled with frivolity, immorality, and obscenity, without a trace of higher idea, bound solely to titillate the dull senses of the wanton and blasé theater public in the modern Sodom [Paris]."[5] Schiedermair and Schletterer might appear to speak the language of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German nationalism, but as the following chapters show, they are in fact developing a mode of cultural criticism that has existed in the German-speaking lands ever since the seventeenth century, and became particularly influential in late eighteenth-century Vienna. Before outlining the main sections and arguments of this book, each of which focuses on specific Viennese developments, this introductory chapter briefly delineates the earliest debates about morality and German theater that gave rise to and influenced the situation in the Habsburg capital.

Morality and national identity in German Baroque opera

The idea that German national opera should exude superior moral qualities to reflect the inherent character of the German people became attached to the very first operatic works to be created by German authors. One of the earliest documents of German operatic aesthetics was Georg Philipp Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*, the eight volumes of which were published between 1641 and 1649. The fourth volume contains Harsdörffer's libretto for the opera *Seelewig*. The musical setting of the libretto, by Sigmund Gottlieb Staden (1607–55), is printed at the end of the volume, which makes *Seelewig* the oldest through-composed German opera whose music has survived to the present day. The plot of the opera resembles a pastoral morality play; instead of actual characters we find allegorical figures (such as the evil Trügewalt who wants to seduce the main heroine Seelewig), and most of the action is schematic and symbolic. Into the libretto text, Harsdörffer injected commentaries by several fictional characters, the participants in the *Gesprächspiele*. The fictional commentators constantly connect the work's didactic qualities to its Germanness. Reymund, one of the commentators and Harsdörffer's alter ego, claims that Italian pastoral operas cannot be translated into German partially because "we Germans are not as affectionate as the Italians, it befits our language to depict brave heroic deeds rather than to conjure up fancy love stories."[6] The same speaker also points out that the following opera does not focus on "foolish love adventures" ("thörichte Liebesfantzen") but deals with the spiritual subject of how a devoted soul can be saved from eternal damnation. Throughout the opera, Harsdörffer also has the imaginary analysts point out the significance of the onstage actions and draw instructive principles from them. In the prologue to the opera itself, Harsdörffer further distinguishes his work from previous (read "Italian") operatic works, when he has the allegorical figure of Music step in front of the closed curtain and announce:

> Like a slave, I was bound to voluptuousness,
> So that my love of God gradually cooled down.[7]

The announcement represents a veiled critique of the numerous early Italian operas in which allegorical figures also held opening speeches that usually discussed the power of love or music.[8] The moralistic basis of Harsdörffer's rejection of Italian opera highlights the unarticulated assumption that moralistic vigor should become the distinguishing feature of an ideal German opera.[9]

In his eagerness to construct a positive image of the basic principles underlying German theater, Harsdörffer overlooks the fact that his opera is indebted to the Italian tradition of musical morality plays, such as Emilio de'Cavalieri (music) and Agostino Mani's (text) *Rappresentatione di Anima et di Corpo,* produced in Rome in 1600. Harsdörffer would have encountered these works in the 1630s during his stay in Siena, where spiritual operatic allegories had been popular and widespread.[10] Christiane Caemmerer has shown, furthermore, that Harsdörffer directly modeled his libretto on a German translation of the five-act verse drama *Anima felice: favola boscareccia et spirituale* by the Venetian poet Nicolò Negri.[11]

Gottsched's moralistic aesthetics

The attempts to postulate moral uprightness as a prerequisite of a truly German form of national theater further intensified in the eighteenth century. In the mid-1700s, German spoken theater was slowly gaining more prestige in the German-speaking lands and eventually became the decisive force behind the emergence of a new kind of German opera in the 1750s and 1760s. The main instigator of the early eighteenth-century German theater reform was Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766). Gottsched's aesthetic principles do not represent a particularly original contribution to the theory of drama; most of his ideas on theater and morality, for instance, had been circulating in treatises about theater ever since the Greco-Roman era. Gottsched himself often cites and relies on the writings by French neo-classical theorists of drama, but as Roland Krebs points out, Gottsched's concern for theatrical morality seems to be more intense than that of his contemporaries.[12]

