

## THE PARODY PROCESS IN BACH'S MUSIC: AN OLD PROBLEM RECONSIDERED

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Anyone who sets out to talk about Bach's parody process, or even about the problems associated with parody, must understand that he is going to stir up uneasiness in people who would rather simply close their eyes to it, or annoyance in those who have been lectured to all too often on the subject. Such a rejection of the topic, more or less intentional, is certainly not conditioned by the field of inquiry itself, because there has not been a complete treatment of this issue to date. It is more likely due to an obstinate, peculiarly one-sided assessment of the issue, settled somewhere between a smug, knowing smile on the one hand, and a tendency, either open or concealed, to make apologies on the other.

An urge to repress and the tendency to minimize Bach's parody process set in relatively early. The Breslau church musician, Johann Theodor Mosewius, was one of the first — if not the very first — to point out in his 1844 discussion of Bach's cantatas and chorales that the composer's so-called short Masses consisted mostly of reworked cantata movements. Six years later, in 1850, the Hamburg lawyer, Carl Ludwig Hilgenfeldt, could venture a value judgment: Bach had not been particularly interested in the composition of these Masses, and so he rid himself of the task by assembling pieces reworked from cantatas.

Wilhelm Rust, about a generation younger, and later editor-in chief of the *Bach-Gesellschaft* edition, reached for a more dictatorial formulation in the first two volumes he edited (V/1 and V/2, in 1855 and 1856, respectively). "If something is truly sacred, it remains sacred," he wrote somewhat apodictically of the parodied movements of the Christmas Oratorio; the subsequent discovery of a secular origin changes nothing. Rust further opined "that right from the start, Bach was concerned with the use of his occasional cantatas as church music; not surprisingly, considering the many duties he had and the often senseless texts that were set before him." Bach ruled out for use in the Christmas Oratorio "only those pieces that could not be adapted to sacred purposes."

So, for Rust, not only did this fix the assessment of Bach's parody process; it also prescribed the editorial method for a work transmitted in both sacred and secular versions. The method was put into practice in the conflation of the homage cantata *Angenehmes Wiedersehen* and the St. John's Day cantata *Freue dich, erlöste Schar*, in that the trumpet and timpani parts from the secular version were added to the latter, in which they do not belong. This was a full decade and a half before Rust's famous blunder in the cantata *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. It is only fair to point out,

though, that Rust's knowledge of Bach's parody procedure made it possible for him to be the first (in 1873) to recognize the connection between the 1727 "Mourning Ode" and the lost St. Mark Passion of 1731.

Philipp Spitta's Bach monograph of 1873 and 1880 sticks to the path laid out by Rust. The peremptory tone is the same: "The Bachian style was the sacred; and the sacred style was the Bachian." [I/560] "His secular occasional compositions were, on the contrary, unsecular, and as such did not fulfill their purpose; the composer returned them to their rightful place when he transformed them into church pieces." There need be no fear of tension and disagreement in this view — a simple act of annexation has removed its foundation. But this very *coup de main* signals that Bach's parody process has finally become a parody problem. The parody process, with its approximate equivalence of sacred and secular versions of a work, does not fit in with the period's highly stylized view of Bach — greatly influenced by Spitta — as a kind of idol as "Germany's greatest church composer."

In the succeeding years, the concept of the word-tone relationship developed in the opera aesthetic of Richard Wagner, and his school had more than its share of influence. Symptomatic were the withering remarks made by Albert Schweitzer in his Bach book of 1908, which dealt partly with the secular models, partly with the parody texts, and occasionally with the parody process. These things are too well known to be cited here at any length.

But minimalization and annexation have proven themselves to be unsuitable tools; the open conflict over the parody issue has given rise to a widespread and refined strategy of defense. This battle, fought as it were while beating a retreat, has lasted practically until today.

