

## New Perspectives on Imagology

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# New Perspectives on Imagology

*Edited by*

Katharina Edtstadler, Sandra Folie and Gianna Zocco



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# “... the first singer, a born German”: Notions of Nationality as a Field of Conflict in Operatic Music of the 1770s

*Andrea Horz*

## Abstract

This article contributes to the European history of musical nationalism with regard to operatic debates in the eighteenth century. The investigation reveals that within operatic debates national categories were used for all levels of the multimedia genre of opera: music, text, composer, and actor. Moreover, the relationship between national character and national taste was a highly critical point: there was general agreement that only outstanding aesthetic abilities enable composers to go beyond their own particular national character. Only in this respect could aesthetic abilities stand above national taste, which was said to be shaped by national character.

## Keywords

national character – national taste – musical nationalism – operatic debates – eighteenth century

## 1 Introduction

Music has been associated with national categories since time immemorial, and many facets related to imagology have been passed down since antiquity. As a cultural expression, music is closely linked to national character. One example of a popular paradigm is the practice established in antiquity of associating certain musical tonalities with nations. The Doric mode was the musical mode of the Dorians, one of the four major ethnic groups of classical Greece. It is said, at least in most sources, to possess a majestic character and was a fitting accompaniment to heroic poetry.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the reception and a discussion of musical modes in the Renaissance, see Horz (2013).

The connection between music and nation is not limited to musical tonalities but can also affect other forms and correspondences: for instance, in later times national categories were associated with musical genres, particularly in connection with dances. *Bourrée*, for example, refers to a French dance tune. In the eighteenth century, the German<sup>2</sup> operatic discourse was dominated by national categories. In public debates, Italian operas were usually contrasted with French operas, which also prevailed the stage repertoire in German-speaking countries.

Likely due to the endeavour to establish a national theatre<sup>3</sup> in the German-speaking world, the musical characteristics linked with nations came into particular focus within Christoph Willibald Gluck's<sup>4</sup> operatic works in the 1770s. Equally present in all operatic genres, Gluck aimed at nothing less than a reform of the Italian as well as the French opera—a project that created enormous reverberations at the time: for the period from 1768 to 1782, eighteen articles on Gluck can be found in German-language journals and books (see Table 20.1). He was one of the most controversial opera composers of his time—a circumstance that may have been influenced by his and his supporters' professional use of journalistic organs. This enormous media publicity determined Gluck's image and place in operatic history in music research until recently. Only in the last few years has the picture of Gluck as a monolithically genius opera reformer changed (Jacobshagen 2018, 83–97).

The significant music-historical text corpus presented in Table 20.1 is permeated with “nationalisms.”<sup>5</sup> This raises fundamental questions of imagology concerning the function of national categories within the German-speaking operatic discourse and how to “bring them to the surface” as well as “analyse them” (Beller 2007, 11–12). This article therefore contributes to the “comparative history of musical nationalism in Europe” (Leerssen 2014, 607) demanded by Leerssen.

The first part of this article reveals that within this text corpus national categories were used for all levels of the multimedia genre of opera: music, text, composer, and actor. The second part deals with the relationship between national character and the aesthetic category of taste, that is to say, national taste: the positive response to Gluck's operas in France led to a discussion on

2 “German” includes all German-language discourses.

3 For more information on the efforts to establish a national theatre, see Fischer-Lichte (2009, 107–115).

4 Christoph Willibald (Ritter von) Gluck (1714–1787) was a prominent composer of the Habsburg court at Vienna.

5 For examples, see the following analysis in this text.



TABLE 20.1 Gluck reviews in German-speaking areas (1768–1782)