Gottsched also continually uses morality in his attempts to define national specificity of German culture and differentiate it from the cultural traditions that dominated European literature and theater of the day—an idea that appeared already in Harsdörffer's *Seelewig*, though in a less intense form. In his discussion of the history of poetry in the *Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* ("Essay on Critical Poetics for the Germans"), his most influential treatise first published in 1730, Gottsched claims that ancient Germanic tribes invented poetic rhyme to memorize their songs and chronicles and thus to preserve their moral and political wisdom. The technique was then supposedly appropriated by the Latin-speaking Romans; Roman poets enjoyed the sound of rhymes so much that they could not restrain themselves from putting multiple rhymes into one verse, and in their inability to curb their desire for pleasing rhymes, the Romans resembled "children who take pleasure in the ringing of little bells."[13] Only later, Gottsched continues, did the Italians, the Spaniards, the French, and the Poles learn the proper use of rhymes, and they did so, once again, from the ancient Germans.[14] Gottsched's narrative not only infantilizes Romance-speaking

nations but also implies that they were imitators and used art merely for sensual pleasure, whereas the creative, intellectual, and morally rigorous ancient Germans invented rhyme for educational purposes.

As in mythic antiquity, numerous ethnic groups in eighteenth-century Europe lacked good (German) morals in Gottsched's view, particularly the French and the Italians. In his discussion of Italian comedy, Gottsched writes that "the Italians … are a salacious and weak [effeminate] nation, whose poets therefore fill their comedies with mischievous tricks, deceitful servants and endlessly large number of silly farces."[15] It would seem that Gottsched had a higher opinion of the French since he so frequently recommends French neoclassical theory and drama as worthy of emulation by German writers. At the same time, Gottsched is often quite critical of French comedy. In the *Versuch*, Gottsched does admit that the French have had some success with creating high-quality comedies, but he then notes that even French comedy is not perfect, especially as far as morality is concerned. To illustrate his point Gottsched discusses the works of Molière and complains that the French dramatist

> should be reprimanded because he often portrays vice in too pleasant terms and virtue in a disturbing and ridiculous manner. The love interests of young people are often presented as more preferable to the caring supervision of the good parents who are concerned about the virtue of their children … [Molière] often mocks husbands that have been cheated on by their wives, but often through no fault of their own. After all, how can a good, honest husband prevent his wife from debauchery if they live in France: where it has become a gallant fashion to break a marriage and to keep half a dozen lovers besides the rightful husband.[16]

An even more virulent attack on the French appears in Gottsched's 1757 Preface to his *Nöthiger Vorrath zur Geschichte der deutschen dramatischen Dichtkunst*:

> I cannot finish without making one more remark. The German theater has a quality that hardly any of the theater traditions practiced by our neighbors could match. [The German theater] has rendered an incomparable service to religion; … Few other nations have had so many spiritual teachers among their playwrights, as we do. These religious men were earnestly interested in educating their audience in matters of faith and life-wisdom: and thus [through the work of these men] … theater pieces were brought back to their ancient purpose that the Greeks intended them to have: i.e. to edify people. … *docere fabulas*, that was the festive concept associated with poetic arts. In pursuing their beneficial [didactic] aims, they [the Greek and the German poets] did not always follow all the dramaturgical rules: yet their violations of these rules were committed for the sake of presenting sound, though monotonous, moral teachings, which makes these violations much more honorable than the highly dissipated quibbles of the Italian wit, the exaggerated accuracy of the Gallic theater, or raved ferociousness of the British comedies with their excess of obscenity.[17]

By stressing the connection between German theater and religion Gottsched carries forward the tradition of perceiving theatrical pieces as religious morality plays, an idea that surfaced already in the discussions surrounding *Seelewig*.