There has been no lack of attempts to stop or reverse these tendencies. Arnold Schering's fundamental essay from the year 1921 is particularly noteworthy. In the search for a handle on the problem, Schering stumbled on the 1721 essay, "Random Thoughts on Church Music as It is Constituted Today," whose author, Gottfried Ephraim Scheibel, appeared to be legitimized as a star witness because he had studied in Leipzig starting in 1716. Scheibel considered whether Erdmann Neumeister's 1700 formulation from the point of view of text — "that a cantata looked just like an extract from an opera, made up of recitatives and arias" — also applied by extension to music. He objected to the assumption that church music had to be different from secular music, and fought against outmoded *Choralia* and *Contrapuncte*, against *alten Schlendrian* and *Hammerschmiedische Manier*. In Scheibel's view it was in no way sinful to perform a *freye Composition* in church, "a cantata composed in the new unconstrained manner," because "affects" could just as well "be motivated in church as outside it in an opera or *Collegium Musicum*." Parody texts for opera arias by Telemann serve to illustrate the thesis that

the "affect" itself in a work remains the same; "only the object changes, so that here a spiritual pain is felt, there a secular one, here one longs for something sacred, there for something worldly, and so on. The tone that gives me pleasure in an opera can do the same in church; it is just that the object is different."

What Schering could not know, or did not want to admit, was that with his informant Scheibel he had set a fox to guard the henhouse. For although he spent time in Leipzig, Scheibel in no sense paved the way for Bach — quite the opposite. Rather, he was part of the circle of cultivation of music in the third Leipzig church, the Neukirche, refurbished in 1700. From the beginning it had provided a kind of foil to the venerable Thomaskantorat and had a different stylistic ideal. In any event it is inadmissible to evaluate the parody process of Bach in Leipzig by the standards of the musicians and theorists of the rival Neukirche. At issue in their work was a deliberate levelling of the differences between church music and opera.

Schering took up the theme of parody process once again in one of his last efforts, the 1939 essay on the lost St. Mark Passion. This largely unsuccessful discussion need not be considered here.

Between the mid-1920s and the 1950s, Friedrich Smend came to the fore with fruitful research into Bach's parody process. From his work, an aesthetic approach — already foreshadowed — easily took shape. According to it, only a fundamental compatibility of words and music could guarantee a work of the highest quality. In Smend's opinion this was the case, almost without exception, in the St. John and St. Matthew Passions. Smend faced the B-minor Mass, so laden with parodied movements, with a sort of love-hate attitude. These feelings culminated in his curious edition of the piece for the *NBA* and the attempt to interpret the score of the Mass in B minor as a more or less accidental assembly of unrelated individual works. It must be conceded that the matter of division between parts 3 and 4 (i.e., between the *Sanctus*, with *Pleni*, and the *Osanna*) is not trivial and calls for justification. It can be explained by reference to the different origins of the *Sanctus* and the parodied *Osanna*, and particularly by the change in performing forces. Beyond that, it is perhaps the only truly problematic spot in the whole work: the juxtaposition of the *Pleni* and *Osanna* movements, identical in key and all too similar in thematic material. But this does not really count for much compared to the Mass as a whole, and in particular to the effort Bach invested in the accommodation and condensation of movements taken from older works. Unfortunately, Smend could not bring himself around to such an interpretation.

Smend's search for texts of lost early versions of Bach's vocal works was particularly fruitful. The identification of the Pastoral Cantata of 1725 as the original form of the Easter Oratorio gave him the welcome oppor-

tunity of better identifying the weak points in the latter, and thereby virtually eliminating it from the canon of the Thomascantor's masterpieces. On the subject of the text of the 1729 funeral music for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, Smend used every persuasive and pettifogging device at his disposal to ward off the dangerous possibility that movements from the St. Matthew Passion may have been used in the funeral music and thus "profaned."

The method used by Smend and his successors for identifying texts that were originally associated with a work was actually laid out as early as 1873 by Wilhelm Rust. It consisted of the demonstration of prosodic congruence, and as far as possible, the additional explanation of previously obscure madrigalisms in compositions transmitted with non-original texts.

Werner Neumann's 1965 essay "On the Extent and Nature of Bach's Parody Process" demonstrated with examples that this method was less certain than had previously been assumed, because in making a parody Bach did not always stick exactly to his existing poetic model. Further, the essay contributed fundamentally to the understanding of Bach's parody process by making the important distinction between "compositional" and "poetic" parodies. The first term refers to a somewhat random process, in which the composer, starting with an aria text that has been set before him, looks through his oeuvre for a piece suitable for adaptation. "Poetic parody" refers to the deliberate re-texting of a previously existing work — all movements in extreme cases. According to Neumann, Bach's librettists produced "true masterpieces of texts cut from a pattern." "This process," continues Neumann, generally results in "formally congruent text pairs." The method of reconstruction cited above is seen in action here.