	Year	Author	Title	Published in/by	Operas
1.	1768	Sonnenfels	<i>Briefe über die wienerische Schaubühne</i>	Vienna: Kurtzböck	<i>Alceste</i>
2.	1768	Anonymous	“Wien”	<i>Unterhaltungen</i> 5: 452–457	<i>Alceste</i>
3.	1768	[Hiller]	“Über die zu Wien aufgeführte Oper <i>Alceste</i> ”	<i>Wöchentliche Nachrichten</i> 3: 127–137	<i>Alceste</i>
4.	1769	[Hiller]	“ <i>Piramo e Tisbe</i> ”	<i>Wöchentliche Nachrichten</i> 3, appendix, 135–139; 143–157	<i>Alceste</i>
5.	1769	[Nicolai]	“Briefe über die wienerische Schaubühne”	<i>Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek</i> 10, no. 2: 28–32	<i>Alceste</i>
6.	1771	[Agricola]	“ <i>Alceste</i> , Tragedia messa in Musica”	<i>Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek</i> 14: 3–27*	<i>Alceste</i>
7.	1775	Riedel	<i>Ueber die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck</i>	Vienna: Trattner	<i>Iphigenie en Aulide</i>
8.	1776	La Harpe	“Schreiben aus Paris über das Gluckische Singspiel <i>Iphigenia in Aulis</i> ”	<i>Der Deutsche Merkur</i> 1: 260–264*	<i>Iphigenie en Aulide</i>
9.	1777	[Neefe]	“ <i>Paride ed Elena</i> . <i>Dramma per musica</i> ”	<i>Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek</i> , Suppl., nos. 13–24, pt. 1, 481–486*	<i>Paride ed Elena</i>
10.	1778a	Forkel	“ <i>Ueber die Musik des Ritters Christoph von Gluck</i> ”	<i>Musikalisch-kritische Bibliothek</i> 1: 53–273	<i>Iphigenie en Aulide</i>
11.	1778b	Forkel	“ <i>Le Souper des Enthousiastes</i> ”	<i>Musikalisch-kritische Bibliothek</i> 2: 365–369	<i>Alceste</i>
12.	1778	Anonymous	“ <i>Ausländische Nachrichten</i> ”	<i>Olla Potrida</i> 1: 177–180	<i>Armide</i>
13.	1779	Anonymous	“ <i>Paris. L’Enéide</i> , Opera François”	<i>Musikalisch-kritische Bibliothek</i> 3: 309–311	<i>Armide</i>

TABLE 20.1 Gluck reviews in German-speaking areas (1768–1782) (cont.)

	Year	Author	Title	Published in/by	Operas
14.	1779	Anonymous	“Musikalische Neuigkeiten”	<i>Musikalisch-kritische Bibliothek</i> 3: 340–342	<i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i>
15.	1779	Anonymous, ed.	“Ueber die Tonkunst”	<i>Olla Potrida</i> 2: 222–242	<i>Alceste</i>
16.	1780	Rothauge	“Des Herrn Quintanus Rothauge zweiter Brief”	<i>Chronologen</i> 6: 202–216	<i>Armide</i>
17.	1780	Sander	“Fortsetzung der Briefe an Herrn Professor B****”	<i>Neueste Mannigfaltigkeiten</i> 4: 113–122	<i>Alceste</i>
18.	1782	Sonnenfels	“Nach der zweiten Vorstellung der Iphigenia in Tauris”	<i>Deutsches Museum</i> 7: 400–416	<i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i> , <i>Alceste</i>
19.	1782	Reichardt	“Gluck und Lulli”	<i>Musicalisches Kunstmagazin</i> 1: 91	<i>Alceste</i>

Note: \* = [Agricola] 1771, La Harpe 1776, and [Neeffe] 1777 all reprinted in Forkel 1778a (entry 10).

how it could be possible for a foreigner to influence and shape the taste of another nation. This investigation demonstrates that there was general agreement on the point that only outstanding aesthetic abilities enable composers to go so far beyond their own particular national character. In this respect, aesthetic abilities can stand above national taste, which was said to be shaped by national character. However, the constitution of aesthetic mastery and whether Gluck possessed these abilities were matters of dispute among critics of that time. In principle, the present analysis therefore aims to examine the relationship between national character, national taste, and aesthetics.

## 2 The National Dimension of Opera

With the attempt to establish a national theatre in the German-speaking world, such as in Hamburg (1767–1768), Vienna (1776), Mannheim (1779), Berlin (1786), or Munich (1789), the question of nationality was very popular in the theatre and also the music theatre field particularly in terms of institution and repertoire (Fischer-Lichte <sup>2</sup>1999, 112). But how were national categories linked

to the multimedia art form of the opera? And when was something considered to be “German opera”? In fact, the contemporary reviews (see Table 20.1) indicate that critics chose different reference points between nationality and opera. Musical texture was a central category, but they also referred to operatic language as well as the nationality of the actors and the composer.

