Citation:

Printed: Sun, 22 Nov 2026

Edge, Dexter. 2017. "Mozart as imagined composer for a melodrama on *Prometheus Bound* (1783)." In: *Mozart: New Documents*, edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 7 Apr 2017. [direct link]

Mozart as imagined composer for a melodrama on *Prometheus Bound* (1783)

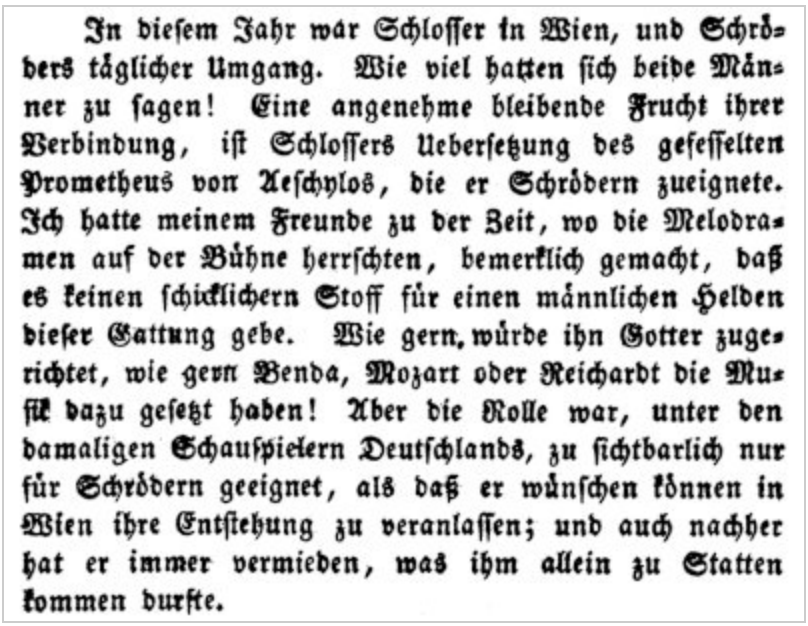
Dexter Edge

Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer, *Friedrich Ludwig Schröder. Beitrag zur Kunde des Menschen und des Künstlers*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe. Vol. 1. 1819

[389]

In diesem Jahr [1783] war Schlosser in Wien und Schrö=
ders täglicher Umgang. Wie viel hatten sich beide Män=
ner zu sagen! Eine angenehme bleibende Frucht ihrer
Verbindung, ist Schlossers Uebersetzung des gefesselten
Prometheus von Aeschylos, die er Schrödern zueignete.
Ich hatte meinem Freunde zu der Zeit, wo die Melodra=
men auf der Bühne herrschten, bemerklich gemacht, daß
es keinen schicklichern Stoff für einen männlichen Helden
dieser Gattung gebe. Wie gern würde ihn Gotter zuge=
richtet, wie gern Benda, Mozart oder Reichardt die Mu=
sik dazu gesetzt haben! Aber die Rolle war, unter den
damaligen Schauspielern Deutschlands, zu sichtbarlich nur
für Schrödern geeignet, als daß er wünschen können in
Wien ihre Entstehung zu veranlassen; und auch nachher
hat er immer vermieden, was ihm allein zu Statten
kommen durfte.

Mozart: New Documents by Dexter Edge & David Black
is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License



In dieſem Jahr war Schloſſer in Wien, und Schröders täglicher Umgang. Wie viel hatten ſich beide Männer zu ſagen! Eine angenehme bleibende Frucht ihrer Verbindung, iſt Schloſſers Ueberſetzung des gefeſſelten Prometheus von Aeſchylos, die er Schrödern zueignete. Ich hatte meinem Freunde zu der Zeit, wo die Melodramen auf der Bühne herrſchten, bemerklich gemacht, daß es keinen ſchicklichern Stoff für einen männlichen Helden dieſer Gattung gebe. Wie gern, würde ihn Gotter zugerichtet, wie gern Benda, Mozart oder Reichardt die Muſik dazu geſetzt haben! Aber die Rolle war, unter den damaligen Schauſpielern Deutſchlands, zu ſichtbarlich nur für Schrödern geeignet, als daß er wünſchen können in Wien ihre Entſtehung zu veranlaſſen; und auch nachher hat er immer vermieden, was ihm allein zu Statten kommen durfte.

[translation:]

In this year [1783], Schlosser was in Vienna and in daily contact with Schröder. The two men had so much to say to one another! A pleasing and enduring fruit of their connection is Schlosser's translation of *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, which he dedicated to Schröder. At the time when melodramas ruled the stage, I pointed out to my friend that there was no more appropriate material than this for a male hero of this type. How gladly Gotter would have adapted it, how gladly Benda, Mozart, or Reichardt set the music to it! However, the role was, among the actors in Germany at that time, too obviously suited only to Schröder for him to be able to want to arrange for its production in Vienna; and later on, too, he always avoided whatever might be suitable

only for him.

Commentary

Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer (1758–1840) is best known today for his 1819 biography of actor, director, and playwright Friedrich Ludwig Schröder (1744–1816), one of the most important figures of the German-language stage in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth. (On Schröder's importance for early Mozart reception in Hamburg, see our commentary on the Mozart memorial concert in Hamburg on 19 Feb 1792.) Meyer knew Schröder personally and was able to base his biography on letters and other primary sources, including (most significantly for Mozart scholarship) a travel diary that Schröder kept

during a tour of German-language theaters in April, May, and June 1791 looking for new repertoire and actors for his company in Hamburg. (For more on the diary and the passages in it relating to Mozart, see our entries for 1 May 1791 and 10 May 1791.) However, the passage transcribed above is not from a primary source; it is, rather, Meyer's recollection in 1819 of an event in 1783, Schlosser's dedication to Schröder of his translation of *Prometheus Bound*. Thus the reference to Mozart may well be a later elaboration, rather than a report of something Meyer communicated to Schröder at the time. Even so, Meyer's notion that Mozart would have been an appropriate (and potentially eager) composer for a melodrama based on *Prometheus Bound* is of sufficient interest to include here, despite its uncertain chronology.

