


RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Weight of Lightness: Italian Opera and Parody in Congress Vienna

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Abstract

Recent scholarship at the crossroads of opera and Habsburg studies has emphasised the centrality of Italian opera within the political agenda of the Congress era (1814–22). It was a particularly effective means to project prestige, cosmopolitanism and belonging within a new geopolitical order, as the Kingdom of Lombardy–Venetia was integrated under the Habsburg Crown. While much attention has been given to performances of Italian opera at the Viennese court theatres, the role of suburban venues has so far been largely neglected. This article aims to demonstrate the ‘weight’ that the so-called ‘light’ genres carried within the cultural life of the capital and across the Habsburg lands. Two parodies written by Adolf Bäuerle for the Theater in der Leopoldstadt in Vienna – *Tankredi* (1817, music by Wenzel Müller) and *Die falsche Prima Donna in Krähwinkel* (1818, music by Ignaz Schuster) – serve as case studies for a discussion of the fluidity of genres, operatic voices and audiences, and the role of such singers as Gentile Borgondio, Angelica Catalani and Ignaz Schuster as ‘aural ambassadors’ of the Habsburg cultural project.

Keywords: Opera parody; Congress of Vienna; Prima donna; Suburban theatre; Habsburg cultural politics

‘I am, however, on my feet walking or standing all day, just sitting in the morning when I write to you, and at the theatre in the evening.’¹ These words, from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s letters to his wife Marie von Tucher, summarise well the philosopher’s everyday life during his sojourn in Vienna between 21 September and 5 October 1824. His relentless *flânerie* through the must-see sights of the capital – the Belvedere Gallery, St Stephen’s Cathedral and the Prater, to name but a few – was paralleled by a series of immersive moments in the theatre.

[23 September 1824] But the Italian opera! On Monday *Doralice* by Mercadante, the day before yesterday *Otello* by Rossini, yesterday *Zelmira* by the same! [...] The singers are of such excellence, power, purity, and training that only Catalani and Mme Milder could give you a sense of it!

¹ ‘Ohnehin bin ich den ganzen Tag auf den Beinen, gehend oder stehend, sitze nur morgens, wenn ich an Dich schreibe, und abends im Theater’. *Briefe von und an Hegel*, vol. III (1823–1831), ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Berlin, 1970), 58. Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[25 September 1824] The day before yesterday, no Italian theatre [...] but the Theater in der Leopoldstadt [...] – It is not very difficult to give you a brief idea of it. The main character is now Mr Ignaz Schuster – he plays in *Die falsche Primadonna*, *Die Hüte im Theater*, – I saw *Die schlimme Liesel* [...] [Yesterday] afternoon another few hours at the Belvedere and then at *Figaro* by Rossini, – Lablache, what a Figaro! Mme Fodor, what a Rosina!

[27 September 1824] After the Prater to the Leopoldstadt theatre; here a prologue in which Schuster almost in the same manner as before, [appeared] as an elderly merchant with a young woman, and then again *Die Zauberbirne*; [...] even you yourself would not have been too old to be amused for the second time, as was my case.²

As these excerpts suggest, Hegel largely divided his time between two venues. On the one hand, he rushed whenever possible to the court opera (Kärntnertheater), where he could see performances of works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Saverio Mercadante and Gioachino Rossini, whose operas he especially enjoyed. Such experience – a sort of epiphany – allowed him to develop a ‘deep passion, not to say an obsession’ for Italian opera and its singers, as Emanuele Senici has put it, and which profoundly shaped his aesthetic thought.³ On the other hand, he often attended the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, the oldest suburban theatre (*Vorstadttheater*) of the capital, founded in 1781. There the philosopher could gain insight into the two main pillars of its repertoire: *Pantomimen*, pieces that featured such traditional stock characters as Harlequin or local figures as Kasperl, and comedies (*Possen*) mainly written by playwrights including Adolf Bäuerle (1786–1859), Karl Meisl (1775–1853) and Joseph Alois Gleich (1772–1841).⁴

These two spheres – court and suburban theatres – have rarely been considered alongside each other. Unlike other contemporary commentators, Hegel resists categorising the venues in terms of topography (court or suburbs), repertoire (serious or comic) or audience type, and thus avoids the common practice of drawing a distinction between elite and popular arts and rating them accordingly. Vienna appears through his eyes as a

² ‘[23 September 1824] Aber die Italienische Oper! Montag *Doralice* von Mercadante, vorgestern *Otello* von Rossini, gestern *Zelmira* von demselben! [...] die Sänger und Sängerinnen von einer Vortrefflichkeit, Macht, Reinheit und Ausbildung, daß nur die Catalani und Mde. Milder Dir eine Vorstellung davon geben können! [25 September 1824] Vorgestern, da kein italienisches Theater sondern pantomimisches Ballett war, beim weltberühmten Kasperl, d.h. im Leopoldstädtischen Theater, also jetzt auch dies vielberühmte Wunderding gesehen. – Es ist nicht so schwer, Dir einen kurzen Begriff davon zu geben. Die Hauptperson ist jetzt Herr Ignaz Schuster, – die Stücke, in denen er spielt, sind *Die falsche Prima Donna*, *Die Hüte im Theater*, – ich sahe *Die schlimme Liesel* – also gar keine außerordentlichen, eigentümlichen, noch grob komischen Stücke [...] [gestern] Nachmittags wieder ein paar Stunden im Belvedere und dann im *Figaro* von Rossini, – Lablache, welch ein Figaro! Mde. Fodor, welch eine Rosine! [27 September 1824] Nach dem Prater ins Leopoldstädter Theater; hier ein Vorspiel, worin Schuster beinahe in derselben Manier, als ältlicher Kaufmann mit einer jungen Frau, wie früher, und dann abermals *Die Zauberbirne*; [...] auch Du selbst wärest nicht zu alt gewesen, um Dich dabei zum zweiten Mal zu amüsieren, wie es mein Fall war’. *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 55–61.

³ Emanuele Senici, ‘Die Wiener “Rossinis” von Carpani und Hegel’, in *Rossini in Wien*, ed. Reto Müller (Leipzig, 2024), 264–77, at 268. Over the past years, Hegel’s aesthetics, particularly in relation to opera, has garnered significant scholarly interest. See also Alessandra Lazzerini Belli, ‘Hegel e Rossini: Il cantar che nell’anima si sente’, *Revue Belge de Musicologie* 2 (1995), 211–30, <https://sites.unimi.it/gpiana/dm1/dm1rosal.htm#4>; Wolfgang Welsch, ‘Warum hat Hegel Rossini so hoch geschätzt – während Beethoven nicht einmal erwähnt hat?’, in *Hegel und Italien – Italien und Hegel: Geistige Synergien von gestern und heute*, ed. Francesca Iannelli, Federico Vercellone and Klaus Vieweg (Milan, 2019), 247–68.

⁴ Standard accounts of Viennese theatrical history are Franz Hadamowsky, *Wien: Theatergeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des ersten Weltkriegs* (Vienna, 1988); William E. Yates, *Theatre in Vienna: A Critical History, 1776–1995* (Cambridge, 1996). On suburban theatres in particular see Otto Rommel, *Die Alt-Wiener Volkskomödie: Ihre Geschichte vom Barocken Welt-Theater bis zum Tode Nestroys* (Vienna, 1952).

cosmopolitan, multifaceted, yet cohesive theatrical centre, animated by the on-stage voices that he mentions repeatedly throughout his notes. Indeed, he highlights the overwhelming experience of listening to the singers of Domenico Barbaja's entourage at the court opera – soprano Girolama Dardanelli, tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini, baritone Domenico Donzelli and bass Luigi Lablache, to name but a few, whose talents reminded him of those of international stars including Angelica Catalani (1780–1849) and Pauline Anna Milder-Hauptmann (1785–1838). Equally significant is his discovery of the Leopoldstadt company, particularly its leader, actor and singer Ignaz Schuster (1779–1835), whose performances he praised for their 'great excellence'.⁵ Demonstrating a remarkable familiarity with the boulevard theatrical *milieu*, Hegel noted that Schuster's talents might even surpass those of his counterparts at the boulevard theatres in Munich (Karl Andreas von Bernbrunn, known as Carl Carl) and Berlin (Johann Georg Gern).⁶

It is not an exaggeration to say that all of these voices – from both the court and the suburban theatres – marked the soundscape of Congress-era Vienna, a period spanning from the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) to the Congress of Verona (1822).⁷ To put it succinctly, the above-mentioned performers can be regarded as 'aural ambassadors' of the Habsburg Restoration. The foreign minister Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859) not only saw in musical culture the quintessence of international harmony after two decades marked by the Napoleonic wars, but also viewed Italian opera in particular as a supranational art that was well suited to Austria's projected self-image as a state at such a crucial time of change. Indeed, as early as 1822, Metternich lauded such an idea, defining 'the establishment of the Italian opera' as a 'good episode in [his] life', one that 'had at last succeeded'.⁸ Through the refined work of cultural diplomacy based on the appointment of Italian companies and impresarios, the genre began to assume an increasingly prominent role within Viennese cultural life. While many of the court opera's productions were still based on French *opéra comique* or German *Singspiel*, Italian opera was reserved for crucial events, such as weddings, festivities and state occasions. As such, the genre contributed to two key aspects of the Habsburg cultural project during the Congress era: by recalling the tradition that Italian opera had in the Habsburg lands, it projected and traced continuity, prestige and cosmopolitanism;⁹ and it signalled imperial belonging and dynastic representation within a new geopolitical order, as the Kingdom of Lombardy–Venetia was integrated under the Habsburg Crown in 1815.

As a consequence of recent trends in Habsburg history and transnational opera studies, the centrality of Italian opera within the empire's agenda has garnered the attention of a growing body of scholarship. Music historians have especially focused on the activity of

⁵ '... wo Schuster einen Magister ganz exzellent machte, übrigens hochdeutsch sprach'. *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 66.

⁶ 'Schuster ist nicht ein gemeiner und niedriger Komiker wie Karl, den Du in München gesehen [hast], sondern etwa wie Gern, im Ganzen von derselben Force, ein kleiner, buckliger Mann wie Köster'. *Briefe von und an Hegel*, 58.

⁷ On diplomacy and politics during the Congress era see the most recent contribution by Glenda Sluga, *The Invention of International Order: Remaking Europe after Napoleon* (Princeton, 2021); Brian E. Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics after Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA, 2014). For an overview of the variety of performances during the Congress of Vienna see Elisabeth Fritz-Hilscher, 'Musik und Musikleben rund um den Wiener Kongress (1814/1815) aus der Sicht einiger Zeitungen', *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 57 (2013), 215–39.

⁸ 'What a good episode in my life is the establishment of the Italian opera here: it has at last succeeded, and I have gained a real and great victory'. *Memoirs of Prince Metternich, 1815–1829*, vol. 3, ed. Richard Metternich (London, 1881), 575.