Neumann's basic premise is particularly noteworthy: the fundamental and unalterable incompetence of Bach librettists. This view has a long history and is a foundation for the view of the parody process as a problem. In Bach's works, music and text seem to be separated by a vast chasm, and their joining is to be regarded as a misalliance. Karl Friedrich Zelter's verdict that German cantata texts were "wicked" and "disgraceful" had a notably long influence. Its roots may go back even further: Characteristically, the great music collector Georg Poelchau gave, in 1811, his entire treasure of Bach cantatas to the Berlin Sing-Akademie, without any apparent reason. Masses, Passions, and other works in which the "disgraceful" texts played little role, he kept. If I am not mistaken, the behavior of the Leipzig publishing house, Breitkopf, in the last third of the eighteenth century can be explained the same way. Here, too, it was Bach's cantatas — and only they — that vanished from advertisements of manuscripts and from stocks.

The controlling factor in Neumann's interpretation of Bach's parody process and his attitude toward the texts may well have been the

discoveries he made in connection with his 1938 dissertation on Bach's choral fugues. The principle of the so-called permutation fugue, more constructive than text-derived, and its often instrumental conception in which the vocal parts are created after the fact as excerpts from the instrumental material, all lead to the interpretation that the word-tone relationship as conceived in the aesthetic sensibilities of the late nineteenth century simply could not have applied to Bach.

The supposed inferiority of the text was also the starting point for Ludwig Finscher's 1969 essay, "On the Problem of Parody in Bach's Music." Finscher, in this important and pathbreaking work, comes to the conclusion that Bach's music demonstrates a "superfluity" with respect to its texts — a multiplicity of possibilities that makes it possible for it to consort with different, or even contradictory, texts. "The musical greatness of a piece by Bach is the precondition for its susceptibility to parody." In principle there is not much to be said against this view, but there are certainly cases that require particular scrutiny. An example: Gottsched's "Mourning Ode" for the Electoress, Christiana Eberhardine, in which Bach partially destroyed the poet's original conception by breaking up the strophic structure of the poem to make it fit his compositional intentions.

Finscher's important essay is also in essence an apology, because — as the word "problem" in the title shows — he deals with the question of why Bach's music does not find its one and only true partner in a particular text.

Finally, Günther Stiller presents a comprehensive defense in his 1970 book, *J. S. Bach and the Leipzig Liturgical Life of his Time*. In his interpretation, there are no grounds to be uneasy, especially as concerns Bach's church music, for several reasons: (1) parodied movements make up a small percentage of the surviving repertoire; (2) generally the direction is secular to sacred, never the other way around; (3) Bach approached the parody process in Leipzig with increasing deliberation; (4) his goal was the re-use of his finest creations; (5) he was seeking to realize his ideal of a seamless unity of musical style in each new context; (6) basic affect and *topos* were preserved for the most part; and (7) the parody process allowed the re-performance of commissioned works that would otherwise have been heard only once.

This simplified summary gives us the opportunity of ending our historical survey, which is really the story of a misunderstanding coupled with the apology for this very misunderstanding. I would like briefly to examine the issue in Bach's era, before concluding with a few remarks by way of an attempt at a new evaluation of Bach's parody process.

Johann Christoph Gottsched's *Handlexikon oder Kurzgefasstes Wörterbuch der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste* (Leipzig, 1760) gives the following short and pithy definition of "parody": "In poetry, an imitation of another poem, particularly with respect to the lyric

type." Heinrich Christoph Koch's *Musiklexikon* of 1802 gives the musical corollary, explaining parody as follows: "When a new text — be it in the same language or another — is made for an extant piece of vocal music, and is underlaid in it, the text newly underlaid is called a parody."

Walther's praise for Georg Caspar Schürmann in the *Lexikon* of 1732 belongs to the uncomplicated world of this sort of conception, and dispenses with any problematic aspects: Schürmann is "a skillful poet, and knows, among other things, how to underlay a well-made text to another's composition." The words of self-praise in Johann Friedrich von Uffenbach's foreword to his *Gesammelte Nebenarbeit* of 1733 are similar: "Among the poems dedicated to the noble art of music, most of the cantatas are parodies, or words underlaid to the melodies of famous composers, all written for my own use, and to whose laborious passing of time I devoted the greatest part of my poetic skill... Most of the texts are fashioned after Italian arias."