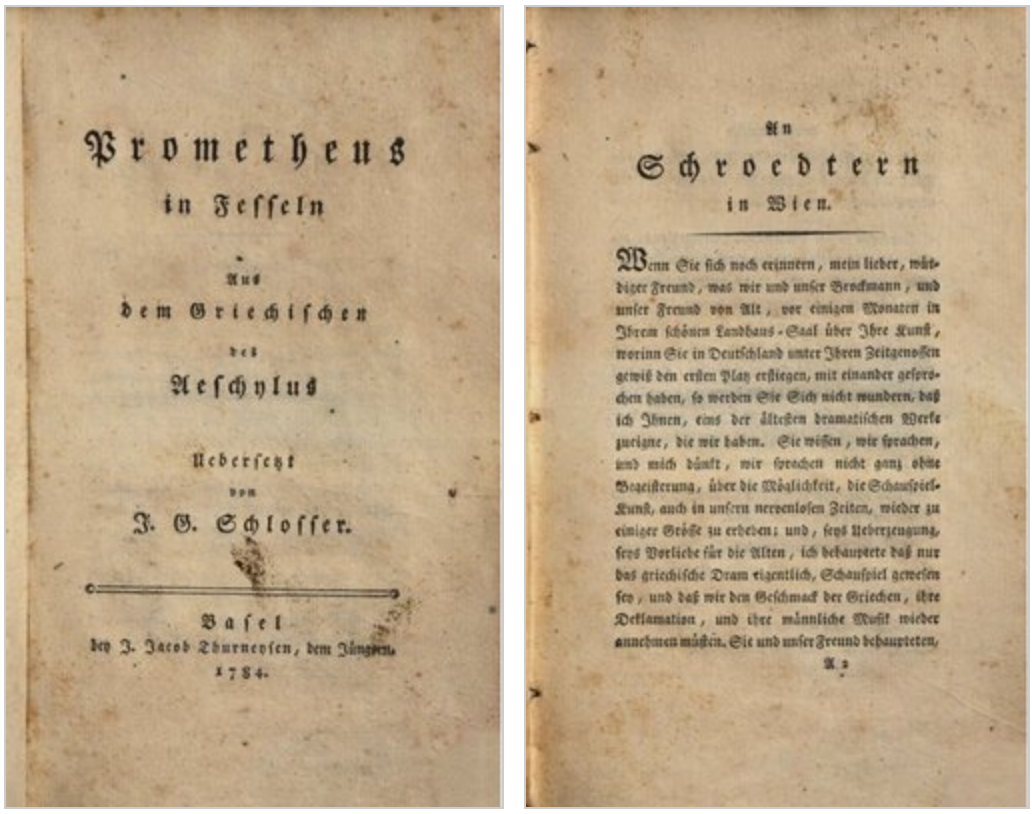
Meyer was born on 26 Jan 1758 (many references incorrectly have 1759) in Harburg, now a district of Hamburg, but at that time a nearby town in the Electorate of Hannover; Meyer's father was the town's postmaster (Zimmermann 1890, 7; Goedeke 1916, iv/1:1095). Meyer's family moved to Hamburg when he was very young, and he received his early education at the Johanneum there. His lifelong love of the theater was sparked by his youthful experiences in Hamburg, during a period that included the short-lived but epochal National Theater (also called the *Hamburgische Entreprise*, 1767–1769), where Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) was dramaturge, and young Schröder was a member of the company. From 1776 to 1779 Meyer studied law in Göttingen, and during that period he became acquainted with writer and poet Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter (1746–1797), to whom he refers in the passage above.



"Schattenriss Porträt des stud. Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer, imm. GÖ 25. April 1776, Sekretär der Hannöverschen Landsmannschaft im Sommer 1778."
(Silhouetten-Sammlung Schubert, Handschriften Abteilung, SUB Göttingen)

Upon leaving university in 1779, Meyer initially took a position as private secretary in St. Petersburg, but soon returned to Germany after his employer was killed in a duel. Over the following few years—Zimmermann (1890, 12) aptly calls them Meyer's "Wanderjahre"—Meyer briefly held a variety of positions that need not be cataloged here; for present purposes we need only note that he visited Vienna at least as early as 1781: Campe (1847, 53) quotes a letter that Meyer sent from Vienna dated 9 Aug 1781, and other letters place him there on 3 Feb 1782 and in June of that year (Campe 1847, 61–62). Meyer was apparently also in Vienna in the first months of 1783, although the exact dates remain unclear; in any case, he seems not to have been in the city continuously over this period. He is said to have had a commission—indirectly from the Prussian court or at least from someone hoping to advise the court—to observe the political scene in the imperial capital. Campe (1847, 71–94) quotes extensive passages from Meyer's resulting report in French; the report provides, among other things, a fascinating outsider's view of the character and actions of Joseph II. Meyer's sojourns in Vienna overlapped with Schröder's time there as a member of the court theater (1781 to 1785), and the two were evidently in close contact. At least two of Meyer's own translations and one of his original plays were premiered in the Burgtheater in 1781 and 1782, and Meyer is said to have collaborated with Schröder on at least three translations first performed there in 1783 and 1784 (see below). From 1785 to 1788 Meyer held a position as librarian in Göttingen, where he was also listed as an "ausserordentlicher Professor" of philosophy at the university (Saalfeld 1820, 632); he then spent the years 1788 to 1791 in England. Upon returning to Germany, he initially settled in Berlin, but in 1797 retired to Bramstedt in Holstein, his home for the rest of his life.