⁹ I discuss the crucial role of Italian opera in the *primo Ottocento* Habsburg lands, and especially of Giuseppe Nicolini's opera *Gli antichi slavi* (1811), commissioned by Prince Joseph Franz Maximilian von Lobkowitz for his daughter's wedding, in my 'Morlacchi e matrimoni in scena: Sulle tracce degli *Antichi slavi* (1811) di Rossi-Nicolini', in *Una generazione perduta? L'opera italiana tra 1790 e 1815*, ed. Daniele Carnini, Fabrizio Della Seta, Paolo Fabbri, Ilaria Narici and Emanuele Senici (Pesaro, 2025).

composers (Rossini, Donizetti) and impresarios (Barbaja, Bartolomeo Merelli) in Vienna,¹⁰ as well as on performances in salons and at diplomatic gatherings of the Congress era in Habsburg territories.¹¹ However, less attention has been devoted to other spaces such as the Viennese suburban theatres, venues that have often been considered peripheral but which – just like the court theatres – were hotspots of imperial cultural politics. In this context, the role of the Theater in der Leopoldstadt warrants further investigation. Even if it did not serve as a stage for Italian opera or its singers – as was the case of another suburban theatre, the Theater an der Wien¹² – the Leopoldstadt venue was key in marking distinct periods in the Viennese imperial calendar. Its manifold connections with courtly environments are especially clear when browsing through the theatre’s performance catalogue and the daily notes by *Kapellmeister* Wenzel Müller (1759–1835).¹³ Indeed, the Habsburg imperial family and their guests, especially European royalty, were regular visitors to this venue, not least to attend parodies that drew on the latest cultural highlights such as opera premieres or recitals.

This article explores opera parodies given at the Leopoldstadt in the Congress era, a context that has received limited scholarly attention thus far, owing to its placement on the boundaries between theatre studies and music history. Parodies – sometimes hidden behind other designations (*Posse, Travestie*) – offer a fresh perspective on the interconnected nature of the Viennese theatrical landscape, revealing a dynamic interplay between the court and suburban theatres. Just like the *literarische Parodien* of classical works (such as Shakespeare’s tragedies), spoken dramas (by such contemporary authors as Kotzebue, Goethe, Schiller) or genres (melodrama, *Zauberspiel*),¹⁴ parodies on operatic or musical topics can be understood as a distinct, although heterogeneous, subgenre. Despite constituting a relatively small portion of the venue’s production,¹⁵ they play a crucial role in reflecting the theatrical trends on the Viennese operatic stage in Congress Vienna. They reveal the success of French operas by Grétry, Cherubini and Spontini,¹⁶ and classics by Gluck and Mozart, for example, as

¹⁰ Claudio Vellutini, ‘Cultural Engineering: Italian Opera in Vienna, 1816–1848’ (PhD diss, University of Chicago, 2015). I am grateful to the author for sharing with me a preprint of his *Entangled Histories: Opera and Cultural Exchange between Vienna and the Italian States after Napoleon* (Oxford, 2025).

¹¹ Axel Körner, ‘Culture for a Cosmopolitan Empire: Rossini between Vienna and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown’, in *Gioachino Rossini 1868–2018: La musica e il mondo*, ed. Ilaria Narici, Emilio Sala, Emanuele Senici and Benjamin Walton (Pesaro, 2018), 357–80.

¹² In the early nineteenth century, the Theater an der Wien shared the same management as the court opera, and was often used for the restaging (*Wiederaufführungen*) of Italian operas or to host recitals of guest singers. See the theatre’s catalogue contained in Anton Bauer, *150 Jahre Theater an der Wien* (Zürich, 1952) as well as the latest contribution to this venue’s history, *Beethoven.An.Denken: Das Theater an der Wien als Erinnerungsort*, ed. Julia Ackermann and Melanie Unseld (Vienna, 2020).

¹³ Rudolf Angermüller, *Wenzel Müller und ‘sein’ Leopoldstädter Theater: Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Tagebücher Wenzel Müllers* (Vienna, 2010).

¹⁴ Jürgen Hein counts around 270 parodies that were staged between 1776 and 1870 in Vienna; Jürgen Hein, *Das Wiener Volkstheater* (Darmstadt, 1997), 64. On Viennese parody as a genre see the contributions by Johann Hüttner, ‘Literarische Parodie und Wiener Vorstadtpublikum vor Nestroy’, *Maske und Kothurn* 18 (1972), 99–139; Jürgen Hein, *Parodien des Wiener Volkstheaters: Mit einer Karte der Originalschauplätze* (Stuttgart, 1986).

¹⁵ See the overview in Tatjana Spendul, ‘Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Parodie in Wien: Opernparodien 1800–1850’ (PhD diss., Universität Wien, 1965), 206–7, and partially republished in my ‘Rossini in *Krähwinkel*? Una parodia del *Tancredi* viennese’, *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi* LVI (2016), 9–61, at 24–6.

¹⁶ In his recent volume on Viennese parody c. 1800, Matthias Mansky includes two case studies on Karl Meisl’s opera parodies, *Julerl, die Putzmacherin* (on Spontini’s *La vestale*) and *Fra Diavolo oder das Gasthaus auf der Strasse* (on Auber’s *Fra Diavolo*). Matthias Mansky, *Ökonomien der Parodie am Wiener Vorstadtheater: Unterhaltungsdramatik in politischen und sozioökonomischen Krisenzeiten, 1813–1830. Studie und kritische Edition* (Hanover, 2022), 520–621.

well as reflect the latest craze for Italian singers that arose in the capital after the success of Rossini's operas.¹⁷

Tancredi (1817) and *Die falsche Prima Donna* (1818), the two representative parodies at the core of this investigation, are crucial in helping us understand discourses around the impact of Italian opera in the aftermath of the Viennese Congress and the role of so-called 'light' genres within Habsburg cultural politics. For different reasons these two pieces can be considered as a sort of diptych. Most obviously, they were both written for the Theater in der Leopoldstadt by Adolf Bäuerle, a crucial figure in Vienna's cultural life. His influence radiated well beyond his employment as a secretary and playwright at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, not least owing to his role as editor of the *Wiener Theaterzeitung* (1806–60), then the most widely read theatrical newspaper in German-speaking Europe. Secondly, both parodies are based on two musical highlights that Vienna theatre-goers witnessed: the arrival of an Italian company and their staging of Rossini's *Tancredi* in the winter season 1816/17, and the series of recitals given by soprano Angelica Catalani in summer 1818. Lastly, the two parodies are connected by the fact that they were conceived for Ignaz Schuster as a lead protagonist. In both works he interpreted a cross-dressed *prima donna*, mocking contralto Gentile Borgondio's *Tancredi en travesti*,¹⁸ as well as the above-mentioned diva Angelica Catalani. Indeed, cross-dressing as a theatrical and parodistic practice connects several interrelated strands of enquiry that grapple with both *genre* and *gender* and which dovetail with Judith Butler's notion of 'parodic repetitions' of drag performances.¹⁹ However, stepping into the diva's shoes meant more than just subverting roles or uncovering the gap between the performer's voice and the character being portrayed. Bringing a 'mock' *prima donna* on stage reflected transformations occurring in the opera house *tout court* during the Restoration: on stage, the shift between the slow decline of the castrati, the rise of female singers, and the relevance of practices like cross-dressing and travesty in opera;²⁰ behind the curtains, the commercialisation of the theatrical marketplace and new ways of expressing cultural patronage and diplomacy; and in the theatre boxes, an enthusiastic and variegated fandom that contributed to the transformation of distinctive singers into divas.

Schuster's voice as a 'drag queen' echoed just as far as the cosmopolitan voices of the Italian 'singing queens' that he sought to imitate on stage. Indeed, *Tancredi* and *Die falsche Prima Donna* were widely enjoyed throughout the Habsburg territories. Dissemination was helped not only by the circulation of the printed libretti or scores of selected songs, but also by Schuster's guest performances (*Gastspiele*) in distinct centres of the empire, such as Graz, Preßburg/Bratislava, Troppau/Opava and Prague. This aspect challenges the common understanding of the parody as a mere popular and autochthonous phenomenon of the so-called 'old-Vienna' times (*alt-Wiener Volkstheater*) – a rather traditional and nostalgic

¹⁷ Beyond *Tancredi's* parody (a work explored later in this article), other examples of Rossini's parodies include *Der Barbier von Sievering* by Karl Meisl with music by Adolph Müller (Theater an der Wien, 1828) and *Finette Aschenbrödel oder Rose und Schuh* by Auguste Schreiber and Wilhelm Würfel (Theater in der Leopoldstadt, 1830). References to Rossini's operas in Viennese comedies are discussed in Bernd-Rüdiger Kern, 'Ferdinand Raimund und Rossini', in *Rossini in Wien*, ed. Reto Müller, 467–78.

¹⁸ Very little is known about the contralto Gentile Borgondio (Brescia, 1780–after 1830), who made her name in the German-speaking area thanks to her interpretation of *Tancredi*: 'Unvergeßlich bleibt ihr Tancred, welchen sie in Deutschland zuerst einführte' in *Damen Conversations Lexikon*, II (Leipzig, 1834), 139–40. On her and on other Italian singers in Vienna see also Michael Jahn, *Di tanti palpiti...: Italiener in Wien* (Vienna, 2006), 63–4.

¹⁹ See 'From Parody to Politics', the final chapter in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1999), 181–190.

²⁰ Katherine Hambridge offers a compelling overview of such plurality of 'cross-dressed' voices c. 1800 in her '(Cross-)Gendering the German Voice', *Beethoven Studies* 4, ed. Keith Chapin and David Wyn Jones (Cambridge, 2020), 124–9.

image that was constructed in the late nineteenth century and perpetuated until the 1960s.²¹ Although labelled *Lokalpossen* (local comedies), both parodies would quickly become emancipated from their Viennese origins. Not only did they participate in broader theatrical discourses within a growing and interconnected entertainment industry, but they were also used to mark and celebrate official state occasions beyond Vienna.

Against this backdrop, the categories of ‘weight’ and ‘lightness’ that lie at the core of this article engage with two notions.²² On the one hand, lightness relates to the bright and agile qualities of the voices that echo throughout this investigation, spanning from soprano Angelica Catalani to the male *false* Ignaz Schuster. On the other hand – as may now be anticipated – lightness denotes the label typically assigned to boulevard genres. Yet, in this investigation, I shall challenge these conventional dichotomies, undermining the simplistic low/high associations attached to this vocabulary. *Tankredi* and *Die falsche Prima Donna*, I argue, demonstrate the potential of parodies and singers as vehicles to support and amplify the imperial agenda of the Congress era, rather than subvert the status quo. More broadly, I seek to recalibrate the balance between original and parody – between the perceived gravity of the operatic repertoire and the ephemeral essence of popular genres – to allow the shortening of distances between court and suburban theatres.

Retelling *Tancredi*

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. This old adage applies to a note that Bäuerle added as a preface to his ‘Posse mit Gesang’, *Tancredi*, performed for the first time at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt on 25 April 1817 with music by *Kapellmeister* Wenzel Müller:²³

[Rossini’s] opera *Tancredi*, which gained popularity because of its beautiful music and successful performance by the Italian company coming from Munich and has since been performed in this city to wide acclaim, has given rise to the present local parody, the content of which, by the way, is not at all suitable for it. The plot is extremely simple and operatic. Readers will therefore be so kind as to regard this little work as a comic tale which is merely intended to amuse, and which, after it brings along all the favourite melodies of the original in German and in comical form, merely has the purpose of filling a couple of hours in the most cheerful manner. Vienna, March 1817. The Author.²⁴

²¹ On the construction of the *Alt-Wiener Volkstheater* of the Biedermeier era see Marion Linhardt, ‘Kontrolle – Prestige – Vergnügen: Profile einer Sozialgeschichte des Wiener Theaters 1700–2010’, *LiTheS Sonderband 3* (2012), 5–81 (http://lithes.uni-graz.at/lithes/beitraege_12_sonderbd_3/linhardt_sozialgeschichte.pdf). Marc Lacheny also points to Otto Rommel’s reading of popular theatre as a ‘surestimation de la dimension folklorique de la tradition comique locale’. Marc Lacheny, *Littérature ‘d’en haut’, littérature ‘d’en bas’? La dramaturgie canonique allemande et le théâtre populaire viennois de Stranitzky à Nestroy* (Berlin 2016), 18–19.