With *Alceste*,<sup>6</sup> Gluck presented his vision for a reformed Italian opera. In the course of the discussion, the characteristic stylistic features of Italian opera came under criticism, especially the singular embellishment of aria melodies through extensive melismatic-virtuoso<sup>7</sup> passages. As a central Italian musical trait, this vocal art was generally negatively connoted. In rejecting it, both the advocates and the opponents of Gluck called it a specific national opera image. With the opera *Alceste*, Gluck sought to revise Italian opera: the discussion of this work focused on the stylistic features which were typical of Italian opera but at the same time perceived as problematic.<sup>8</sup> The aforementioned vocal ornamentation of the arias through melismatic-virtuoso passages was one of the central criticisms of Italian opera practice. It was negatively connoted, especially in the context of the “Gluck debate,” because it was perceived as inappropriate to the text and the plot. Through the consistent rejection of these musical characteristics in the media, specific national opera images were manifested.

Gluck’s advocate, Joseph von Sonnenfels<sup>9</sup>—who was responsible for creating a positive image of Gluck in German-speaking journals—described the Italian virtuoso singing as “Gurgeley” (“gagging”) and attributed the allegedly weak effect of the music to this vocal skill, that which is associated with a certain group of singers: the castrati. In contrast, he saw Gluck’s merit as having come from the deletion of these passages from his arias. Sonnenfels considered *Alceste* to be an amazing triumph because Gluck had eliminated these negative characteristics of Italian opera.

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6 The libretto of Gluck’s Italian opera *Alceste* was written by Ranieri de’ Calzabigi. The premiere took place in 1767 at the Burgtheater in Vienna. In 1769 Gluck published the score and added a preface by Calzabigi, which set out their ideals for operatic reform. They demand, among other things, no long melismas but rather a predominantly syllabic text setting, no da capo arias because of the repetition of the texts, a blurring of the distinction between recitative and aria, and simpler melodies, etc.

7 Melismatic means many notes per syllable.

8 See footnote 6.

9 Joseph Freiherr von Sonnenfels (1732–1817) was one of the most influential personalities of the Enlightenment in Austria. Among other things, he fought for a reform of the Burgtheater in Vienna.

I am in the land of miracles. A serious singspiel without castrati / —a music without virtuous passages / or what I would prefer to call “gagging” [Gurgeley]—a poem without floridity and squiggle—with this triple miracle work, the theatre *nächst der Burg* has been reopened. I would like to add a fourth, and it may not be the smallest: the first [female] singer is a born German.

SONNENFELS 1768, 17<sup>10</sup>

The multiple pejorative connotations of the virtuoso Italian vocal style are unmistakable in this passage. It is a skill that was previously highly regarded: the famous singers, especially the castrati, received a fair amount of money for it.<sup>11</sup>

Other German critics did not respond positively to Gluck’s *Alceste*. They did, however, all agree with Gluck’s opinion on the shortcomings of Italian opera. Johann Friedrich Agricola<sup>12</sup> and his anonymous colleague regarded *Alceste* dispassionately, making observations such as: Italian opera stood for “floridity,” “squiggle against the affect of aria,” for “crooked modulation and bumpy rhythms.” “All fire of expression” was extinguished over the “lamest and most empty passages,” which resembled a “chicken shriek” ([Agricola] 1771, 12).<sup>13</sup>

10 My translation. Original quote (German): “Ich befinde mich in dem Lande der Wunderwerke. Ein ernsthaftes Singspiel ohne Kastraten / —eine Musik ohne Solfezieren / oder wie ich es lieber nennen möchte, Gurgeley—ein wälsches Gedicht ohne Schwulst und Fliterwitz—mit diesem dreifachen Wunderwerke ist die Schaubühne nächst der Burg wieder eröffnet worden. Noch wohl ein viertes habe ich Lust hinzuzusetzen, und es ist vielleicht nicht eben das kleinste: die erste Sängerin eine gebohrne Deutsche.” And further below: “Wenn wir zu unseren Zeiten von den erstaunlichen Wirkungen der Tonkunst nicht eben diese Begriffe haben; so kömmt es daher, daß unsere Empfindungen, wie unsere Leiber zu Weichlingen ausgeartet; daß uns Wäschland mit seinen entmannten Sängern auch seine kraftlose Musik aufgedrucken, und daß wir, aufrichtig zu reden, nur eine Musik für das Ohr, keine für das Herz haben” (Sonnenfels 1768, 35).