Historically, the ancient Greek play *Prometheus Bound* (Προμηθεὺς Δεσμώτης, *Promētheus Desmōtēs*) has been attributed to Aeschylus, although this attribution has been questioned by recent scholars; in the eighteenth century, however, Aeschylus was generally held to be the author. The translation that Meyer refers to, *Prometheus in Fesseln* (Basel, 1784), was made by the Enlightenment writer Johann Georg Schlosser (1739–1799), Goethe's brother-in-law; Schlosser was in Vienna in 1783 at the behest of Emperor Joseph II to take part in conferences on legal reform in the Austrian lands (*ADB*). Schlosser was, among many other things, an industrious translator from ancient Greek; his translations include works by Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Thucydides, Euripides, Aristophanes, Homer, and Callimachus, in addition to *Prometheus in Fesseln*. The 1784 Basel edition of the play is indeed dedicated to Schröder; the beginning of Schlosser's 22-page preface is headed "An Schroedtern in Wien".



Prometheus
in Fesseln
Aus
dem Griechischen
des
Aeschylus
Uebersetzt
von
J. G. Schlosser.
Basel
bey J. Jacob Thurneysen, dem Jüngern.
1784.

An
Schroedtern
in Wien.

Wenn Sie sich noch erinnern, mein lieber, würdiger Freund, was wir und unser Brockmann, und unser Freund von Alt, vor einigen Monaten in Ihrem schönen Landhaus-Saal über Ihre Kunst, worinn Sie in Deutschland unter Ihren Zeitgenossen gewiß den ersten Platz erstiegen, mit einander gesprochen haben, so werden Sie Sich nicht wundern, daß ich Ihnen, eins der ältesten dramatischen Werke zueigne, die wir haben. Sie wissen, wir sprachen, und mich dünkt, wir sprachen nicht ganz ohne Begeisterung, über die Möglichkeit, die Schauspiel-Kunst, auch in unsern nervenlosen Zeiten, wieder zu einiger Größe zu erheben: und, seys Ueberzeugung, seys Vorliebe für die Alten, ich behauptete daß nur das griechische Drama eigentlich, Schauspiel gewesen sey, und daß wir den Geschmack der Griechen, ihre Deklamation, und ihre männliche Musik wieder annehmen müßten. Sie und unser Freund behaupteten,

A 2

Prometheus in Fesseln, trans. Johann Georg Schlosser
Title page and dedication
(ÖNB, 46872-A)

Meyer is correct that the play was not given in Vienna. Although stories and characters from ancient Greek sources were not uncommon on the German-language stage at that time, the performance of ancient Greek plays was extremely rare. In the eighteenth century, the only such play performed by the Viennese court theater was *The Trojan Women* by Euripides, in a translation by Johann Elias Schlegel as *Die Trojanerinnen*, which had its premiere in the Burgtheater on 17 Jun 1782, with Schröder in the role of Ulysses; it was given just two more times that season before disappearing from the repertoire (Alth & Obzyna 1979, i:31; Hadamowsky 125). No work by Aeschylus was performed in the Burgtheater until 1900, a production of *The Oresteia* (Alth & Obzyna 1979, i:395).

After the reference to Schlosser's translation, Meyer's narrative may seem to a modern reader to take a slight chronological detour: he writes "zu der Zeit, wo die Melodramen auf der Bühne herrschten" ("at the time when melodramas ruled the stage"). While melodramas remained popular in 1783, we know that the peak enthusiasm for the new genre on the German stage was somewhat earlier, in the mid and late 1770s. Nothing is known about Meyer's personal experiences with melodrama, however, and he did not have the benefit of modern scholarship in judging the chronology of the genre's reception; so we should not jump to the conclusion that he is referring to the late 1770s in this passage. If we understand his recollection to imply that he made his point about *Prometheus Bound* to Schröder in person, then this conversation would most likely have taken place in 1781, 1782, or 1783, when both were in Vienna and in direct

contact. On the other hand, Meyer's choice of words ("ich hatte meinem Freunde ... bemerklich gemacht") does not rule out the possibility that he might have made the point to Schröder in a letter, and they are known to have corresponded frequently when not in direct contact. In any case, Meyer's recollection in 1819 concerns an event over 35 years in the past, and human memory is notoriously fallible, particularly on the precise chronology of events far in the past.