From the mid-1700s onwards, the younger generation of theater critics and authors sought to distance themselves from Gottsched.[18] Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, German critical writings tend to replicate Gottschedian views on morality and Germanness in theater. For example, many passages in Schiller's famous 1784 essay "Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet" ("Theater Viewed as a Moral Institution") bear the moralistic stamp of Gottschedian thought.[19] Furthermore, as shown in Chapter 1, the Gottschedian moralistic aesthetics of German theater exerted a remarkable influence on the critical and theoretical writings of aestheticians in Vienna and through them also on the Viennese *Singspiele* of the late 1700s.

Gottsched and opera

Gottsched directed his theories mainly at spoken theater, but they ultimately also affected opera. The repertoire of eighteenth-century German theaters featured a mixture of spoken and musical genres. Spoken plays would often, depending on the availability of musicians and singers, be performed with musical numbers and ballets, whereas operas were often transformed into spoken plays, a practice documented, for example, in the German theater novels such as J. W. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung* and Anton Philip Moritz's *Anton Reiser*. This interrelatedness of *Singspiel* and *Schauspiel* remained an important characteristic of German theater well into the nineteenth century.[20] John Warrack, for example, recounts a nineteenth-century production of Weber's *Der Freischütz* by the Obstfelder Company, in which all the music was left out because, as stated on the poster announcing the performance, it "only disturbs the action."[21] Even the most famous pre-Wagnerian German romantic opera was therefore subjected to the genre fluidity.

Gottsched himself discusses opera extensively throughout his writings—only to express a negative opinion of it. His main attack against the art form appears in the *Versuch*, where he claims that opera cannot conform to the Aristotelian and French neoclassical rules of drama and is therefore unnatural and irrational. Already in his earlier works, moreover, Gottsched accuses opera of having a harmful influence on the moral well-being of its audience. In a philippic that appeared in 1728 in his moral weekly *Der Biedermann*, Gottsched claims, that in an opera "impudent poetry, ravishing music, dazzling stage decorations, insolent costumes and lewd movements of the actors combine their forces to fill a weak minded listener with the most shameful inclination, i.e. lechery."[22] In 1740 Gottsched highlighted his anti-operatic sentiments in an adaptation of Charles de Saint-Évremond's play *Les opéras*; in the German version, two young people in Lübeck go insane after reading too many opera librettos (they end up communicating with others through *da capo* arias and recitatives and talking in rhymed verses). Finally, in 1753 Gottsched and his circle voiced disapproval of Heinrich Gottfried

Koch's theater company in Leipzig and their performances of the German musical comedy *Der Teufel ist los, oder Die verwandelten Weiber* ("The Devil to Pay, or The Metamorphosed Wives") by Christian Felix Weisse (librettist) and Johann Georg Standfuss (composer). A pamphlet war developed between Koch's and Gottsched's supporters; both camps modeled their polemics on the concurrent *Querelle des Bouffons*.[23]

Gottsched's negative opinions about opera lost some of their ferociousness in the later decades of his career; the extent of his ability to tolerate this genre, however, has been a matter of scholarly contention.[24] On several occasions, moreover, Gottsched's hatred gave way to national pride about and (uncritical) support for the achievements of German opera authors. Thus in the fourth edition of his *Versuch* (1751), Gottsched attempted to prove the German origin of opera, confusing some partly sung sixteenth-century musical plays with actual operas.[25] Similarly in a 1740 issue of his *Beyträge zur critischen Historie* ("Articles on Critical History"), Gottsched expressed hope that the time would soon come when all of Europe would appreciate German music and start singing compositions with German texts.[26]

Gottsched's theories of German theater and morality were affecting the aesthetics of German opera as early as the 1730s. In his journal *Der critische Musicus*, published in Hamburg from 1738 to 1740, Johann Adolph Scheibe (1708–1776) called for a reform of operatic practices that would bring opera closer to the reformed, literary drama of Gottsched.[27] Some passages by Scheibe seem to be taken directly from Gottsched, with the exception that they apply to opera libretti. In the seventh issue of *Der critische Musicus* (dated May 28, 1737), entitled "Die Untersuchung der Fehler und Thorheiten der meisten deutschen Opern" ("An analysis of the faults and foolishness of most German operas"), Scheibe complains:

> A librettist needs to be a moralist. But can we find traces of rational moralizing in the majority of our operas? Do they present virtue in its greatness? Do they awaken abhorrence in the minds of the spectators by depicting the heinousness of vice? Do they edify and stimulate the audience to give preference to virtue? [No! Instead,] carnality with all its abuses reigns supreme; the vicious persons achieve happiness, and the virtuous ones remain suppressed and wretched. Unhappy moralists! Contemptible advocates of vice and loathsome enemies of virtue![28]

Like Gottsched, Scheibe sees the main problem with musical theater as resulting from poor treatment of moral issues. Following Gottsched's lead, moreover, Scheibe claims that the low moral standards in German opera came about because the Germans imitated a foreign tradition—Italian opera.[29] The attempts to break the reliance on foreign models or to trump the French and Italian operatic practices through intense engagement with didacticism were also to become an important element of Viennese German opera culture in the late eighteenth century.

The reform of eighteenth-century German theater

Most of the moralistic ideals of the eighteenth-century German aestheticians were conditioned by the social reconstitution of German theater during this period. Earlier eighteenth-century German theaters did not operate within a unified and centralized state that would sponsor and support the development of a German equivalent to the French theatrical system. Unlike the politically fractured Italians, moreover, the Germans did not possess internationally established cultural institutions comparable to Italian opera.[30] In their attempt to overcome what they perceived as cultural backwardness of the German-speaking lands, German intellectuals needed to face the fact that very few German political leaders were interested in supporting such endeavors. In the first half of the eighteenth century most opera houses and other theatrical institutions in the German-speaking countries were subsidized and operated by one of the numerous German courts and the repertoire of these court theaters consisted mostly of Italian opera and French spoken drama and comic opera.[31] The tendency to vilify foreign theater traditions as immoral can therefore be seen as an attempt to persuade the rulers to give more support to German theater and to overcome the feeling of inferiority to their western and southern neighbors.[32]

The German reformers, however, had to fight on two fronts in order to legitimize their idea of a national theater. Due to the limited governmental support of German-language theater institutions, German musical and spoken theater traditions developed mainly through the activities of German traveling theater companies ("Wandergesellschaften"). These companies responded to the interests of their socially diverse audiences by presenting spectacular and adventurous historical dramas (the so-called "Haupt- und Staatsaktionen") together with low-comedy farces featuring stock characters, such as the Hanswurst.[33] The stress on morality in the theories of Gottsched and Lessing therefore also served to distinguish the reformed repertoire from the more crudely entertaining, often obscene popular theater traditions.

The situation gradually started to change throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Under the influence of enlightened reformist political and economic thought, the German courts paid more attention to the vernacular culture of the middle and plebeian classes, and introduced German-language productions into their theaters as a way to connect to and better control their subjects outside of the confines of the court.[34] The changing attitudes of state authorities went hand in hand with the theories proposed by aestheticians and state bureaucrats about the importance of theater for the cultivation of obedient subjects.[35] The courts and state administrations also became interested in the vernacular theater culture out of economic reasons, especially after the financially crippling War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) and the Seven Years War (1754–1763)—German performers and German repertoire were a lot cheaper than the cosmopolitan French and Italian plays and operas.[36] At roughly the same time, the personnel of German theater companies espoused the Gottschedian ideas of reformed German theater because it granted them a higher social esteem and financial support from the

state and gave them an ideological advantage against both the nonliterate popular theater and the cosmopolitan traditions favored by the German courts.[37] The German theater reform in many ways prefigured what would later (in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) happen in the field of serious music—in response to the changing and eroding nature of aristocratic patronage, German musicians managed to re-conceptualize music both as something morally and intellectually superior and as part of the German middle-class identity.[38]