²² In a review of Clair Rowden’s volume *Opera and Parody in Paris, 1860–1900*, Jack Blaszkiewicz similarly addresses the dichotomy of weight and lightness, but in reference to Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984); *Music and Letters* 102/4 (2021), 847–50.

²³ *Tancredi*, eine lokale Parodie in zwey Akten von Adolf Bäuerle. Die Musik vom Herrn Kapellmeister Müller. Für das k.k. priv. Leopoldstädter-Theater. Zweite Auflage. Wien, Joseph Tendler und Sohn, 1817. The libretto is held at the Austrian National Library, A-Wn, ÖNB 4729-A. Mus and is available online: <http://data.onb.ac.at/rep/1053B849>. For a close reading of *Tancredi* and Rossini’s reception in Vienna, see my ‘Rossini in *Krähwinkel?*’.

²⁴ ‘Die wegen ihrer schönen Musik und glücklichen Darstellung beliebte Oper *Tancredi* von der Münchner italienischen Sängergesellschaft und längst in hiesiger Stadt mit lautem Beyfall gegeben, gab Veranlassung zur gegenwärtigen lokalen Parodie, deren Inhalt übrigens gar nicht dazu geeignet ist. Die Handlung ist äußerst einfach und opernmäßig. Die Leser werden daher so gütig seyn, dieses Werklein für einen Schwank anzusehen, der sie blos belustigen soll, und der, nachdem er alle Lieblingsmelodien des Original Deutsch und komisch mitbringt, blos den Zweck hat, ein paar Stunden fröhlich auszufüllen. Wien, im März 1817. Der Verfasser’. Adolf Bäuerle, *Tancredi*, 3.

By oscillating between homage and divertissement, Bäuerle was explicitly pointing out his harmless intentions. However, with these lines he was also indirectly responding to a censorship enquiry conducted by the *Polizeihofstelle* (Austrian police) a few weeks earlier. On 6 March 1817, the censors noted that the playwright ‘dared to write a parody of the famous opera *Tancredi*’, which came across as nothing less than an ‘inappropriate satire of the court theatres’.²⁵ Unfortunately, the lack of sources precludes a retracing of the background of the play’s first refusal: neither the complete censorship act nor different versions of the manuscript have been preserved. What is interesting, however, is the fact that these two statements point to a fundamental theoretical feature that is at the core of parody as a genre, namely the distinction between *satire* and *parody*. The former is the use of humour or criticism to uncover deeper issues related to social practices, here detected by the Viennese authorities, while the latter is the act of mimicking a plot or a style in a humorous way, as declared in Bäuerle’s preface.

With regard to satire, the censors might have recognised critical barbs in the scenes that deviate from the original plot of the opera, especially the ones that allude to the court theatres’ management and to contemporary circumstances. As Claudio Vellutini has shown, the staging of Rossini’s *Tancredi* as part of the operatic season in late 1816 coincided with a key moment in the imperial calendar.²⁶ In fact, the performance, along with that of other Italian operas such as *Adelina* by Pietro Generali and Rossini’s *Italiana in Algeri*, was planned as part of the festivities for the marriage between Emperor Francis I of Austria and Caroline of Bavaria, celebrated in Munich (29 October) and Vienna (10 November). The choice of inviting the Italian company, led by impresario Antonio Cera,²⁷ to perform on such an occasion has to be understood not only in terms of prestige but also as a highly symbolic act that signalled the closeness with the northern Italian territories, which now officially belonged to the Habsburg crown. Against this background, references to the dynasty capitalising on Italian opera to mark the wedding celebrations can be found in a short dialogue in the first act of Bäuerle’s parody (Act I scene 7) featuring the powerful Orbazzano and a wandering artist called Fingerspitz [finger tip]. The two negotiate the contract for a theatrical play for Orbazzano’s wedding with Amenaide, who is, as in the original opera, in love with *Tancredi*. The artist proudly announces that he travels around with ‘2,000 people, 104 coaches with scenography and costumes’²⁸ and that his company offers a broad repertoire including opera, spoken drama and ballet. Despite the high price, the contract is eventually signed and Orbazzano, left alone on stage in the following scene, turns to the audience ‘hoping that at least the theatrical company will be appreciated’.²⁹

Reading between the lines, the reference to the substantial financial resources that the court invested in the production of Italian opera sits in tension with references to the precarious conditions that the Viennese were experiencing in the aftermath of the state bankruptcy (1811) and the famine following the ‘year without summer’ (1816).³⁰ Bäuerle

²⁵ ‘6 März 1817. Die Polizeidirektion wird beauftragt, die Direktion des Leopoldstädter Theaters zur Verantwortung zu ziehen, weil sie sich erdreistet habe eine Parodie der bekannten italienischen Oper *Tancredi*, die zur Zensurierung eingereicht, aber als eine sehr unanständige Satire auf die k. k. Hoftheater nicht zugelassen werden konnte, dennoch in das Repertoire als erlaubt aufzunehmen und deren Aufführung für morgen anzukündigen’. Karl Glossy, *Zur Geschichte der Theater Wiens*, vol. 1, 1801–1820 (Vienna, 1915), 223–4.

²⁶ Vellutini, *Entangled Histories*, 99–109. Performance records of the court opera are available in Michael Jahn, *Die Wiener Hofoper von 1810 bis 1836: Das Kärnthnertheater als Hofoper* (Vienna, 2007).

²⁷ Richard Erkens, ‘Vom Farsa-Produzenten zum Gastspiel-Manager: Der Rossini-“Entdecker” Antonio Cera in Venedig, München und Wien’, in *Il Tedeschino: Rossini und der deutschsprachige Raum*, ed. Reto Müller (Leipzig, 2021), 205–316.

²⁸ ‘Ich hab 104 Güterwagen voll Dekorationen und Garderob, Ich reis mit 2000 Menschen’. *Tancredi*, Act I scene 10, 24.

²⁹ ‘Was will ich machen, es ist nichts umsonst auf der Welt; ich bin nur neugierig, ob die Gesellschaft g’fällt’. *Tancredi*, Act I scene 11, 27.

³⁰ The eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia in 1815 had caused global temperatures to plummet, which resulted in crop failures across Europe.

inserts a wide range of puns on this issue through the parody, beginning with the opening scene, where Rossini's chorus *Pace, onore, fede, amore* is rewritten as a celebration of money as the only way to conciliate people (Act I scene 1).³¹ The protagonist Tankredi openly regrets that his journey to join his beloved Amenaide was very expensive (Act I scene 8),³² and the secondary characters lament their poor salary (Act II scene 7).³³ It is noteworthy that these wordplays referencing contemporary circumstances passed the authorities' scrutiny, even though topics such as hunger, inflation and crisis were on the censors' blacklist.³⁴ Against this backdrop, the role of censorship in *Vormärz* Vienna, often portrayed as an oppressive and unenlightened aspect of Metternich's policies, requires more nuanced consideration. Historian Friedrich von Raumer (1781–1873) offers a clue to this complexity by highlighting the censor's relative tolerance regarding the Leopoldstadt's productions:

The Leopoldstadt Theater is completely despised and rejected by many; but I do not join them, rather I stand with the people. No theatre in the world has as much claim to be called a national theatre – none has so entirely sprung from the people and from the present time, none so thoroughly reflects the views and lifestyle of the Austrians and the Viennese citizens. They see themselves portrayed on stage, and the censorship here is extremely liberal, so that everything, from state officials and banknotes down to the cab drivers and food stalls, is presented in the most varied ways.³⁵

This venue's role as a mirror of Viennese society is especially evident in certain scenes of the parody that apply *Verwienerung* – the strategy of adapting the plot by adding familiar elements or local references.³⁶ This procedure, however, does not solely concern the plot's setting or the dialogues: it also includes the music numbers. As Table 1 makes clear, a couple of musical moments from Rossini's opera are replaced with newly composed songs (*Lieder*) characterised by a vernacular style evoking the flavour of Viennese urban popular culture through both lyrics and musical practices. Of the four musical numbers that employ this approach, two are

³¹ 'Friede! Ehre! Treue, Liebe, nennt Ihr Güter dieser Welt? Anders ist es! denn das Meiste thut das liebe blanke Geld. Geld wir jetzt die Hochzeit machen, Geld bringt Einigkeit ins Haus. Geld versöhnt der Zwiespalt Drachen, Geld löscht alle Feindschaft aus'. *Tankredi*, Act I scene 1, 4.

³² 'Mir ist nur jetzt um die Reis leid, und um das viele Geld!'. *Tankredi*, Act I scene 9, 22.

³³ 'Ich hab schon geredt mit dem Theaterprinzipalen, er nimmt uns beyde, nur Curag', allein für unsere Kunst kann er nichts zahlen, zum Schauspiel, sagt er, braucht er keine neuen, zur Oper auch nicht, wie das schon geht'. *Tankredi*, Act II scene 7, 51.

³⁴ 'Bei der großen Mißstimmung, welche die gegenwärtige Teuerung unter das Volk gebracht habe, sei es dringend notwendig, jede Gelegenheit zu vermeiden, die gegenwärtige Teuerung öffentlich zur Sprache zu bringen'. Glossy, *Zur Geschichte der Theater Wiens*, 212. For fruitful insights into issues related to parody, economics and censorship in the early nineteenth century, see Matthias Mansky, *Ökonomien der Parodie am Wiener Vorstadttheater*, 13–44.

³⁵ 'Das Leopoldstädter Theater wird von Vielen ganz verachtet, und verworfen; aber ich trete ihnen nicht bei, sondern auf die Seite des Volks. Kein Schauspiel in der Welt hat so viel Ansprüche, ein Nationaltheater zu heißen, keins ist so ganz aus dem Volke und aus der Gegenwart entsprungen, keins greift so von allen Seiten in die Ansichten und Lebensweise der Oesterreicher und der Wiener Bürger ein. Diese sehen sich selbst spielen, und die Censur ist hier äußerst liberal, so daß von den Staatsbeamten und Banknoten bis zu den Fiakers und Garküchen hinab Alles in den mannigfachsten Wendungen vorgeführt wird'. *Die Herbstreise nach Venedig von Friedrich von Raumer*, II (Berlin, 1816), 237. I owe this quote to Julius Dominik Lottes, *Unterhaltungstheater und vormärzliche Öffentlichkeit: Adolf Bäuerles Possen zwischen Zensur, Kommerz und Kritik* (Vienna, 2012), 40. Raumer also highlights Ignaz Schuster's excellent performance skills, describing him as 'one of the best actors on earth' ('In seiner Art gehört Ignatz gewiß zu den ersten Schauspielern auf Erden').