The first full-length melodrama is generally held to be Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, written around 1762 and first performed in 1770. The genre was introduced to German-speaking audiences in 1772, when adaptations of Rousseau's text were performed in Weimar, with music by Anton Schweizer, and that same year in Vienna with music by Franz Asplmayr (both works are lost). But the German vogue for the new genre was triggered mainly by two melodramas that premiered in 1775, both with music by Georg Benda: *Ariadne auf Naxos*, on a text by Johann Christian Brandes (based on a cantata by Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg), first performed in Gotha on 27 Jan; and *Medea*, on a text by Meyer's friend Gotter, first performed in Leipzig on 2 May that same year. Both quickly became popular staples in the repertories of theater companies throughout the German-speaking lands, and both were considered show pieces for their female leads. It was Mozart's experience of *Medea* in Mannheim—very likely at the performances on 17 and 18 Feb 1778 with Sophie Seyler, for whom the title role had been written—and of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, which was performed in Mannheim on 30 Oct 1778, a performance he may also have attended, that triggered his brief but ardent enthusiasm for melodrama (see especially Mozart's letter to his father of 12 Nov 1778, *Briefe*, ii:505–6; for further discussion, see the *Notes* below). The only known surviving results of this enthusiasm are the two items marked "melologo" in his uncompleted singspiel *Zaide*, K. 344 (no. 2, "Unerforschliche Fügung", and the opening of no. 9, "Zaide entflohen!"), and (arguably) his music for the transition between Acts 3 and 4 of *Thamos, König in Ägypten*, where the music continues under the opening dialogue of the fourth act, although not in the manner of Benda's melodramas, which alternate music and spoken word (see K. 345, no. 4, and the discussion of this entr'acte as "melodrama" in Abert 1919, i:821–22, English translation in Abert 2007, 581–82). Mozart may also have begun work on a full-scale melodrama in 1778: on 3 Dec of that year, he wrote to his father from Mannheim (*Briefe*, ii:516) that he was composing an extended "Duodrame" ("duodrama," a melodrama with two characters) entitled *Semiramis* on a text by his friend Otto Heinrich von Gemmingen (1755–1836). Neither music nor text for this work are known to survive, and it is unclear whether Mozart actually even began composing it. Oddly, however, *Semiramis* is repeatedly cited as one of Mozart's dramatic works in the brief entries on the composer in several installments of Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard's *Theater-Kalender*, beginning with the issue of 1779 (on this point, see also *Dokumente*, 162). So Reichard, for whatever reason, thought that Mozart had completed such a work.

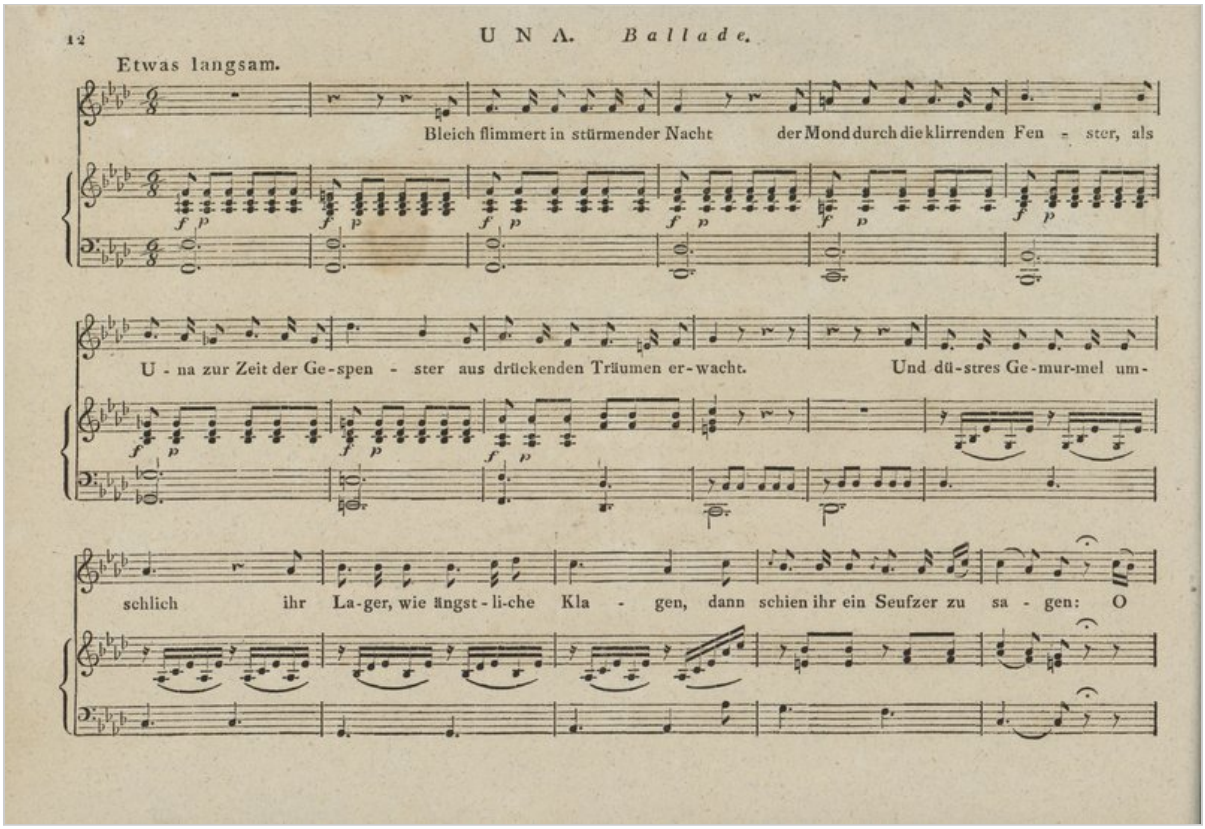
It is clear why Meyer referred to Georg Benda as a suitable composer for a melodrama based on *Prometheus Bound*, and to Gotter as suitable for adapting the text: Benda composed the music for both of the most famous German-language melodramas of the time, and Gotter wrote the text for one of them. Meyer also mentions Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752–1814) as a possible composer for his hypothetical Promethean melodrama: Meyer would probably have known

Reichardt's melodrama *Cephalus und Prokris* on a text by Karl Wilhelm Ramler, which premiered in Hamburg on 7 Jul 1777.