The occasional early criticism of the parody process leveled its aim primarily against blunders in the realm of church music. Johann Heinrich Buttstedt expressed himself in a decidedly conservative manner in his polemic treatise *Ut, mi, sol, re, fa, la* published in 1716: "Everything performed on stage and as chamber music is brought into church. All church music is written in theatrical style; what is more, they underlay sacred texts to theatrical arias." Gottsched's student, Johann Adolph Scheibe, took up a call not merely to go back "to the good old days," but rather for an improvement of the status quo by the combat of abuses. When he went to battle in Part 18 of the *Critischer Musicus* for 29, October, 1737, against a so-called "Pater Präses," his comments sound like an exact rebuttal of the opinion put forth in 1721 by the similarly named Scheibel: "He had a sheaf of opera arias stocked up from Italy, so whenever he needed a sacred aria for the *Gloria*, he made a parody out of a lovesick and voluptuous opera aria, and performed it with all devotion, just as if opera and church music were one and the same, and as if one could sigh just as voluptuously, tenderly, and basely over the highest being as to an insensible beauty." It is by no means out of the question that there are echoes here of opinions that Scheibe may have encountered in Leipzig in Bach's milieu, much more likely than the traditional interpretation of Scheibe's relation to Bach would suggest. Lorenz Christoph Mizler, otherwise more of a rival and opponent of Scheibe, put forth a similar opinion in his *Musicalischer Staarstecher* of 28 February 1740: "When, finally, words about the suffering of Christ are underlaid in a cantata about a love-struck Italian in the most hot-tempered passion for his paramour, that's nothing to certain cantors."

Buttstedt's position was decidedly regressive. Scheibe and Mizler had a somewhat more modern outlook, already stamped with the mark of the Enlightenment and better categorized with the tradition of the so-called *Moralische Wochenschriften*. Bach's Weimar cousin, Johann Gottfried

Walther, on the other hand, looked at matters more pragmatically, from the viewpoint of the practicing musician. Even in his last letter to Heinrich Bokemeyer in Wolfenbüttel, written on August 6, 1745, he asked for those "Latin motets of Italian origin... If a suitable German text could be underlaid to them, they could all pass quite nicely as new pieces." In August 1731, Walther sent two secular cantatas to Bokemeyer and asked him to "honor them with suitable sacred text." He had already made a copy of the music, apparently a score with no texts. In June 1729, Walther rejected the suspicion of faulty text declamation: "The enclosed parody of the wedding cantata delivered most recently can illuminate the first point, namely where it comes from, because the text is not always handled correctly. This is also the case with the cantata *Lobsinget ihr Christen*, etc., which originally had a different text and was later provided with this one for practical reasons." A few months later he sent another three cantatas: "It must be remembered, that the texts of these are only parodies; an out-of-town friend set them under the notes (which were originally provided with another text) for his pleasure and use, and later sent them to me. Because the present texts don't work in every case, I wanted dutifully to report this, so that you will know the reason."

The failure of a parody attempt was a common thing, and responsible and discriminating musicians made no bones about their opinions. Georg Michael Telemann, grandson of Georg Philipp Telemann, commented on the music for Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's installation as cantor and music director in Hamburg with the words: "The first part of this aria, already composed, had its words changed by the poet, and that accounts for its incoherence and strained quality." Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg also had to report such a mishap. In August 1757, he wrote to a publisher (perhaps Breitkopf in Leipzig): "I had promised you a French parody of the Coffee Cantata, but it turned out so badly that I gave it back to the French gentleman. The long and short syllables had not been taken into account, etc. It was awful."

Finally, the use of arias in 1749 "from a certain artful passion oratorio" for a concert for a Prorektor of the University of Halle has often been cited. It is to be counted as a parody blunder, but not a parody problem, as it has always been regarded. "To the misfortune of the composer," reported Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg in 1786, referring to Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, "there was in the audience a Saxon cantor from not far from Leipzig who knew the parodied artful arias. He began to bewail and lament their desecration, madder than Lully over the transformation of one of his secular arias into a sacred piece, and asked a student who the whippersnapper was who had the impudence to commit such a sinful act of plagiarism. He was told the name of the composer, and with a sigh the cantor shrugged his shoulders."