³⁶ The concept of *Verwienerung* frequently appears in theatre scholarship on Viennese suburban repertoire and can be traced back to contributions on Nestroy's work from the 1960s. See for example William Edgar Yates, 'Convention and Antithesis in Nestroy's Possen', *The Modern Language Review* 61/2 (1966), 225–37; John R. P. McKenzie, 'The Technique of *Verwienerung* in Nestroy's *Judith und Holofernes*', *New German Studies* 1 (1973), 119–32.

duets. The first is ‘Zu dir bin ich g’gangen!’ (Act I scene 9), the counterpart to Tancredi and Amenaide’s ‘Lasciami: non t’ascolto’ and one of the rare musical sources preserved in the Viennese archives.³⁷ The lyrics convey the lovers’ conflicting emotions expressed in the original, while the music laughs at operatic conventions through the use of ornamentation – sighs, *volatine*, glissandi, the final *stretta* – that nevertheless enriches a simple and catchy polonaise. The second duet is ‘Uns lohnt dann der herrliche Frieden’ (Act II scene 6), sung by Tankredi and Argirio and corresponding to ‘Ah, se de’, mali miei’ (Act II scene 4). According to a review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of a performance in Pest, this number ‘ending with a *Dudler*’ was much ‘appreciated and was requested as an encore’.³⁸

Table 1. Overview of the musical numbers in *Tancredi* and comparison with Rossini’s *Tancredi*³⁹

Act, scene	Form	Bäuerle–Müller, <i>Tancredi</i> (parody)	Act, scene	Rossi–Rossini, <i>Tancredi</i> (opera)
	Ouverture	Ouverture		Ouverture
I, 1	Chorus	Friede, Ehre, Treue, Liebe	I, 1	Pace, onore, fede, amore
I, 3	Chorus	Più dolci e placide	I, 3	Più dolci e placide
I, 6	Aria (Tankredi)	O patria! [...] Die Tant’, die talkiti	I, 4	O patria! [...] Di tanti palpiti
I, 9	Lied/Duetto (Tankredi, Amenaide)	Zu dir bin ich g’gangen	I, 7	Lasciami, non t’ascolto
I, 13	Chorus	Liebe und Ehe	I, 9	Amori, scendete
I, 15	Marsch + Chorus (Guerrieri)	Alla gloria, al trionfo	I, 10	Alla gloria, al trionfo, agli allori
II, 1	Aria (Amenaide)	Ah che non serve il piangere	II, 2	Ah che non serve il piangere
II, 6	Lied/Duetto (Argirio, Tankredi)	Uns lohnt dann der herrliche Frieden	II, 4	Ah, se de’ mali miei
II, 8	Quodlibet (Tankredi) (as a Quodlibet) (Tankredi)	Wo bin ich? (Melodram/ Quodlibet)	II, 8	Dove son io? (Tancredi’s gran scena)
II, 8	Incidental music	Marsch aus dem Tankred von der letzten Scene	II, 13	[Marcia: Tancredi portato dai Soldati su i loro scudi in trionfo]
II, 9	Incidental music	Lustige Kampfmusik	II, 11	[Ah senti ferve la pugna: d’armi, di guerrieri, odi il fragor, le grida...]
II, 12	Lied (Polonaise)	Wir glücklich pocht mein Herz	II, 13	Fra quei soavi palpiti

³⁷ *Zwey komische Duetten für Gesänge mit Begleitung des Piano Forte*, in Musik gesetzt von Wenzel Müller Kapellmeister des k.k. priv. Theaters in der Lepoldstadt zu Wien, Wien, Steiner & co. (n. 2852), [c. 1820].

³⁸ ‘Ein Duett zwischen Tancredi und Argirio (Hr. Fakler) im zweyten Acte, welches mit einem Dudler schliesst, gefiel, und wurde zu wiederholen verlangt’, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (mit besonderer Rücksicht auf den österreichischen Kaiserstaat) 11 (14 March 1818), 90.

³⁹ The edition of the libretto used here as a reference for this comparison is *Tancredi*, dramma serio per musica in due atti, da rappresentarsi nel teatro imperiale e reale di Vienna, Vienna, 1816, presso Giov. Batta Wallishausser. A copy is held at the Austrian National Library (A-Wn, 987145-B).

References to theatrical conventions are also evident in the parodistic transposition of another key moment from Rossini's opera: Tancredi's *gran scena* (Act II scene 8), which features the hero wandering alone and thoughtful through enemy territory – a desolate mountain landscape that reflects his emotional disorientation.⁴⁰ The combination of these elements – the soliloquy, the heightened dramatic situation and the interplay between external (natural) and inner (emotional) worlds – recalls the 'melodramatic sublime',⁴¹ a mode that was central to the successful melodramas of Benda, such as *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Medea* (both 1775). Indeed, this similarity seems to have been striking to Adolf Bäuerle and Wenzel Müller, who reimagined Tancredi's *gran scena* as a melodrama, albeit in a more lighthearted manner. The result is a spoken monologue that begins by showcasing anti-heroic virtues and ends with a declamation of Tankredi's comic testament, interlaced with short excerpts of popular tunes instead of suspenseful orchestral cues.⁴² Thus the comic effect is achieved by combining the *topoi* of two opposite genres: melodrama with its pathetic expression and the quodlibet with its humorous medley of well-known tunes quoted sequentially.

Tankredi's final scene mirrors the happy ending of the original opera but surpasses it by exaggerating its cheerful atmosphere. On the notes of a 'general, joyful polonaise, which has to be as pompous as possible',⁴³ all characters end their stanzas with a hyperbolic repetition of the word 'felicità', in reference to the last lines of Rossini's 'Fra quei soavi palpiti' ('no non vi posso esprimere la mia felicità' / 'No, I can't express my happiness', Act II scena ultima). The end of the parody is not mocking, however, but encomiastic: the work concludes with a dedication to contralto Gentile Borgondio, 'who has highly delighted us with her Tancredi'.⁴⁴ The encounter between the two 'Tancredis' – the 'original' Gentile Borgondio and its parodistic counterpart Ignaz Schuster – was by no means just figurative, as the readers of the newspaper *Der Sammler* could learn on 6 May 1817:

At a performance attended by the reviewer, Madame Borgondio was also present in a nearby box. The applause that the facial expressions and gestures of this artist bestowed upon her unparalleled likeness will surely be no small reward for Mr Schuster's arduous efforts. The playwright's idea was very successful in crafting a flattering allusion to the real Tancredi in the final verses of the polonaise; this eliminates any suspicion of personal sarcasm, ensuring that the overall pleasant impression is not weakened by any disagreeable connotation.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ 'Fra queste roccie il fremer cupo: il triste abandon di natura...ah! Tutto accresce, tutto pasce nel povero mio core, le tetre idee del mio tradito amore' ('Among these rocks, the deep trembling; the sad abandonment of nature... ah! Everything grows, everything nourishes in my poor heart, the gloomy thoughts of my betrayed love'). *Tancredi* (libretto), Act II scene 8, p. 32.

⁴¹ Austin Glatthorn, 'The Legacy of "Ariadne" and the Melodramatic Sublime', *Music and Letters* 100/2 (2019), 233–70.

⁴² 'Dieses Melodrama ist äußerst komisch und mit lauter bekannten Liedeln und Gassenhauern durchspickt. Viele sind dem Herrn Kompositour überlassen. Einige hat sich der Verfasser herzusetzen erlaubt'. *Tancredi*, Act II scene 8, 54. On the genre of quodlibet in Vienna see *Quodlibets of the Viennese Theater*, ed. Lisa Feurzeig and John Sienicki (Middleton, 2008), ix–xii.

⁴³ 'Allgemeine muntere Polonaise; welche so pompös als möglich seyn muß'. *Tancredi*, Act II scene 12, 61.

⁴⁴ 'Der Sängrinn sey dieß Leid [sic] geweiht, die uns durch Tankred hoch erfreut'. *Tancredi*, Act II scene 12, 60.

⁴⁵ 'Bey einer Vorstellung, welcher Referent beywohnte, befand sich auch Mad. Borgondio in einer Loge. Der Beyfall, welchen Mienen und Hände dieser Künstlerinn ihrer unübertrefflichen Copie zollten, wird Hr. Schuster gewiß kein geringer Lohn seiner mühevollen Anstrengung seyn. Sehr glücklich war der Gedanke des Dichters, in den Schlußversen der Polonaise eine schmeichelhafte Anspielung auf den wahren Tancredi zu verfassen; dadurch wird aller Verdacht einer Personal-Ironie beseitiget, und der angenehme Totaleindruck durch keinen widrigen Nebenbegriff geschwächt'. *Der Sammler* (6 May 1817), 216.

These lines illustrate effectively how parody can be seen also as a form of homage rather than derision, an opportunity for the interpreter to refine their imitation rather than offer a mere masquerade. This aspect is confirmed by another press account reporting on the same event that appeared three weeks later in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and praised Schuster's incomparable mimicry of Tancredi: 'He was, from head to toe, in costume, gait, posture, eye expressions and gestures – indeed, in the smallest, barely noticeable nuances – the truest yet also the most respectable copy of Mad. Borgondio, who took great pleasure in seeing herself reflected in his masterful portrayal.'⁴⁶ *Tancredi* and *Tankredi* – original and parody – were within touching distance, separated only by a fourth wall that served as a mirror.

Rossini reloaded

In the previous section we encountered a wide range of practices of parodistic rewriting: references to contemporary circumstances, the shift from the serious to the playful (and vice versa), the use of Viennese *couleur locale* and the unmasking of operatic conventions.⁴⁷ These strategies, applied to both the plot and newly composed musical numbers, were complemented by the retention of numerous excerpts from the original opera. Indeed, when browsing through the libretto or through press reports,⁴⁸ one chances upon different instances that suggest *Tankredi* is a sort of *pasticcio* of Rossini's melodies. As Table 1 reveals, this practice is on display in Amenaide's 'dungeon aria' 'Ah! Che non serve il piangere' (Act II scene 1) as well as in the choruses 'Più dolci e placide' (Act I scene 3) and 'Alla gloria, al trionfo, agli allori' (Act I scene 15) that were drawn from the original. It is likely that the parody also featured several other instrumental sections from Rossini's score, as suggested by references such as 'Marsch aus dem *Tankred* von der letzten Scene' (Act II scene 8).

That said, some musical numbers lie somewhere between subversion and preservation, employing what I understand as a kind of *trompe l'oreille* effect – subtle adaptations of the opera's melodies designed to evoke a comic twist. A notable example of this technique is found in the parody's overture, a copy of which is held in the music collection of the Wien Bibliothek im Rathaus. Likely prepared from Viennese materials for a performance in Lemberg/L'viv on 11 October 1820,⁴⁹ this score features Rossini's original melodies occasionally modified or juxtaposed with brief thematic motifs. The intent here seems to have been twofold: to disrupt or unmask Rossini stylistic hallmarks (crescendos, repetitions, noise) and to subvert the audience's expectations, thus creating a disorienting yet comic experience. The effect of 'mishearing' the most famous excerpts from the opera, however, involved the distortion of not only its melodies, but also its lyrics. As is well known, Tancredi's cabaletta 'Di tanti palpiti' was turned into 'Die Tant', die talkiti' ('the silly aunt'), a verse followed by several lines of nonsense that are a mere acoustic imitation of the Italian language. More than mocking Italian singers, such a transformation underscores the

⁴⁶ 'Hr. Ignaz Schuster, in dessen Säckel die reichliche Einnahme floss, ist unerreichbar als Tancredi. Er war vom Kopf bis zur Fusspitze, in Costume, Gang, Haltung, Augen- und Geberhdenspiel, kurz in den kleinsten, kaum bemerkbaren Nuancen, die getreueste, aber auch zugleich die anständigste Copie der Mad. Borgondio, welche mit wahren Vergnügen in seiner Meisterdarstellung sich selbst gleichsam im Spiegel erblickte'. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (28 May 1817), 377.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of common strategies applied in opera parodies, see Clair Rowden, *Opera and Parody in Paris, 1860–1900* (Turnhout, 2020), 1–17.