But why does Meyer mention Mozart as a potential composer for a melodrama based on *Prometheus Bound*? It is highly unlikely that Meyer would have known Mozart's melodramas in the uncompleted *Zaide*, which was published only in 1838 and is not known to have been performed until 1866. It is conceivable that he might have seen Gebler's *Thamos* performed with Mozart's incidental music, but at present we have no documentation that he did. And It is possible, of course, that Meyer was merely letting his imagination run free when he wrote this passage, based on his experience (probably extensive by 1819) of Mozart's other dramatic works. But Meyer, a lifelong theater buff, very likely followed the *Theater-Kalender* closely; if so, he may well have known of its repeated references to Mozart's *Semiramis*, and he may have assumed that the work actually existed. (However, the *Theater-Kalender* consistently refers to *Semiramis* as a "musikalisches Drama," a term Meyer might not have associated with the technique and genre of melodrama.)

If Schröder himself ever performed in a melodrama (as Jason in *Medea*, for example), Meyer does not mention it. Again, Meyer may simply have been describing imagined possibilities: "if Schröder were ever to appear in a melodrama, the material of *Prometheus Bound* would be perfectly suited to him." (One assumes that Meyer imagined Schröder in the title role; other male roles in Schlosser's translation are Vulkan, Stärke, Gewalt, and Hermes, corresponding to Hephaestus, Kratos, Bia, and Hermes in the Greek original.) Meyer's reference to Gotter as an appropriate person to adapt the material should not be taken as an insult to Schlosser, whose intention had been to make a close German translation of the ancient Greek, the literary style of which may not have been well suited to melodrama. Gotter, whose adaptation of *Medea* had been a considerable hit, would have been an obvious choice to adapt such material into a suitable form.

From the standpoint of literary history, Meyer is remembered today more for the prominent writers he knew than for his own writings, which (apart from his biography of Schröder) are largely forgotten. But he was quite productive: Goedeke (1916, iv/1, 1097–99) lists around 25 plays, two singspiel libretti, and 10 longer prose works, in addition to a large number of poems and shorter prose pieces published in periodicals of the time. The great majority of the dramatic and longer prose works consists of translations and adaptations from French and English, languages that Meyer had taken special pains to master during his education; but he also wrote a few original works. Meyer is also credited with at least two singspiel libretti: *Das Blendwerk* (ca. 1778), after *La fausse magie* by Marmontel, with music by Grétry; and the original one-act *Die Reue vor der Hochzeit* (1782; no setting is known). Meyer's poem "Una" was set by Zumsteeg, who published it in the first volume of his *Kleine Balladen und Lieder* (1800; the volume can be downloaded here).



Johann Rudolf Zumsteeg, first page of the ballad "Una," text by Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm Meyer
Kleine Balladen und Lieder, vol. 1, no. 3 (1800)
(DIGAR, Estonian National Library)

Although standard references note merely that Meyer was in Vienna in the early 1780s on a confidential mission, one suspects that he would eagerly have accepted any opportunity to bask in the rich theatrical life of Vienna, where his friend Schröder was currently a leading actor in the court theater. In fact, some of Meyer's own plays were given in the Burgtheater during these years. His *Der seltne Freyer*, adapted from a French original, *Monsieur de Saint Charles, ou L'Homme comme il y en a peu* (attributed to Gernevalde), was a moderate success in Vienna; it was first performed in the Burgtheater on 29 Sep 1781, with Schröder in the role of Herr von Karlstein, and it remained in the repertory of the court theater until 1794, receiving twenty-six performances over that period (Alth & Obzyna 1979, i:28; Hadamowsky 113). Meyer's *Imogen*, adapted from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, was premiered in the Burgtheater on 16 Dec 1782, with Schröder in the role of Cymbeline; it was given five more times that season, and remained in the repertory of the court theater until 1792 (Alth & Obzyna 1979, i:33; Hadamowsky, 64). Meyer's original play *Treue und Undank* was first performed in the Burgtheater on 20 May 1782 (with Joseph Lange in the role of Sir Thomas Callico), but was not a success and was dropped from the repertory after just two more performances. Meyer also collaborated with Schröder on at least three other translations and adaptations from English or French during these years, all of which were performed by the court theater (see the *Notes* below).

While Meyer's reference in 1819 to Mozart as a potential composer for a melodrama based on *Prometheus Bound* may not provide direct insight into the composer or his reception during his

lifetime, it is nonetheless fascinating to imagine what the composer of *Don Giovanni* might have done with the story of Prometheus.

Notes (⇧)

For more on Meyer, see also this page at alt-bramstedt.de. Meyer’s biography of Schröder appeared in a “new, less-expensive edition” (“[n]eue, wohlfeilere Ausgabe”) in 1823. The passage on *Prometheus Bound* appears on the same page of that edition (vol. i, 389), and is identical in every respect to the 1819 edition.

The three most important references to Mozart in Meyer’s biography of Schröder come from a transcription of what appears to be Schröder’s travel diary during his tour of German-language theaters in May and June 1791. Unfortunately Meyer does not specify the nature of the source; but the second volume of his biography includes a very long quoted passage that is clearly in Schröder’s voice, and consists of dated entries recording his opinions of what he had seen and read during the tour (Meyer 1819, ii/1, 57–95; the only unquoted portions over this span are a few short interjections by Meyer). This long quote is unlikely to be a letter, so it can plausibly be assumed that it comes from a diary. (For more on Schröder’s travel diary and its references to Mozart, see the entries for 1 May 1791 and 10 May 1791.)