That this parody blunder was not stylized into a parody problem can be explained only by reference to the rather broadly drawn boundaries for the parody process. In this regard it is important to recall the classic example of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* and Klopstock's parody of it. There are whole worlds between Klopstock's dogmatic poetry and Pergolesi's music. The latter was based on the sentimental Marian poetry of the Middle Ages, on the sequence with the suggestive heading *De compassione B.M.V.*, intended for private devotion. Compared to the heaviness of the surgery by Klopstock and with Johann Adam Hiller's own staunchly progressive version, Bach's version seems relatively unassuming: a rhyming paraphrase of Psalm 51, a "prayer of repentance for the forgiveness of original and personal sins," and harmonic enrichment of the musical material. This is so, even though the dynamics of the new text necessitated an adjustment of the musical text in the last quarter of the work.

But let us return to Johann Gottfried Walther. In his letters there are a few other noteworthy remarks on the relationship of words and music that are of use in considering the parody process. He wrote in August, 1729, again to Heinrich Bokemeyer in Wolfenbüttel: "Finally, as far as my lord's basic premise is concerned: the vowels that are pronounced short and are marked with only an *Acuto*, for example 'Flammen, wallen, wandern, locken,' and the like, are to be set with no passage; that is fine with me. But I would offer the following for you to consider: whether in this manner the things expressed by such words, and their characteristics, might not come out too short?: This is certainly a noteworthy formulation of the question: Impairment of the musical impression because of the necessity of taking into account the aural characteristics of individual words — and particularly important ones at that."

In another letter from October of the same year, Walther discusses a movement from an Advent cantata that he had "recast" and sent to Bokemeyer in its new form. "You will surely notice without my pointing it out, that in this movement the 'raising' and 'anxious pressing of certain persons who want to open a heavy door' was the specific aim of my compositional work." In fact, we have here a key that makes possible further consideration of J. S. Bach's parody process.

By way of example let us take the Christmas Oratorio — but not simply to preach that "Jauchzet, frohlocket," with its strikingly deep tessitura, originally read "Tönet ihr Pauken"; or that the tender "Bereite dich, Zion" is based on the strongly defensive "Ich will dich nicht hören." The Christmas Oratorio is particularly well suited because its secular models are relatively accessible, and the catalogue of questions that can only be provisionally answered, not all that long.

The "Echo aria" in Part IV of the Oratorio presents a critical parody — accordingly negatively commented on by tradition. Its model from the Hercules Cantata is known (*Treues Echo dieser Orten*), but this is



possibly based in turn on a still older model from a lost homage cantata (*Frommes Schicksal, wenn ich frage*). A recently completed study by a Leipzig theologian, to be printed early next year, points out for the first time that the echo dialogue, in particular with the voice of the Christ child, refers to a tradition that reaches back well into the seventeenth century and that is described and praised in theological treatises of the time. The "Echo aria" thus can no longer be considered out of place, "sandwiched in" to "dispose of" the secular model; rather, it must be assumed that it represents a deliberate recourse to the tradition suggested by the text.

A second example. The aria, "Schliesse, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder" in Part III can be shown to be an original composition, because its final version was preceded by an unusually fully worked-out draft that was subsequently set aside. Bach originally planned to use the aria "Durch die von Eifer entflammten Waffen" from Cantata BWV 215. Apparently, *bassetto* technique is to be regarded as the point of comparison, musically representing an inverted word order. As I have discussed elsewhere, in Bach's music this represents (1) situations in which firm support is lacking; (2) the unusual, the incomprehensible, or the intellectually intangible; or (3) light, brightness, clarity, innocence (and also the association with the serenade). The "incomprehensible" element in the text of the secular model has to do with "anger paid back with kindness"; in the text of the Christmas Oratorio it is in the first line ("...this blessed miracle"). Perhaps this first line is the result of a later change — the word *Wunder* has no rhyme — but the word also appears in line 3, and could take its place in this analysis as well as Bach's compositional conception.