⁴⁸ Not only the preface, but also press articles highlight the fact that the parody contains music from Rossini's original opera. See the indication 'Tancredi [...] mit Musik von Hrn. Kapellm. Müller, nebst Beybehaltung der beliebtesten Stücke des Originals' in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 22 (28 May 1817), 377.

⁴⁹ See the material on the *Ouverture zu der Oper: Der travestirte Tancred* held at the A-Wst, Wien Bibliothek im Rathaus, MHc 739.

immense popularity of this tune⁵⁰ – it circulated widely offstage by permeating the Viennese urban space, played on street organs⁵¹ and in dance halls.⁵²

Against this backdrop, Bäuerle's *Tancredi* can be understood as an occasion to relisten to Rossini's most popular melodies and amplify their popularity. The parody's impact was not limited to the capital: it soon reached other Habsburg centres such as Graz (May 1817), Preßburg/Bratislava (June 1817), Pest (February 1818, June 1820), Prague (September 1819) and Lemberg/L'viv (October 1820). At times performances even preceded those of the 'original' *Tancredi*. Bäuerle – in his double role as playwright and editor of the *Wiener Theaterzeitung* – did not miss the chance to stress the quality and the far-reaching success of his parody,⁵³ as well as the attention displayed by courtly spheres. On 4 May 1818, the imperial family attended a performance of *Tancredi* at the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, accompanied by their newly acquired relatives from Bavaria, including Crown Prince Ludwig and his wife.⁵⁴ They were already familiar with Rossini's opera, having attended performances in Munich and Vienna during Francis I's imperial wedding in late 1816. Reportedly, they 'left the theatre visibly amused'.⁵⁵ Irrespective of whether it was in its original form or an imitation, Rossini's *Tancredi* became closely associated with the Habsburgs, reflecting a distinct moment of their cultural politics, marked by a renewed interest in Italian opera and a fascination with its voices.

Acting diplomatically: the 'real' Catalani

The promotion of Rossini's operas was just one aspect of a broader musico-cultural diplomatic plan that was carried out by the Habsburg court in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna. Recitals – in both public spaces and salons – of internationally celebrated singers reflected the monarchy's ambitions in communicating not only a connection with the Italian territories, but also the impression of a modern and cosmopolitan state. Soprano Angela Catalani (1780–1849) elegantly embodied all these qualities. Born in Senigallia in 1780, she made her name on different Italian operatic stages (Venice, Florence, Rome) by interpreting the main roles in operas by Giovanni Simone Mayr, Domenico Cimarosa, Niccolò Antonio Zingarelli and Sebastiano Nasolini. Around 1800, she joined the court opera in Lisbon and subsequently moved to London (1808–14), where she sung in different productions by Vincenzo Pucitta and Marcos António Portugal (Marco Portogallo) at the King's Theatre on Haymarket. In 1814 she left for Paris to take on the management of the Théâtre Italien; this role lasted until 1818, and in parallel she began a peripatetic career as a solo singer in Europe's theatres and concert halls.

⁵⁰ See Emanuele Senici, 'Music and Memory in Rossini's Italy: *Di tanti palpiti* as folk song', in *Gioachino Rossini 1868–2018: La musica e il mondo*, ed. Ilaria Narici, Emilio Sala, Emanuele Senici and Benjamin Walton (Pesaro, 2018), 253–82.

⁵¹ 'Die beliebteste Oper dieses Jahres war *Tancredi* von Rossini, die so oft gegeben und von aller Welt bewundert wurde, daß einige Stücke daraus jetzt in den Straßen auf allen Leierkasten gespielt werden'. *Der Gesellschafter oder Blätter für Geist und Herz: Ein Volksblatt* (8 December 1817), 799.

⁵² 'Ouverture und beliebte Stücke aus der Oper, *Tancredi*, auf türkische Musik gesetzt (!)'. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (30 April 1817), 306.

⁵³ See for example the emphatic tone of the premiere's announcement, highlighting the parody's 'many happy compositions by genius composer Kapellmeister Müller' ('und mit mehreren glücklichen Compositionen von dem genialen Tonsetzer Hrn. Kapellmeister Müller'), *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (19 April 1817), 188; and a report of Schuster's guest performances in Preßburg/Bratislava in *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (10 June 1817), 276.

⁵⁴ '4. Mai: Der Kaiser und Kaiserin, der Kronprinz Ludwig von Bayern mit seiner Frau und Erzherzogin Leopoldine hören *Tancredi* travestiert'. Angermüller, *Wenzel Müller und 'sein' Leopoldstädter Theater*, 227.

⁵⁵ 'Der Empfang der Allerhöchsten Herrschaften war rauschend und mit dreymahligem Vivat begleitet. Die Produktion ging mit gewöhnlich gutem Erfolge vor sich. Die Allerhöchsten Personen verließen das Schauspiel mit sichtbarem Vergnügen'. *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (8 May 1817), 219.

While a growing body of literature has focused on Catalani's activity in Britain,⁵⁶ less attention has been paid to her presence in German-speaking lands. The impact of her performances in cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Hanover, Karlsruhe and Leipzig is captured in a collection of international press accounts published in 1816 under the title *I giudizi dell'Europa intorno alla signora Catalani*.⁵⁷ Indeed, it seems that the year 1816 was key to her celebrity in this region. On his way to Italy, during a short stop in Munich, Stendhal had the chance to attend 'this famous singer's salon full of ambassadors and ribbons of all colours, which would make one's head spin'.⁵⁸ While Stendhal's often hyperbolic tone must be approached with caution, these lines highlight the extent to which the *prima donna* was closely intertwined with diplomatic circles. Catalani's presence in Munich in late 1816 was prompted by an invitation to the imperial wedding. According to press accounts, beyond her participation in the ceremony, she was personally received by the court and then invited to attend a performance of Rossini's *Ciro in Babilonia*, staged by Cera's Italian company on 29 October on the occasion of the arrival of the ambassador, the Prince of Schwarzenberg, from Vienna.⁵⁹ Although rumours were spread in different newspapers, she was not meant to perform on that occasion. Soon after the wedding celebrations, however, Austrian minister and *mélomane* Klemens von Metternich was at the forefront of the negotiations to bring the singer to Vienna for a series of recitals.⁶⁰ Letters and papers held at the Viennese State Archive bear witness to his personal efforts to facilitate Catalani's travel to Vienna in the spring of 1817.⁶¹ Although the trip was delayed for unknown reasons, it eventually occurred one year later.⁶² On 16 June 1818, Catalani gave her first concert at the capital's Redoutensaal (Hofburg), followed by three recitals at the Theater an der Wien on 18 and 25 June and 2 July. Viennese audiences could enjoy (among other pieces), arias by Vincenzo Pucitta, Marcos António Portugal, Pietro Guglielmi, Niccolò Zingarelli, Giuseppe Millico, two sets of variations on a theme by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and another on Giovanni Paisiello's *Nel cor più non mi sento*.⁶³ Viewed together, her performances in Vienna were no different from those put on elsewhere. Her programmes always featured a limited choice

⁵⁶ Charles Edward McGuire, 'John Bull, Angelica Catalani and Middle-Class Taste at the 1820s British Musical Festival', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 11/1 (2014), 3–31; Rachel Cowgill, "'Attitudes with a Shawl": Performance, Femininity, and Spectatorship at the Italian Opera in Early Nineteenth-Century London', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford, 2012), 217–51.

⁵⁷ *I giudizi dell'Europa intorno alla signora Catalani ossia Articoli concernenti il di Lei merito musicale, tratti dalle più riputate opere periodiche di Londra, Parigi, Berlino, Amsterdam, Lipsia, Amburgo, Annover, ecc. con un breve compendio della sua vita*, Milano, Antonio Fortunato Stella, 1816.

⁵⁸ 'Munich, 15 septembre. M. le comte de *** m'a présenté ce soir à madame Catalani. J'ai trouvé le salon de cette célèbre cantatrice rempli d'ambassadeurs et de cordons de toutes les couleurs: la tête tournerait à moins'. Stendhal (Henri Boyle), *Rome, Naples et Florence*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1826), 2. Some weeks later, he would attend a concert of the singer at the Conservatory in Milan.

⁵⁹ *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia* (8 November 1816), 1.

⁶⁰ On Metternich's musical patronage, see Damien Mahiet, 'The Musical Diplomacy of Metternich', *Diplomatica* 3 (2021), 244–77.

⁶¹ See the letters by Metternich to Wrba in April/May 1817, AT-OeStA/HHStA, Gen.Int., Box 8 (1817), ad 202, Beil. 1 and 4. Vellutini, 'Cultural Engineering', 73, n.71. The Austrian ambassador in Rome, Ferdinando De Gennotte, wrote to Metternich that Catalani would have reached Vienna at the beginning of May 1817 after having travelled to Naples and Rome (HHStA, Gen.Int., Box 8 (1817), ad 202, Beil. 2).

⁶² 'Das ganze so sehr zahlreiche musikalische Wiener Publikum war auf dasselbe schon lange äußerst gespannt, da hier schon öfter von der Ankunft der so viel besprochenen Sängerin die Rede war, weshalb sich der große Redoutensaal, ungeachtet des hohen Eintrittspreises von zwölf Gulden, dennoch sehr füllte'. *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (20 June 1818), 295.

⁶³ Unfortunately, no playbill or programme of Catalani's recitals in Vienna has been preserved. For more details on the concerts see the following press accounts: *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (20 June 1818), 295; *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (25 June 1818), 303; *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (27 June 1818), 307.

of arias ('the twelve arias with which she strolled around Europe', as noted by Stendhal⁶⁴) followed by a national anthem dedicated to the local ruler and audience.

In Vienna, she sang 'Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser' in its Italian translation by Giuseppe Carpani ('Salvo sia Francesco Augusto'),⁶⁵ causing 'never-ending cheering' from the parterre.⁶⁶ In doing so, Catalani reconfirmed her reputation as 'la reine des cantatrices, et la cantatrice des rois',⁶⁷ and the perception of her closeness to courtly circles, thus disseminating the aura of privilege, luxury and exclusivity conjured by her musical persona. Rumours of her imperious behaviour and the large sums of money she amassed with her husband-agent Paul Valabrègue (1770–1849) made them targets. The exorbitant ticket prices she charged drew the particular ire of the press. A satirical dialogue published in 1817 in the *Wiener Theaterzeitung* quipped that 'One of her notes would immediately turn into a banknote,'⁶⁸ and in fact the cost of a ticket to see her in Vienna was nearly five times higher than the standard rate. However, this did not prevent her devotees from rushing to her concerts and to overtly declaring the wildest admiration for the singer through sonnets, biographical sketches and anecdotes in the main local newspapers.⁶⁹ The imitation of such a 'Catalani-moment' in Vienna would soon find a place on the stage of the Theater in der Leopoldstadt.