In addition to the diary references and the passage on *Prometheus Bound* transcribed above, Meyer’s biography includes several other references to Mozart or his operas, but none appear to be based on primary sources from Mozart’s lifetime. Meyer mentions all premieres of Mozart’s operas in Hamburg under Schröder’s direction, but it is unclear whether Meyer actually attended any of them (he was not living in Hamburg during the years they took place), and his information on the premieres may be derived from other sources, such as Schütze (1794), who almost certainly did attend them; for that reason, we mention Meyer’s references to the Hamburg premieres only in the relevant commentaries to Schütze’s reports (see 18 Jun 1787, 27 Oct 1789, 4 Apr 1791, and 15 Nov 1793), and do not devote separate entries to them.

In the final volume of his biography, Meyer gives a list of all works performed in the Hamburg theater from 1754 to Easter 1812 (Meyer 1819, ii/2, appendix viii); in that list, he misleadingly names “Die Entführung aus dem Serail” as one of the singspiels premiered in Hamburg in 1782 during the directorate of Dreyer and Brömel (Meyer 1819, ii/2:62). The work performed was Johann André’s setting of Bretzner’s libretto, *Belmont und Konstanze*, not Mozart’s version; see the *Theater-Kalender* for 1783, 268, based on information from 1782, where a Herr Müller is listed as having made his debut in Hamburg as a “Janitschar, in Belmont und Konstanze.”

Meyer’s biography also includes a reference to Mozart in a letter written by Schröder dated 1 Dec 1808:

> „Figaro’s Hochzeit ward gut gesungen, aber nicht
> „gut, und so tragisch gespielt als Titus. Das Lustspiel,
> „vorgestellt wie es soll, würde diese Oper, ohngeachtet
> „Mozarts herrlicher Musik, begraben.”
> [Meyer 1819, ii/1:264]

> "*Figaros Hochzeit* was well sung, but not well acted, or as tragically as *Titus*. The comedy, however it might be performed, would bury this opera, despite Mozart's magnificent music."

The reference here is to a German version of Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*, which had its first staged performance in Hamburg on 30 Sep 1808 (Reininghaus 2006, 40; the opera had first been given in Hamburg in a concert performance in the original Italian by Constanze Mozart and Aloysia Lange over two evenings in 1796, 3 and 10 Jan). Meyer's biography also includes numerous references that we have not included on this site to performances of Mozart operas and guest appearances in them by various singers in the years after 1793.

Jahn cites Meyer frequently in his Mozart biography, although mainly in support of contextual discussions. Of the three references to Mozart or his works in Meyer's transcription of Schröder's travel diary, Jahn cites only the beginning of Schröder's reaction to the premiere of *Così fan tutte* in Frankfurt on 1 May 1791 (in German as *Liebe und Versuchung*; see our entry for that date, which gives the complete passage); Jahn also cites Schröder's unflattering assessment of Josepha Hofer, whom he heard sing in *Oberon* in Vienna on 23 May 1791 (see the commentary to our entry for 10 May 1791).

For additional helpful discussions of Benda's melodramas, see Bauman 1985, 115–16 and Bauman 1989, 260–61. On Mozart and melodrama, see esp. Abert 2007, in the chapter on *Thamos* and *Zaide*, 581 and 589–92 (corresponding to Abert 1919, 821–22 and 833–37).

Mozart's first experiences with Benda's melodramas have not always been described accurately in the secondary literature, owing in part to careless readings of his letter to his father on 12 Nov 1778. In that letter, Mozart makes clear that he attended two performances of *Medea* in Mannheim "wie ich das erstemal hier war" ("when I was here the first time"), that is, at some point between 30 Oct 1777 and 23 Mar 1778. It has not generally been recognized that the only known performances of *Medea* in Mannheim during that period were those given on 17 and 18 Feb 1778 with the visiting Sophie Seyler in the title role (the Seyler company did not take up residency in the Nationaltheater in Mannheim until Oct 1778), and these must have been the performances that Mozart attended. (Mozart had recently traveled with Fridolin Weber and Aloysia to Kirchheim-Bolanden and then to Worms, leaving Mannheim on 23 Jan 1778, and returning on 2 Feb, so he was in Mannheim on 17 and 18 Feb.) These performances of *Medea* are reported in the *Theater-Journal für Deutschland* (1778, 8. Stück, 78; they are not mentioned in Walter 1899), in a letter dated "6 Junius 1778" on theatrical events in Mannheim in February of that year:

> Den 12 Febr. **Eduard Montrose** *[...]*
>
> Den 17. die **Verklei=**
> **dung** und **Medea**. Den 18. **Emilia Galotti** und **Me=**
> **dea**. Madame Seiler, so von dem Herrn Grafen von
> Savioli ersucht war, sich auch hier als eine der größten
> Schauspielerinnen in Medea zu zeigen, war so gütig es anzu=
> nehmen. Beydemal war das Schauspielhaus gestopft voll.
> Die erste Vorstellung aber hätte für sie von unglücklichen