After the planned parody failed to materialize, the aria "Durch die von Eifer entflammten Waffen" was supplied with a new parody text: "Erleucht auch mein finstre Sinnen, erleuchte mein Herze." Here, the other meaning of the *bassetto* comes into play — light, brightness, innocence — and is reflected in the diction of the text. (Bach later disguised these connections between text and music through compositional changes, in particular by substituting an ordinary continuo for the *bassetto* part. Perhaps this was inevitable after he had changed the solo voice from soprano to *basso*.)

Such a procedure — as it were *in statu nascendi* — is inconceivable without the close (not to say most intimate) cooperation between composer and librettist, as I tried to show some time ago using the example of the Peasant Cantata. Further, it requires that the librettist be fully informed by the composer, or as Walther would say, "[know] the specific idea that the composer intended to express."

These examples show that one cannot assume that the production of texts — if not for all, then probably for most of the parodies — was a matter of making them from a mold, without consideration of sense and meaning, by simply writing the necessary number of syllables in the proper

rhyme scheme. Doubtless this also happened — I have already spoken of blunders — but considering the centuries-long tradition in making *contrafacta*, it can only be assumed when all other interpretations are exhausted that professional poets were facile at it.

It is noteworthy enough that the role of Bach's librettists, both known and anonymous, has been so greatly misjudged; the "parody problem" sketched at the beginning has apparently obstructed a clear view of the issue. In a new study, Elke Axmacher points out only incidentally in regard to the text of the St. Matthew Passion, that Henrici-Picander became acquainted with certain models, in particular texts by the Rostock theologian Heinrich Müller, "by way of Bach."

To return to the *bassetto* movement and its symbolic meaning: The aria "Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben" can serve as the classic example of the type. One must also keep in mind that the corresponding text from the funeral music for Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen ("Mit Freuden sei die Welt verlassen") fully lives up to the musical material and could itself serve as our "classical example" if the St. Matthew Passion did not exist. That authors like Detlef Gojowy and Paul Brainard after him had to employ such thorough analysis to settle the question of the priority of Passion or funeral music speaks for the artistry and insight of the author of the parody text.

We may continue with the examples. The opening chorus of the sixth part of the Christmas Oratorio ("Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben"), although strictly speaking originating in a lost church cantata of 1734, could hardly have acquired its new text without knowledge of the original text of the 1731 homage cantata: "So kämpfet nur, ihr muntern Töne."

It appears to be somewhat more difficult to elucidate the relationship between the aria "Auf meinen Flügeln sollst du schweben" from the Hercules cantata and the version from the Christmas Oratorio, "Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben." The fugue theme in the original, with the beating of wings and ensuing glide almost naturalistically depicted, appears to be without a textual partner in the parodied version and thus to have lost its justification. But if we assume here, too, that composer and librettist worked closely together, there is reason to look for the thoughts and ideas that guided the composer. To this end, let us take a detour by way of the cantata *Schleicht, spielende Wellen*. The aria of the personified Danube, "Reis von Habsburgs hohem Stamme," praises the virtue and matrimonial fidelity of the Electoress Maria Josepha. A strictly imitative quartet movement appears here as the musical equivalent of ethical norms and moral qualities. This provides a key for understanding our tenor aria: the composer's concern there was not the precise imitation of the flight of the eagle, but rather the musical personification of virtue and the "perfection" apostrophized in the text. This is represented by the musical "perfection"

of the "virtuous" contrapuntal form, which finds its expression as a fugue. It was the job of the librettist of the Christmas Oratorio to find a version that dealt with similar kinds of ideas. The new version did not read "Dir zu Liebe will ich leben," as we might have expected, but "Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben." This is entirely in accordance with the requirements formulated by J. G. Walther in 1708 and Kuhnau in 1709, always to pay close attention to the *scopus* of the text.

This opens up numerous perspectives on Bach's music, not all of which have to do with the parody process. One often comes across fugal movements whose formal motivation is the same as that of the tenor aria discussed above. The central fugal movement of the motet *Jesu, meine Freude* textually presents little motivation for a "tutti-character" setting, and there is also little room for madrigalisms. But if the text of the fugue embodies "the law" in a theological sense, then the fugal form is the exact medium required. The same goes for the opening chorus of Cantata 144, *Nimm, was dein ist, und gebe hin*. In 1760 Friedrich Wilhelm Marburg praised its compositional features and imagined a "Chorus of admonishment" — from our perspective, a rationalistic misunderstanding and platitude.