The 'fake' Catalani

The *furor* around Angelica Catalani forms the background to Bäuerle's parody *Die falsche Prima Donna in Krähwinkel*, which premiered on 18 December 1818 with music by Ignaz Schuster.⁷⁰ As with the arrival of Rossini's opera some months earlier, the Catalani craze that spread around Vienna in the summer of 1818 offered the playwright an excellent occasion to deliver a new piece to comment on the latest fashion in town. What makes this parody so special is the fact that its source is not – as is usually the case – the plot of a theatrical play, but an event and its impact on Viennese society. This novelty is emphasised by Bäuerle himself in the columns of his newspaper, where he refers to the positive reaction of the Viennese audiences towards this new method of parodistic writing.⁷¹

By following the *topos* of the *Krähwinkeliaden*,⁷² the playwright set the action in a remote place called *Krähwinkel* (literally, the 'crows' corner'), a ridiculous small town or

⁶⁴ 'Madame Catalani ne chante jamais qu'une douzaine d'airs; c'est avec cela qu'elle se promène en Europe'. See Stendhal's report from his travel to Italy in 1816/1817 in Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence* (Paris, 1826), 28.

⁶⁵ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 29 (22 July 1818), col. 522. Elsewhere she was used to sing 'God Save the King' and 'Rule Britannia'.

⁶⁶ 'Der Jubel wollte nicht enden, und ihr zarter Sinn fand in dieser Aufnahme der Berücksichtigung unserer würdigen Nationalität einen schönen Lohn'. *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (20 June 1818), 295.

⁶⁷ *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode* (9 August 1823), 780.

⁶⁸ 'Eine Note von ihr würde gleich zur Bank-Note', in 'Die Billets zum Concert der Catalani', *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (22 May 1817), 242. This piece is a reprint of an article published in *Der Gesellschafter oder Blätter für Geist und Herz* (21 March 1817), 185.

⁶⁹ On Catalani in the press see Gabriele Moroni, 'Natura e arte, virtuosità contro espressione, melodia italiana e canto Tedesco: Angelica Catalani negli articoli dell'*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*', in *Quaderni musicali marchigiani* 10/2003 (2006), 11–22.

⁷⁰ A handwritten version of the libretto, held at the Library of the Theatermuseum in Vienna (A-Wn, Theat.-S., 127786), features a slightly different title: *Die falsche Prima-Donna oder die vermeinte Catalani in Krähwinkel*. On the printed libretto: *Die falsche Prima-Donna (Die falsche Catalani)*, A-Wn, Theat.-S. 839678-B.

⁷¹ 'Die falsche Prima Donna, von Bäuerle, hat bey dem Wiener Publikum ihr Glück auf eine Art gemacht, wie diesem Genre noch kein Stück bey dem Leopoldstädter-Theater. Bisher konnten nur lokale Stücke, Geister- und Feenopern, Travestieen und Geister-Komödien anhaltenden Zuspruch gewinnen'. *Wiener Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (2 January 1819), 4.

⁷² *Krähwinkel* was a setting invented by Jean Paul for his *Das heimliche Klagelied der jetzigen Männer* (1801), then adopted by August von Kotzebue in the comedy *Die deutschen Kleinstädter* (1802). On the Viennese suburban stages,



Figure 1. The people of Krähwinkel welcome the 'fake' Catalani, *Die falsche Prima Donna*, Act I scene 26, painted by Johann Christian Schoeller and published in *Gallerie drolliger Scenen zur Wiener Theaterzeitung*, vol. 2 (1828) (© Theatermuseum Wien)

neighbourhood populated by provincial, narrow-minded, self-important and naïve characters, whose names are associated with ornithological jargon, in the tradition of Aristophanes's comedy *The Birds*. From the chief of police Rummelpuff ('noisy') to the schoolteacher Gansleber ('goose liver'), from the newspaper's editor Pfiffspitz ('whistle point') to foreign visitors, everyone in this imaginary place is preparing for the arrival of Madame Catalani, who has been sent by the king to celebrate the marriage of Major Niclas Staar ('starling') to Albertine. In this instance of Catalani-mania, a Krähwinkel actor named Lustig ('funny') – played by Ignaz Schuster – saw a fortuitous opportunity. Deciding to pass himself off as the eagerly awaited soprano,⁷³ he hopes to get closer to local notables in order to obtain two permits. One personal, the permission from the schoolteacher to marry his daughter Hannchen, and the other public, allowing him to open a theatre with his sister, the singer Käthchen Guthmuth ('good-natured'). An engraving of the last tableau of the first act shows all characters reunited in the welcome committee for the diva (Figure 1): the bridal couple Major Niklas Staar and Albertine (on the left), the head of police Rummelpuff with his guards (on the right), the politician, poet and director of the intellectual club Sperling ('sparrow')

it soon became a metaphor for Austrian provincialism, most famously in Johann Nestroy's *Freiheit in Krähwinkel* (1848).

⁷³ 'Die Catalani hab' ich ja gehört, die will ich vorstellen, will mich als Frauenzimmer verkleiden, will durch ihren Nahmen glücklich seyn, dieß wird sie mir doch nicht übel nehmen. O, wie glücklich bin ich, daß ich singen kann. Alle meine Lieder sollen jetzt herhalten'. *Die falsche Prima Donna*, Act I scene 10, 16.

(in front), the council attendant Klaus (on the staircase) among the numerous people of Krähwinkel surrounding the arrival of the two siblings *en travesti*: Lustig in Angelica Catalani's attire, Kätchen as her Italian assistant.

That cross-dressing as a theatrical practice is more than simply disguise is evidenced by the importance given to the characters' voices. In spoken dialogues the siblings conceal their identities by speaking in different languages such as Italian, French or broken German – thus poking fun at a cosmopolitan attitude that clashes with the provincialism of the people from Krähwinkel.⁷⁴ More notable is Lustig's transformation into the diva, which occurs at a vocal level, through a gradual shift in the register from a bass voice in the first act to *falsetto* at the

Table 2. Musical numbers in *Die falsche Prima Donna*⁷⁵

Act, scene	Number	Content
	Ouverture	
I, 1	1 Introitus 'Zum Haus hinaus, zum Haus hinaus!' Schulmeister, children (choir)	The school teacher Schulmeister chases away the children of Krähwinkel
I, 5	2 Allegro, Terzett 'Ich soll. Dich nicht mehr sehen, Liebe' Lustig, Hannchen, Schulmeister	Schulmeister opposes his daughter's relationship with actor Lustig; Hannchen and Lustig declare their love for each other
I, 10	3 Allegretto, <i>Quodlibet</i> 'Jetzt will ich gleich so manches singen' Lustig	Imaginary concert Lustig decides to disguise himself as Catalani and plans his concert in Krähwinkel
I, 23	4 Maestoso 'Herein ihr Herrn und Damen' Klaus, wedding guests (choir)	Council attendant Klaus welcomes the guests to the major's wedding
I, 26	5 Allegretto, Finale 'Sey uns willkommen' Rummelpuff, Sperling, Lustig, people of Krähwinkel (choir)	The people of Krähwinkel welcome (fake) Catalani
	6 Poco adagio, Intermezzo	Entr'acte
II, 26	7 Allegretto, Variationen for solo violin	Beginning of the concert with an instrumental piece for violin solo played by Schulmeister with the orchestra
II, 27	8 Andantino, Aria 'Nel cor più non mi sento' Lustig (as Catalani)	Lustig dressed as Catalani sings the solo aria 'Nel cor più non mi sento'
II, 28	9 Allegretto, Finale 'Wer viel wagt gewinnt oft viel' Lustig, people of Krähwinkel (choir)	Lustig's final couplet on a folk melody followed by a <i>Jodler</i> ('Volksmelodie mit dem Jodler')

⁷⁴ See for example Lustig thanking the people of Krähwinkel for their welcome with a short sentence (*recitativo*) in *falsetto*: 'Io sono contento! Das heißt auf Deutsch: Ihr Lieben, ich bin mit Euch zufrieden'. *Die falsche Prima Donna* (score), fols. 111v–12v. The use of language to depict the dynamics between locals and foreigners is also key in other scenes of the parody. The wandering Jew Aron, for example, is mocked because of his cultural interests and his inability to speak *Hochdeutsch* correctly. Such an antisemitic portrayal, a *topos* of the early-nineteenth-century popular theatre, mirrors the debates on the Jews' acculturation within a German bourgeois milieu. For more on this topic see Stefan Hofmann, 'Von Masken und Mimikry: Akkulturation und Judenfeindschaft auf deutschen Bühnen im 19. Jahrhundert' (PhD diss., Dubnow Institut Leipzig, forthcoming).

⁷⁵ The score of *Die falsche Prima Donna* is held at the Music Library (Musiksammlung) of the Austrian National Library (ÖNB), A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 8418.

end of the parody, thereby allowing Schuster to showcase his range as a singer as well as his skills as a composer.

Let us turn to Lustig's transformation for a closer examination. Among the ten musical numbers contained in the score (Table 2), a scene that could be labelled 'the imaginary concert' (Act I scene 10) deserves particular attention. As Lustig declares his intention to impersonate Catalani, he faces the challenge of having to include a number of instrumental pieces in his recital, just as in the diva's concerts in Vienna.⁷⁶ With a hint of *schadenfreude*, he begins to wonder whether to include an excerpt from the Andante from Haydn's Symphony No. 94 ('Surprise'), featuring a drumbeat intended to scare Major Niclas Staar, a violin solo performed by the school teacher's 'clumsy fingers' (drawn from the comic opera *Die Schwestern von Prag* (1794) by Joachim Perinet and Wenzel Müller), or a duet from Mozart's *Magic Flute* ('Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen') to be dedicated to his beloved Hannchen. Such plans are then followed by a quodlibet including folk tunes ('Ich bin liederlich'), children's songs ('Da geh ich mit meiner Lanterne') and quotes from famous *Singspiele* ('Mir leuchtet die Hoffnung', from Adalbert Gyrowetz's *Der Augenarzt*). Interestingly, the tune 'Die Tant', die talkiti' also appears among these themes: at this point Schuster briefly shifts from bass to *false alto*,⁷⁷ recalling his previous role *en travesti* in Bäuerle's *Tankredi*. Lustig's quodlibet delighted audiences by offering the pleasure of relistening to fragments of the most popular songs that also showcased Schuster's impressive vocal range and breadth of repertoire. As noted by a critic in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, the exceptional quality of this piece led publisher Steiner to release it as the first in a collection of Leopoldstadt hits for voice and piano:

Anyone who has seen the farce [Posse], which has remained in the repertoire for so long, will have to admit that this quodlibet – free from the extravagances usually found in such musical pieces and touching upon many of the most popular melodies – has been executed with a delicacy that has made many wish for its inclusion in this collection [...] Since it is also the *first* quodlibet for voice and piano to be published in such an elegant print, it may be of even greater interest, further highlighting the variety in the collection as a whole.⁷⁸

The arrival of the false Catalani in the second act is hyperbolically announced as 'a great musical-declamatory-plastic, theatrical-dramatic-mimetic, melodic-arioso, boring art-, vocal-, sound- and singing-concert'.⁷⁹ In Krähwinkel the concert opens with an overture from an 'uncorrected opera by a Kapellmeister called Taub' ('deaf')⁸⁰ followed by a new aria

⁷⁶ Reportedly, next to Catalani's solo pieces, audiences could enjoy the overtures from Beethoven's *Egmont* and Cherubini's *Lodoiska*, violin variations by Clement (conductor at the Theater an der Wien) and a Polonaise by Strauß for oboe played by Sellner (a member of the court orchestra). *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (20 June 1818), 295.

⁷⁷ *Die falsche Prima Donna* (score), Austrian National Library (ÖNB), A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 8418, fol. 75r–75v.