> Folgen seyn können. Am Ende, wo sich Medea im Wagen in der Luft zeigt, waren die Arbeiter so unvorsichtig, die Walzen laufen zu lassen, und Medea sah sich auf einmal, mit einem unsanften Stoß begleitet, auf der Erde um. Zum Glück kostete es ihr weiter nichts als einen Schrecken. Die zweyte Vorstellung lief aber weit glücklicher und besser ab. In der Emilie zeigte sie sich als Orsina, und das mit ungleich besserm Erfolg als Brochard. Jedermann war von der Größe und Annehmlichkeit ihres Spiels bezaubert. Die Churfürstinn ließ ihr auch den andern Tag, mit Bezeugung ihrer vollkommensten Zufriedenheit, eine Tabatiere von 20 Louisd'ors überreichen. Außerdem hat sie noch von dem Herrn Grafen 20 Louisd'ors nebst freyem Logis und Reise= kosten erhalten. *[...]*

[translation:]

> On 12 Feb, *Eduard Montrose [...]*
> The 17th, *Die Verkleidung* and *Medea*. The 18th, *Emilia Galotti* and *Medea*. Madame Seyler, who had been asked by Count von Savioli, because she is one of the greatest actresses, also to appear here as Medea, was so gracious as to agree. Each time the theater was packed full. However, the first performance could have had unfortunate consequences for her. At the end, when Medea appears in a chariot in the air, the workers were so careless as to allow the rollers to continue to run, and Medea suddenly found herself rudely knocked to the ground. Fortunately this cost her nothing more than a fright. The second performance went much better and more smoothly. In *Emilia* she appeared as Orsina, and with immeasurably better success than Brochard. Everyone was enchanted by the greatness and amenity of her acting. The second day she received a snuff box of 20 Louis d'ors from the Electoress. In addition, she received from the Count 20 Louis d'ors, along with free lodging and travel costs. *[...]*

Lütteken (1994, 179; repeated verbatim in Lütteken 1998, 179) gives 17 and 18 Feb 1778 as the dates of the performances of *Medea* that Mozart would have attended, but cites no source. He does not mention that Sophie Seyler played Medea in those performances.

In his letter of 12 Nov 1778 Mozart also refers to Benda's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, but does not mention having attended a performance of it, saying only that he carried both works (*Medea* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*) with him ("ich liebe diese zwey wercke so, daß ich sie bey mir führe"; one supposes he meant the printed texts, rather than scores). But *Ariadne auf Naxos* was in fact performed in Mannheim by the Seyler company

(now resident in the Nationaltheater) on 30 Oct 1778 (Walter 1899, ii:260), and it seems very likely that Mozart would have attended.

Goedeke (1916, iv/1:1098) and Zimmermann (1890, 41, continuation of note 4) agree that Meyer collaborated with Schröder on three adaptations from English and French originals:

- *Die väterliche Rache* (1783), after Congreve's *Love for Love*, premiered in the Burgtheater on 10 Feb 1783, with Schröder in the role of Baron Wallberg, and given seven times in all by the end of 1784.
- *Kronau und Albertine* (1783), after Monvel's *Clementine et Désormes*, premiered in the Burgtheater on 21 Apr 1783 (with Joseph Lange in the role of Kronau), and given just once more, on 23 Apr.
- The popular and widely performed *Die Heurat durch ein Wochenblatt,* after Boursault's *Le Mercure galant*, premiered in the Burgtheater on 9 Oct 1784, and remaining in the repertory there until 1824. (The play was published as a work of Schröder's in 1810 in *Vier Lustspiele von F. L. Schröder*, and it also appears in the 1831 complete edition of Schröder's works. Ludwig Tieck's introduction to that volume quotes a letter from Meyer describing his participation; see pp. v–vi.)

Goedeke (1916, 1098) and Zimmermann (1890, 41, continuation of note 4) agree that two other adaptations premiered in Vienna in 1783 are by Meyer alone:

- *Jeder fege vor seiner Thür*, after Madame de Beaunoir, *Jêrome pointu*, premiered in the Burgtheater on 31 May 1783, and given nine times in all through 26 Oct 1786.
- *Der Autor*, after *The Author* by Samuel Foote, premiered in Burgtheater on 3 Feb 1783, and given a total of three times that year before being dropped (but revived for two performances in 1793).

However, other secondary sources attribute these two plays to Schröder (see, for example, Alth & Obzyna, and Hadamowsky). *Jeder fege vor seiner Thür* was published in *Vier Lustspiele von F. L. Schröder* in 1810, but neither work appears in the 1831 edition of Schröder's works.

Zimmermann (1890, 40, note 4) gives 1777 as the date of Meyer's singspiel adaptation *Das Blendwerk*, based on *La fausse magie* by Marmontel and Grétry. According to Goedeke (1916, iv/1:1097), *Das Blendwerk* appeared in *Theater der Ausländer* in 1778, but it is actually found in the third volume of that series, published in 1781. However, *Das Blendwerk* is mentioned in the *Theater-Kalender* for 1778 (260), so it would seem likely that the adaptation does indeed date from 1777 or early 1778.

Two additional singspiel translations are attributed to Meyer in some online listings; both give the author as "F. W. M." on their title pages:

- *Das redende Gemälde* (1771), a translation of *Le tableau parlant* by Louis Anseaume, with music by Grétry. A 1776 edition is attributed to Meyer in the BSB catalog (3 exemplars) and thus appears also

in the listings for Meyer in the *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*. This work is not listed in Saalfeld, Zimmermann, or Goedeke.

- *Der Soldat als Zauberer* (1772), after Anseaume and Philidor, *Le soldat magicien*. Attributed to Meyer in the BSB catalog and hence also in the listings for Meyer in the *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek*. This work is not listed in Saalfeld, Zimmermann, or Goedeke.