Returning to the Christmas Oratorio, it is worth posing the question of whether the three cantatas *BWV* 213, 214, and 215 could have been composed with a view to the oratorio, already planned; that is, whether the secular versions are to be regarded as mere rough drafts, as Philipp Spitta suggested in 1880. This idea cannot be dismissed out of hand, because a composer loses his innocence, so to speak, after his first parody. From a statistical point of view, there are no known re-performances or other uses of the material from the three cantatas in question — especially the first two — in contrast to most of the other secular cantatas, for which second versions survive. Strictly speaking, this means only that Bach did not make any further use of these movements after they were taken over into the Christmas Oratorio, and not that this is evidence of an original master plan. It also cannot be overlooked that Bach took over practically all of the choruses and arias, with very few exceptions, such as: the Gavotte-like concluding chorus of the Hercules Cantata, originally planned to be made into the opening chorus of Part V; the aria, "Blast die wohlgegriffnen Flöten," which is not particularly usable apart from its reference to the sound of flutes; and finally, the concluding chorus of the cantata *BWV* 214, which was taken over despite its limited usefulness. Its unusual quality lies in its deployment of voices: Irene (tenor), Bellona (soprano), Pallas (alto) and Fama (bass and tutti), a faithful representation of the "scenic entrances" of the four characters in the course of the cantata. (Curiously, the score of the *NBA* did not pay attention to this and completely jumbled their order.) It is well known how the librettist of the Christmas Oratorio got around this, with some difficulty. I would prefer to leave as an open question whether this suggests advance planning or not.

We must leave this second chapter of our observations somewhat abruptly in order to consider another question: Why J. S. Bach availed himself of the parody process, and what place it has in his works in general.

A number of catch phrases have often been used in the literature: saving of time, saving of labor, economy of ideas, use of fallow materials from commissioned works, compensation for the reduced productivity that came with age. Each of these may be accepted without contradiction, at least as far as they do not reflect the apologetic attitude demonstrated earlier. The issue here is not a justification of Bach's parody process, but of insight into his creative methods. The reasons may rarely be singular and clear-cut; normally, there will be a clutch of different motives. And even then, they will have to be carefully weighed, because sometimes the expenditure of effort for a reworking is greater than that for a new composition.

The motivation of "saving work" is closely connected with Bach's assembly of a working repertory that could fill most of his needs. This tendency, which may be seen already in his earlier years, is especially clear for his Leipzig vocal works. The repertoire principle is mutually tied up with a principle of quality: only the best material stays in the repertoire. The parody process, too, aims to improve musical material; *creatio* plays a small role, here — *elaboratio* and *variatio* much larger ones (Christoph Wolff, 1983).

Quality, the "superfluity" in Bach's music (Ludwig Finscher, 1969), is an important precondition of its susceptibility to parody. There are also other noteworthy aspects, in particular the method of composition derived from an initial instrumental conception, which has as a consequence a certain neutrality with respect to the text. Whether we can thus speak of "absolute" musical quality remains an open question.

Significant deductions about Bach's dealings with his repertoire are best made from his Leipzig vocal works. The first yearly cycle of cantatas, begun in June, 1723, consists only in part of new compositions and draws on older works, especially from the Weimar period, in great measure. On the other hand, the great vocal works such as the E-flat major *Magnificat* and the Passion according to St. John in its first versions are entirely newly composed. With the second yearly cantata cycle, the relationship is inverted: now the cantatas are entirely new (up to seven chorale cantatas in one month); the large works, on the other hand, are (partially revised) re-performances, such as the second version of the St. John Passion. Bach's productivity in his second year in the job is almost unbelievable; in addition to the forty known chorale cantatas, he wrote the *Sanctus* of the later B-minor Mass, a town council cantata, along with compositions for out-of-town commissions and for guest performances. All this became possible because Bach could work with something already extant: the chorale

melodies. He seems to have relied almost blindly on this foundation, because never again did he venture such a compositional *tour de force*, and never again did he saddle himself with such a burden. Possibly, a creative crisis resulting from fatigue caused the early demise of the chorale cantata cycle and prevented its completion.