⁷⁸ 'Wer die nun sich auf dem Repertoire so lange erhaltende Posse gesehen hat, wird gestehen müssen, dass dieses Quodlibet frey von Extravagancen, die man in solchen Musikstücken gewöhnlich gewahrt, und viele der beliebtesten Melodien berührend, mit einer Delicatesse durchgeführt ist, die vielen die Aufnahme in diese Sammlung wünschen liess [...] Da es übrigens das *erste*, und zwar im eleganten Druck erschienene Quodlibet für Gesang und Pianoforte ist, so dürfte es noch mehr interessiren, die Mannigfaltigkeit in der Sammlung überhaupt erheblich machen'. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 19 (6 March 1819), cols. 150–1.

⁷⁹ '... die durchreisende Fremde, allererste Sängerin in ganz Europa, die große, berühmte Madame Catalani, (gibt) heute ein großes musikalisch-declamatorisch-plastisches, theatralisch-dramatisch-mimisches, melodisch-ariöses, langweiliges Kunst-, Simm-, Ton- und Gesangs-Concert'. *Die falsche Prima Donna*, 97.

⁸⁰ This refers to the Overture from Ludwig van Beethoven's *Egmont*, played at the beginning of Catalani's concert on 16 June 1818. *Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung* (20 June 1818), 295.

di bravura from an Italian opera; a patriotic song ('vaterländisches Lied') by the nightwatchman announces the end of the concert's first part. The following scene (Act II scene 27) features the long-awaited highlight of the concert: Catalani's performance of the variations on 'Nel cor più non mi sento' (from Paisiello's *La molinara*, 1788) sung in Italian and in *falseto*, and interrupted by the people of Krähwinkel clapping after each variation ('die nach jedem schicklichen Momente lebhaft applaudirt werden').⁸¹ In a recent contribution on male *falseto* interpreters in the early nineteenth century, Robert Crowe has eloquently compared three different and contemporary interpretations of these variations, namely by bass/*falset*tist Schuster, soprano Catalani and castrato Giovanni Battista Velluti. In so doing, he was able to point to Schuster's strategies of vocal disguise, which oscillate between *falseto* and chest voice and suggest a fairly close imitation of Catalani's ornaments: this 'violent, invasive vocal gesture' effectively 'pulls the veil aside, showing the audience the maleness that lurks beneath his feminine accoutrements'.⁸²

At a performance of *Die falsche Prima Donna* on 11 January 1821, watching from a box in the Theater in der Leopoldstadt, Angelica Catalani was among those who were applauding this brilliant rendition performed by her *doppelgänger*. A witness reported that far from being perturbed by watching 'herself' on stage, 'the singer herself was not indignant about Schuster's performance, as some newspapers claimed at the time, but was rather pleasantly surprised, taking the joke in her stride'.⁸³ This event is of course reminiscent of the episode discussed in the previous case study, in which Gentile Borgondio endorsed Schuster's performance; indeed, the encounter between original and imitation comes across almost as a trope in the reception of opera parodies. Although seemingly incidental, these situations are pivotal in highlighting the role of printed media in conveying the parodies' harmless intent and in crafting an image of the singers as both humble and indulgent.

Against this backdrop, Schuster's interpretation should therefore be viewed as a stylistic exercise in imitation rather than mere caricature – an aspect that is also evident in the elegant attire he dons for the mock concert scene. The idea is underlined in a note in the libretto, which demands that Lustig must 'be dressed as Madame Catalani, just as she was at her concerts'. The note continues with the caution that, '[a] plump caricature would be out of place here. The more beautifully Lustig is dressed, the better the effect.'⁸⁴ A role portrait by Bernhard von Schrötter (1772–1842), depicting Schuster as disguised singer, confirms the intent (Figure 2). The artist stresses the similarities with Angelica Catalani's most famous portrait (Figure 3), depicting her with a crown of roses, a necklace and pearls. Her serene facial expression as well as the score in her hands are recurring elements present in lithographs of Catalani widely circulated at the time.

Ignaz Schuster was accustomed to personally handing out his own portrait to admirers. An anecdote reported in a biographical note recalling his success in this role stresses that in 1819 'after a performance of *Die falsche Prima Donna*, which was attended by the Crown Prince of Prussia and the Prince of Oranien, the latter wished to own Schuster's portrait, and Schuster personally gifted him the version originally painted

⁸¹ *Die falsche Prima Donna*, Act II scene 27, 102.

⁸² Robert Crowe, "'He was unable to set aside the effeminate, and so was forgotten": Masculinity, Its Fears, and the Uses of Falsetto in the Early Nineteenth Century', *19th Century Music* 43/1 (2019), 17–37, at 24.

⁸³ 'Die Sängerin selbst war über Schuster's Leistung – nicht, wie damals einige Blätter äußerten, entrüstet, sondern – auf das Angenehmste überrascht, nahm den Scherz mit seiner vollen Wirkung auf'. Ignaz Schuster, in *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, vol. 32, ed. Constant von Wurzbach (Vienna, 1876), 240–7, at 242.

⁸⁴ 'Er muß als Madame Catalani gerade so angezogen seyn, wie sie es bey ihren Concerten war. Hier würde eine plumpe Carricatur am unrechten Platze seyn. Je schöner Lustig gekleidet ist, desto besser ist die Wirkung'. *Die falsche Prima Donna*, Act II scene 27, 102.



Figure 2. Ignatz Schuster als falsche Prima Donna in Krähwinkel, portrait by Bernhard von Schrötter, Vienna, 1818; Austrian National Library (ÖNB), Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung (© Austrian National Library)

by Schrötter and then engraved by Pfeiffer'.⁸⁵ Many other royals, ministers, and diplomats were charmed by Schuster's parodistic version of Catalani – as they had been by Catalani

⁸⁵ 'In diesem Jahre erlebte Schuster eine ganz seltene Auszeichnung. Nach einer Vorstellung der Falschen Prima Donna, welche der Kronprinz von Preußen und der Prinz von Oranien beigewohnt, wünschte der Letztere das Bildniß Schusters zu besitzen, und Schuster durfte ihm das von Schrötter gemalte und von Pfeiffer gestochene persönlich überreichen'. Ignaz Schuster, in *Biographisches Lexikon des Kaiserthums Oesterreich*, vol. 32, ed. Constant von Wurzbach, 242. Kapellmeister Wenzel Müller noted the visit of the royals on 11 September 1819: '11. September: Kronprinz Friedrich Wilhelm von Preußen, der Prinz von Oranien und Erzherzog Johann kommen zu einer Vorstellung der Falschen Prima Donna'. Angermüller, *Wenzel Müller und 'sein' Leopoldstädter Theater*, 233.



Figure 3. *Angelica Catalani*, portrait by Jean-Baptiste Singry, Paris, c. 1818, Austrian National Library (ÖNB), Bildarchiv und Grafiksammlung (© Austrian National Library)

herself. According to the journal by Kapellmeister Müller, on 13 November 1819 *Die falsche Prima Donna* was attended by Leopold Johann Joseph (later Leopold II, Grand Duke of Tuscany) and his family,⁸⁶ while on 4 April 1820 Klementine and Leopold of Naples were in attendance.⁸⁷ Added to this, six months later, Ignaz Schuster was asked by Emperor Francis I to perform at the congress of the Holy Alliance in Troppau/Opava (Austrian Silesia) in front of the sovereigns of Austria, Russia and Prussia. As announced by Bäuerle's theatrical

⁸⁶ '13. November: Der Kronprinz von Toskana mit seiner Frau, Erzherzog Carl und seine Frau Henriette, die Erzherzöge Anton und Ludwig und Herzog Albert besuchen *Die Falsche Prima Donna*'. Angermüller, *Wenzel Müller und 'sein' Leopoldstädter Theater*, 234.

⁸⁷ '4. April: Erzherzog Anton, Erzherzogin Klementine und Prinz Leopold von Neapel besuchen *Die falsche Prima Donna*'. Angermüller, *Wenzel Müller und 'sein' Leopoldstädter Theater*, 236.

newspaper, Schuster joined the local theatre company to perform selected ‘Quodlibets with scenes from the most beloved Viennese comedies in order to entertain the noble guests.’⁸⁸ This included *Die falsche Prima Donna*, staged once on 8 November 1820 and a second time eleven days later.⁸⁹ Next to him, other musicians from various centres of the monarchy – such as singer Edle von Massy Cölestina from Lemberg/L’viv, Polish singer Antonia Campi (1773–1822) and Silesian flautist Johann Sedlaczek (1789–1866) arriving from Vienna⁹⁰ – were invited to perform at the congress. Interestingly, although Angelica Catalani was travelling across the Habsburg territories during this period, she was not among the listed performers. Her absence was explicitly noted by her husband, Paul Valabrègue, in a letter addressed to Metternich, written from Brünn/Brno on 7 November 1820:

We now learn that their Majesties the Emperor and Empress will be staying in Troppau for some time; as my wife’s main purpose in visiting Vienna was based on the hope that their Majesties would wish to honour the concerts with their presence – [and] if ever my wife’s delicate talent could be pleasing to the three Sovereigns, infused with the beauties with which she has been showered by their Majesties – she will never be more eager than to place her talent at the disposal of three great and gracious Sovereigns.⁹¹

These lines underscore not only Angelica Catalani’s close ties to the Habsburg court but also her active intent to associate her image with such significant international gatherings. More broadly, this episode invites reflection on the role of the presence and absence of the operatic voice within diplomatic contexts. In fact, Catalani was in a sense virtually present through Schuster’s portrayal of the *prima donna*, which functioned as a simulacrum of her voice and stage persona.

Just like Schuster and Catalani, Adolf Bäuerle was determined to prove his loyalty towards Emperor Francis I and his family. While there is no evidence of the playwright’s presence at official gatherings, he was nonetheless unflinching in his praise of the emperor in a series of publications issued in the following years: a pamphlet, dedicated to Metternich, published on the occasion of Francis I’s sixtieth birthday in 1828,⁹² and a

⁸⁸ ‘Um die anwesenden allerhöchsten Herrschaften mannichfaltiger zu unterhalten, sollen Quodlibet mit Szenen aus den beliebtesten Wiener-Lustspielen gegeben werden’. *Wiener Theater-Zeitung* (16 November 1820), 552. Reportedly, Schuster interpreted two of his key roles: Catalani’s *Die falsche Prima Donna* and the *Parapluiemacher* Chryostomus Staberl (from Bäuerle’s *Die Bürger von Wien*, 1813).

⁸⁹ See the performance records in *Troppauer Theater-Allmanach, enthaltend: das sämtliche Personale der Gesellschaft der Herrn Reder und Grosman, nebst dem Verzeichnis aller vorgestellten Trauer- Schau- Lust- und Singspiele vom 19. Oktober bis Ende Dezember 1820*, als kleines Neujahrsgeschenk herausgegeben von Friedrich Gollmick, Souffleur (pages not numbered). I am grateful to Monika Jägerová for pointing me to this source. On operatic music during the Congress of Troppau, see her paper ‘Die falsche und die kaiserliche Primadonna: Two Opera Worlds at the Congress of Troppau, 1820’, read at the conference *Crowns, Coaches, Curtains: Opera and Dynastic Representation in Nineteenth-Century Habsburg Europe*, Leipzig, 19–21 September 2024.

⁹⁰ Karl Knaflitsch, ‘Lokalgeschichtliches zum Troppauer Kongreß 1820’, in *Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kulturgeschichte Österreich-Schlesiens*, Jahrgang 5, Heft 3/4 (1909/10), 101–60, at 149.