Meyer was born in Jan 1758, so he would have been just 13 and 14 when these two items were published. This might seem an implausibly young age, but the attributions cannot be ruled out on those grounds alone: Goedeke and Zimmermann agree that *Die drei Gascogner*— said to be a translation from Dancourt and published in *Neue Unterhaltungen* in Hamburg in 1773, when Meyer would have been 15—is an authentic work. The BSB catalog and *Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek* also attribute to Meyer *Die Samnitische Vermählungsfeyer* (Schauspiel mit Gesang, 1780), after Marmontel/Rosoi and Grétry, *Les mariages samnites*.

It is clear that the last word remains to be said on the exact extent of Meyer's literary production. An interesting early list of his works is contained in the entry on Meyer in Saalfeld (1820, 205–9), published while Meyer was still alive; given Meyer's former association with the university in Göttingen, this list might well have been based on information that he provided.

We are grateful to Steven Whiting for his comments on this entry.

Bibliography (⇧)

Abert, Hermann. 1919. *W. A. Mozart*. Herausgegeben als fünfte, vollständig neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Ausgabe von Otto Jahns Mozart. 2 vols. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel.

————. 2007. *W. A. Mozart*. Translated by Stewart Spencer, edited by Cliff Eisen. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Alth, Minna von, and Gertrude Obzyna. [1979]. *Burgtheater 1776–1976. Aufführungen und Besetzungen von zweihundert Jahren*. 2 vol. Vienna: Ueberreuter.

Bauman, Thomas. 1985. *North German Opera in the Age of Goethe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

————. 1989. "Courts and Municipalities in North German." Chapter 9 in Neal Zaslaw, ed., *The Classical Era: From the 1740s to the End of the 18th Century*, 240–67. Houndmills & London: Macmillan.

[Campe, Elisabeth]. 1847. *Zur Erinnerung an F. L. W. Meyer, den Biographen Schröder's. Lebenskizze nebst Briefen von Bürger, Forster, Göckingk, Gotter, Herder, Heyne, Schröder u. A*. Braunschweig, Friedrich Vieweg und Sohn. [part 1, part 2]

Goedeke, Karl. 1916. *Grundrisz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung aus der Quellen*. 3rd ed., Edmund Goetze ed. Bd. IV, 1. Abteilung. *Vom siebenjährigen bis zum Weltkriege*, Dresden: L. Ehlermann. [Internet Archive]

————. 1990. *Grundrisz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Dichtung aus der Quellen*. 3rd ed. Bd. XVII, Lieferung 3, ed. Herbert Jacob. Berlin: Akademie Verlag. [Internet Archive]

Jahn, Otto. 1856–1859. *W. A. Mozart*, 4 vols. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel. [vol. 1, vol. 2, vol. 3, vol. 4]

————. 1867. *W. A. Mozart*. Zweite durchaus umgearbeitete Auflage. 2 vols. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel. [vol. 1, vol. 2]

Lütteken, Laurenz. 1994. "'— es müsste nur blos der Musick wegen aufgeführt werden'. Text und Kontext in Mozarts Thamos-Melodrama." In: *Mozart und Mannheim. Kongreßbericht Mannheim 1991*, Ludwig Finscher, Bärbel Pelker, and Jochen Reutter, eds. 167–86. Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Mannheimer Hofkapelle, vol. 2. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

————. 1998. *Das Monologische als Denkform in der Musik zwischen 1760 und 1785*. Wolfenbüttler Studien zur Aufklärung, 24. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Meyer, Friedrich Ludwig Wilhelm. 1819. *Friedrich Ludwig Schröder. Beitrag zur Kunde des Menschen und des Künstlers*. 3 vols. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe. [part 1, part 2/1, part 2/2]

Reininghaus, Till. 2006. "*La clemenza di Tito* (1796)." In: Giesing, Michaela, Jürgen Köchel, Claudia Maurer Zenck, and Jürgen Neubacher, eds., *Mozart und Hamburg. Ausstellung zum 250. Geburtstag des Komponisten in der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietzky, 27. Januar – 18. März 2006*, p. 40. Hamburg.

Saalfeld, Friedrich. 1820. *Geschichte der Universität Göttingen in dem Zeitraume von 1788 bis 1820*. Part 3 of *Versuch einer academischen Gelehrten-Geschichte von der Georg-Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen*, [Johann Stephan] Pütter (d. 1807), continued by Friedrich Saalfeld. Hannover: Verlag der Helwingschen Hofbuchhandlung.

Schütze, Johann Friedrich. 1794. *Hamburgische Theater=Geschichte*. Hamburg: J. P. Treder.

Walter, Friedrich. 1899. *Archiv und Bibliothek des Grossh. Hof= und Nationaltheaters in Mannheim, 1779–1839.* Leipzig: S. Hirzel. [vol. 1, Das Theater-Archiv; vol. 2, with Spielplan]

Zimmermann, Curt. 1890. *F. L. W. Meyer, sein Leben und seine Schriftstellerische Wirksamkeit. Ein Beitrag zur Litteraturgeschichte des XVIII. und XIX. Jahrhunderts*. Ph.D. diss. Vereinigte Friedrichs-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Halle: Ehrhardt Karras.

Credit: DE

Author: Dexter Edge

Link(s): Google Books

Search Term: mozart

Source Library: BSB, Biogr. 1069 m-2,1/2

Categories: Reception

First Published: Fri, 7 Apr 2017

Citation:

> Edge, Dexter. 2017. “Mozart as imagined composer for a melodrama on *Prometheus Bound* (1783).” In: *Mozart: New Documents*, edited by Dexter Edge and David Black. First published 7 Apr 2017. [direct link]