Viennese developments

The changing approaches to vernacular theater were clearly reflected in the gradual transformation of the Vienna court theater from a representative court institution into a reformed German stage, a process that reached an important watershed in 1776 when Joseph II transformed Vienna's Burgtheater into the National Theater. But the uneasy relationship between the reformed German theater and opera, the German popular traditions, and the cosmopolitan Italian opera continued throughout the next decades. The emperor instituted a *Singspiel* company as part of the National Theater in 1778, but the company was replaced with an Italian *buffo* troupe in 1783. Another court-supported *Singspiel* company operated in Vienna's second inner-city theater, the Kärntnertortheater, between 1785 and 1788 but was disbanded due to financial difficulties when the court decided to wage a war against the Ottoman Empire in 1787. The center of German opera production moved from the court to the suburbs, where several commercial theaters opened throughout the Josephine era, but the operatic production there largely abandoned the reformist goals. Another attempt at court-supported German reformist opera occurred with the founding of a new National Singspiel company in 1795, but now the company had powerful competition in the productions of the suburban theaters. In 1794, moreover, the administration of the court theater changed significantly because emperor Franz II leased it to the banker Peter Braun; although the theater still received a state subsidy, it was no longer as closely controlled by the court and engaged in more aggressive competition with the private suburban theaters.[39] As the following chapters illustrate, debates connecting morality and national identity played an important role in defining the character of German opera in Vienna throughout these transformative events.

The increased engagement of state authorities in the matters concerning German theater in the late eighteenth century also brought about stricter control over the content of theatrical works. In Vienna, this control was executed partially through haphazard involvement of court officials and members of the imperial family, and gradually also by the governmentally supervised institution of theater censorship. The following chapters present an overview of the changing nature of Vienna's theater censorship throughout the late eighteenth century and show a gradual transformation that this institution underwent: from a practice of aesthetic and intellectual control over the matters of taste, propriety, and national specificity, to a system responding to the Viennese authorities' need to distract the city's population from pressing social, economic, and political concerns of the later

1790s, to a tool of intellectual and ideological repression in the early 1800s. This study shows, moreover, that contrary to romanticized views of free-spirited artists fighting state oppression, Viennese authors, such as Mozart, Beethoven, and their librettists, did not necessarily perceive the moralistic control by authorities as a hindrance to their creative abilities; instead, state supervision and the reigning aesthetic ideology prompted them to create works that were more intensely and emphatically moralistic and develop new musical and dramaturgical forms and techniques associated with didacticism.[40]

With the changing social functions of German theater in the eighteenth century, the nature of the German audiences transformed as well. The reformist aesthetic was produced by the educated and literate members of eighteenth-century German society, a group of individuals operating in a conceptual space that Jürgen Habermas referred to as "the public sphere."[41] Although Habermas understood the public sphere as predominantly bourgeois, later historians re-conceptualized his views to make it more heterogenous and inclusive of the aristocracy as well.[42] Members of the public sphere were interested in distinguishing themselves from the cultural forms associated with the *ancien régime*, but in the German-speaking lands they also pursued an increasingly patriotic agenda.[43] In regard to theater, this patriotism manifested itself in that the educated public wanted to turn theatrical works and performances into a national school of morals, one that would not only represent the identity and moral character of its educated creators but also affect the sensibilities of the uneducated masses. Apart from the actual audiences that frequented productions of reformed German companies, the ideologues of the national theater movement foresaw that their stage works would eventually reach and cultivate the uneducated consumers of popular theater.[44]

Theatrical developments in late eighteenth-century Vienna closely reflect the tensions between various actual and ideal audience groups: the reformed national theater was initiated by a group of intellectuals and bureaucrats, but was soon incorporated into the cultural policies of the Habsburg court, and German theater and opera functioned both as a symbol of the cultural and social achievements of Josephine Austria and as a means of controlling and cultivating the uneducated classes. Numerous members of Vienna's elite audiences, however, preferred the cosmopolitan culture of Italian opera, whereas various societal groups called for the preservation of the popular traditions of vernacular theater. As a result, German reformed theater, and even more so German national opera, continued to compete for recognition and financial support with popular theater and cosmopolitan genres, and the promoters of the reform used accusations of immorality and dissoluteness as their most effective weapon.

Eighteenth-century German nationalism?

As numerous scholarly studies have shown, eighteenth-century manifestations of German nationalism are often connected to the same intellectuals who were trying to define German culture and called for the reform of German theater.[45] Michael J. Sosulski has argued that "a broad-based sense of national consciousness" existed