Bach's preference for working with extant material apparently grew in the course of his time in Leipzig. This may also have had something to do with growing self-imposed demands for quality that came with old age, in contrast to the less hesitant early period, in which inspiration came more quickly and more abundantly, and in which a battle developed over whether a composer's or virtuoso's career was the more desirable. Growing self-criticism can, in extreme cases, cause a complete silence, or be connected with a *horror vacui* or a "melancholy of ability" as it has been labeled in recent times. The anecdote from Bach's own lifetime, that he was disposed to be inspired only if he had played some other composition beforehand, aptly characterizes this attitude toward creativity.

The young Bach was perhaps the first to apply to composition the maxim of improving something that was not good enough as it was found; the repertoire available to him did not meet his demands. Bach's last complete large work, the B-minor Mass, also speaks to a fondness for improvement and things improved. If one is willing to believe a family story, a nearly narcissistic partiality to his own compositions was characteristic of Bach. Thus, not only would the husbanding of effort and ideas be decisive for his attitude about repertoire, but also the pressing desire to repeat one's own works. Bach's repeated performances of the entire *Well-Tempered Clavier* with only his student Heinrich Nicolaus Gerber as the audience belongs to this category.

When the Saxon Electoress died in 1727 and Gottsched's *Deutsche Gesellschaft* put on an "unofficial" memorial service with Hans Karl von Kirchbach as principal (in consideration of the Elector's Catholicism, little else was possible in Leipzig), Bach delivered in his musical contribution — the "Mourning Ode" — the best of the best. The absorption of material from it into the St. Mark Passion by means of parody offered a suitable opportunity for re-performance of the most important parts of this choice work of art. In the case of the memorial service for the highly regarded Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, Bach appears to have worked the other way: he took from the 1727 St. Matthew Passion several contemplative movements and used them in the funeral music performed in Cöthen in March 1729. Is this a profanation of the Passion?

Bach's parody method cannot be easily pigeonholed. How did Bach's most important contemporaries proceed in comparison? I have already mentioned the practical outlook of Bach's Weimar cousin, Johann Gottfried Walther. For Telemann, parody and reworking appear to have been too taxing in most cases, and new composition was his usual method.

It was apparently no different for Fasch, Stölzel, and Graupner; the great quantity of surviving material by the last two speaks for an ad-hoc approach to composition. On the other hand, George Frideric Handel appears to have undertaken many more borrowings than Bach, both from his own works and those of other composers. But Handel's situation was quite different: he lived and worked as a sort of "free agent," and this demanded a productivity that could not be achieved by normal means.

Composition as the improvement of inadequate extant material, as it apparently was for Bach in great measure, would undoubtedly be easier to demonstrate if we had more sketches in his hand. Perhaps one would then find that some ideas that came to him were only mediocre, and only after later work did they take on their characteristic high quality. It would then be possible to compare Bach's compositional method with the more familiar methods of Mozart, Beethoven, and others.

A more archaic component must not be ignored, though. A recent study entitled "On the Egyptians' Concept of Time" remarks: "In ancient Egypt it would never have been claimed that something fundamentally new had been created; rather the King was proud to have accomplished something that had not been accomplished since the dawn of time, or to have rebuilt something (for example, a temple), as it had been in the dawn of time." If one is willing to assume that something of this tradition lived on in Bach — and his turn to the *stile antico* late in his life speaks for it — then one must think, as Wolfgang Hildesheimer did, of a truly "remote" Bach. But he is not so remote; in the same vein as the ancient Egyptian maxim there is a saying of the painter Eugene Delacroix, which according to Alfred Einstein is applicable to Mozart as well as to Bach: "The essence of a genius, or better of his influence, lies not in his new ideas, but rather in the conviction that everything that had been done by others before him was not good enough." Bach's parody process must also be seen in this light.

(English translation by Daniel R. Melamed)

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Dr. Schulze has graciously allowed *BACH* journal to publish a transcript of the keynote address he presented to the American Bach Society on the occasion of the opening session of their Triennial Meeting, held on the Harvard University Campus, April 28-30, 1988.

In place of footnotes, and by arrangement with the author, works cited in the lecture appear in the "Selective Bibliography" appended to the lecture transcript.

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