⁹¹ ‘Nous apprenons en ce moment que leurs son Majestés l’empereur et l’impératrice resterons quelques temps à Troppau; comme le but principal de mon épouse, en visitant Vienne, était fondé sur l’espoir que leurs Majestés voudraient honorer les concerts de leurs présence; mais si jamais le talent de mon épouse pouvait être agréable aux trois Souverains; pénétrer de beautés dont elle a été comblée par leurs Majestés, jamais elle n’aura rien de plus empressé que de mettre son faible talent aux ordres de trois grands et gracieux Souverains’. Letter from Paul de Valabrègue to Metternich, Brünn, 7 November 1820, AT-OeStA/HHStA, StK Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur 11-2-36.

⁹² Adolf Bäuerle, *Das sechzigste Geburtsfest Sr. Majestät des Kaisers von Oesterreich Franz I. Seitenstück zu dem vaterländischen Erinnerungsbuche der Unterthanenliebe: Gott erhalte Franz, den Kaiser* (Vienna, 1828).

report that gives an overview of the achievements of his reign, published in 1834.⁹³ While he proudly styled himself as an ‘honorary citizen of six cities of the Austrian monarchy’ (‘Ehrenbürger von sechs Städten der österreichischen Monarchie’), his personal ambitions were much broader. As stated in a note in the second edition of his *Die falsche Prima Donna*, his parody was remarkably successful ‘not only in Vienna, but also in Leipzig, Hamburg, Breslau, Munich, Frankfurt, Magdeburg’, and he reassured other German stages that the *Die falsche Prima Donna* needs ‘by no means to be called a local Viennese, but [is rather] a local German comedy’.⁹⁴ In so doing, Bäuerle sought not only to align his parody with works by German authors Jean Paul and Kotzebue, who had previously popularised the *topos* of the *Krähwinkliade*, but also to position his parody as an autonomous piece with relevance beyond the Viennese context. By selecting Angelica Catalani as a symbolic figure representing the vogue for Italian opera and its singers, and by portraying her operatic fandom alongside stock characters tied to cultural politics who supported her career, the parody was able to appeal to an expanding international theatrical network. *Die falsche Prima Donna – pars pro toto* – illustrated how the whole (operatic) world is a village called Krähwinkel.

The excerpts from letters written by Hegel with which I began articulate several of the key strands of my argument in this article. His experience of Vienna’s vibrant cultural life c. 1820 – a cosmopolitan theatrical centre shaped by the fashion for Italian opera and by a lively suburban scene – offered a fresh perspective on theatre-going, thus inviting us to reconsider seemingly clear-cut boundaries between genres (serious/comic), audiences (elite/popular) and venues (court/suburban) with greater nuance. Additionally, his recurrent references to different singers – those belonging to the Italian opera company, performers at the Leopoldstadt such as Schuster, and international stars such as Catalani – should be considered as more than casual, anecdotal observations from the theatre box. They serve as evidence of the central role and allure that operatic voices held within Viennese cultural life – voices that were able to resonate far beyond the Kärntnertortheater and reach the parodic stage.

The parodies *Tankredi* (1817) and *Die falsche Prima Donna* (1818) engage with two pivotal moments of the Viennese imperial and theatrical calendar: on the one hand, the arrival of Rossini’s opera and the great popularity of *Tancredi* with contralto Gentile Borgondio as a protagonist; on the other hand, the success of internationally renowned soprano Angelica Catalani’s series of recitals. Both events are examples of the Habsburg’s strategies in the field of cultural politics during the Congress era. The court, and foreign minister Metternich in particular, capitalised on Italian singers for major events such as weddings and state occasions not only as a means to project cultural prestige but also to strengthen ties to the newly acquired northern Italian territories. Bäuerle’s parodies were key in retracing and amplifying the impact of these events on audiences. Oddly enough, however, these works were not primarily aimed at challenging the system or offering critique – as one might

⁹³ Adolf Bäuerle, *Was verdankt Oesterreich der beglückenden Regierung Sr. Majestät Kaiser Franz des Ersten?* (Vienna, 1834).

⁹⁴ ‘Vorliegende Posse dankt der Kunst- und Triumphreise einer der berühmtesten Sängerinnen ihre Entstehung. [...] Welchen Beyfall übrigens dasselbe [Stück] nicht nur in Wien, sondern auch in Leipzig, Hamburg, Breslau, München, Frankfurt, Magdeburg erhalten hat, und wie gütig viele auswärtige Blätter davon gesprochen haben, das möge darum anzuführen erlaubt seyn, um noch mehreren Bühnen in Deutschland versichern zu können, daß die falsche Prima Donna durchaus keine Wiener Local-, sondern eine deutsche Local-Posse zu nennen sey’. *Vorwort zur falschen Prima Donna*, 3. His parody soon gained a wider audience beyond the Habsburg and German territories: it was quickly translated into Danish (*Den falske Catalani*, Aarhus 1821) and later Polish (*Wronie gniazdo czyli Koncert Pani Katalani*, Poznan 1835).

expect given the subversive nature of the parodic genre – but instead served to reinforce the status quo.

Despite their occasional nature, *Tancredi* and *Die falsche Prima Donna* offer valuable insights into the potential of parodies to function independently from their original sources or performances. Indeed, these works quickly transcended their Viennese origins, gaining traction in other centres of the monarchy and in later periods. This feature can be attributed to the playwright's depiction of broader phenomena, such as the craze for opera singers, operatic fandom, and social actors in the field of cultural politics. In short, I have aimed to shift the interpretation of parody away from readings that confine it (by viewing it as a subordinate, local or folkloric phenomenon of the Viennese boulevard) by instead revealing its cosmopolitan appeal.

By way of conclusion, I shall briefly return to four key themes – genre, gender, cross-dressing and Congress diplomacy – which have been closely intertwined throughout this investigation. First, genre. Parodies on operatic and musical topics – a genre situated in between theatrical and musicological interests – have attracted limited scholarly attention so far. By engaging deeply with the revealing, if rather scarce, musical material held at different Viennese archives, my reading of *Tancredi* and *Die falsche Prima Donna* has opened up a perspective on different strategies of parodistic writing. These include metatheatrical references to operatic conventions as well as the practice of rewriting with Viennese nuances (*Verwienerung*), which applies both to the plot (characters' names, places, situations) and to the music (references to musical practices as the *Dudler* and the *Jodler*). In this context, the quodlibet emerges as a pivotal scene in both pieces, serving as a concentrated blend of various forms of popular music ranging from traditional folk songs to urban music practices and operatic hits, and providing a rich opportunity to showcase the performer's vocal prowess. Moreover, my close reading of both works reveals that a crucial feature of parody – repetition – was central not only to the plot but also to its music. Opera parodies offered an occasion for audiences to re-listen to their favourite tunes, which were circulating widely beyond the theatre. Thematic variations, translations or 'misheard lyrics' on the parodistic stage were not understood as mocking the composers and performers of the original works. While a comedic effect was always desired, reshaping something very familiar was a strategy that was intended to challenge audience expectations and mirror their listening habits.

Second, gender. Parody as a genre is intricately linked with the concept of gender performativity. Ignaz Schuster's disguise as the two *prime donne* provides a significant new perspective on early practices of drag performance, functioning as a critical tool with which to examine societal norms and shifts within the operatic sphere. In *Tancredi*, Schuster was not meant to directly interpret *Tancredi* as a hero, but rather parody the contralto Gentile Borgondio's rendition of the character. In doing so, he touched upon an important shift occurring on the early nineteenth-century stage: the sudden rise of the cross-dressed female heroic role at a time when the castrati were starting to slowly disappear from the stage.⁹⁵ It was no coincidence that in contemporary press accounts Borgondio's voice was often compared to that of castrato Girolamo Crescentini,⁹⁶ while Catalani's vocal skills and diva-esque attitudes were often connected to those of her teacher

⁹⁵ On trouser roles see Heather Hadlock, 'Women Playing Men in Italian Opera, 1815–1830', in *Women's Voices across Musical Worlds*, ed. Jane A. Bernstein (Boston, 2004), 285–307; on Rossini in particular, see Heather Hadlock, 'Tancredi and Semiramide', in *Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, ed. Emanuele Senici (Cambridge, 2004), 139–58; Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington, 2006).

⁹⁶ 'Mad. Borgondio ist die herrlichste Altistin, die wir je gehört haben, und kann mit Marchesi und Crescentini, selbst in ihren blühendsten Epochen, in die Schranken treten'. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (22 January 1817), col. 61.

Luigi Marchesi.⁹⁷ Similarly, Schuster's portrayal of Angelica Catalani – 'perhaps the first singer that can be defined as a star'⁹⁸ – aimed at signalling societal transformations after 1815, when 'women henceforth became the focus of most operatic works, and the most significant element at the box office',⁹⁹ as Susan Rutherford has argued. Against this backdrop, Schuster's interpretation *en travesti* and his use of *false* were critical commentary on operatic practices and connected the variety of vocal ambiguities of light voices coexisting on the early nineteenth-century stage.

Third, cross-dressing. The idea of a *trompe l'oreille* – i.e. Schuster's simulation of the singers' voices – is closely linked to the concept of *trompe l'oeil* realised through cross-dressing. Rather than masquerade, this practice involved a meticulous imitation of the singer's appearance, an illusion of the original, as evidenced by stage directions and iconographic sources. Images of Schuster *en travesti* – including set design (*Szenenbild*) and character portrait (*Rollenportrait*) – provide valuable insights into the dynamics between singers and operatic fandom and reveal the role of audiences in constructing the cult surrounding the soprano. In short, the device of disguise serves, paradoxically, to lay bare the diva, revealing all the layers of her stage persona, interweaving voice and fabric.¹⁰⁰

My final theme is Congress cultural politics. *Tancredi* and *Die falsche Prima Donna* not only offered snapshots of performance on stage and in theatre boxes, but also provided critical insights into the behind-the-scenes dynamics of Habsburg diplomacy. Both parodies reveal the extent to which the operatic voice had an impact on the Congress era, helping to transform the ways in which politics in post-Napoleonic Europe shaped diplomatic relations. Recurring references to royal weddings in both plots emphasised the role of Italian opera as a dynastic and representative genre of the Habsburgs during the Restoration. Added to this, Schuster's performances during state occasions demonstrated the parody's role not only in commenting on but also in supporting such political agendas. In a tantalising interplay between original and its copies, reality and imagination, *Tancredi* and *Die falsche Prima Donna* illustrate the parody's potential to serve as simulacrum of the operatic experience and of their idols during a crucial moment in Habsburg history.

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⁹⁷ See for example P. Scudo's article on 'Angelica Catalani', *Revue des Deux Mondes* 4/1 (1 October 1849), 149–58.

⁹⁸ Rebecca Grotjahn, 'Luxuskörper: Die Diva und das Geld', *Journal Netzwerk Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung* 45 (2019), 26.

⁹⁹ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera: 1815–1930* (Cambridge, 2006), 4.

¹⁰⁰ On the link between operatic voice and fabrics see Thomas Seedorf, "'Wie ein gutgemachtes Kleid': Überlegungen zu einer mehrdeutigen Metapher (nebst einigen Randbemerkungen zu Mozart)', in *Per ben vestir la virtuosa: Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern*, ed. Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Seedorf (Schliengen, 2011), 11–21.

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