11 Pars pro toto the situation in London: Jacobshagen (2009, 48).

12 Johann Friedrich Agricola (1720–1774) was a German musician, composer, critic, and writer on music. He was appointed as court composer and conductor of the royal orchestra to Frederick the Great in Berlin.

13 My translation. Original and complete quote (German): “Wie viel Arien haben wir nicht, zumal von manchem der itzigen italienischen Nationalcomponisten, gehöret und gesehen, wo bey dem stolzesten und feurigsten Inhalte der Arie, eine so große Menge der lahmesten und leerhaftesten Passagien hingeworfen sind, daß alles Feuer des Ausdrucks darüber verlischt. Und wenn sie vollends so schief und lahm moduliret, und so höckerig rythmisieret sind—Ach freylich, alsdenn ist viel dawider zu sagen: so wie auch dawider, wenn sie aus der Eigenschaft der menschlichen Stimme ausgehen, und sich in eine Nachahmung des Hünergeschreyes verwandeln, wie die itzt in Wäschland so beliebten Cornette thun. Nun dergleichen, von der letztern Art, findet man doch in der Oper unsers m.V. nicht. Das sey ihm zum Ruhme gesagt.” The Italian vocal style was not

Was this an intervention for French opera? At this point it is necessary to take into account the specific situation within the German-speaking realm because, after all, this is not about the defence of their own national operatic style. This differs from the French dispute over the Italian practice because French opera was considered boring and simple. “Gluck’s manner”—an anonymous critic wrote—“should be quite original, and express the true nature with noble simplicity, and make a good connection between the muddled Italian music and the boring simple French” (Anonymous 1768, 454).<sup>14</sup>

Specifically, in this judgement, a special issue is noticeable: within the German public around 1770, national images of operas manifested themselves in musical characteristics. In this context, the national terms Italian or French stood for certain musical practices that had been singled out and laden with similarly negative connotations.

But what was Gluck’s *Alceste*? Was *Alceste* regarded a German opera by the contemporary critics? Gluck’s eclectic method of composition could indeed be classified as German, because in the article “Über die Tonkunst,” published in *Olla potrida* in 1779, for example, the German national compositional style is described as follows:

German music has borrowed the most from foreigners. It differs only in the diligent work, the regular execution of the musical form, and in the depth it executes in harmony. [...] The creation of good taste in music is a work of the Germans. They have repaired the Italian and French styles of music, and above all given the first such handsome form, as not even any Italian ever had been able to give it. Even Italian music, as we now find it in the works of the greatest German composers, is German in origin.

ANONYMOUS 1779, “Über Die Tonkunst,” 239<sup>15</sup>

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under criticism for the first time: objections to the artfully virtuoso singing came mainly in the dispute over French opera—one of the most famous disputes in the 1750s was the so-called *Querelle des Bouffons* (Cook 2001).

14 My translation. Original quote (German): “Glucks Manier soll ganz original seyn, und die wahre Natur mit edler Einfachheit ausdrücken, und zwischen der krausen wälschen Musik und der langweiligen einfachen französischen ein glückliches Mittel treffen.”

15 My translation. Original quote (German): “Die deutsche Musik hat das meiste von den Ausländern entlehnt. Sie unterscheidet sich nur durch die fleißige Arbeit, regelmäßige Ausführung der Sätze, und durch die Tiefsinnigkeit, die sie in der Harmonie anwendet. ... Die Herstellung des guten Geschmacks in der Musik ist ein Werk der Deutschen. Sie haben die italienischen und französischen Musikarten ausgebessert, und vornehmlich der ersten so ansehnliche Gestalt gegeben, wie selbst kein Italiener jemals ihr zu geben vermögend gewesen. Selbst die italienische Musik, so wie wir sie jetzt in den Werken der größten deutschen Komponisten finden, ist deutscher Abkunft.”

Gluck's compositional style had exactly the qualities that would make him—according to this classification—German.

But this article is by no means linked to a specific German musical texture in Gluck's compositions. Sonnenfels did not refer to Gluck's *Alceste* as a German opera either, despite the essential intervention in the Italian aria design and the use of other characteristic features of Italian opera. Gluck's German opponents were even less inclined to acknowledge his work as "German." Johann Adam Hiller, for example, describes the result as "made in the French mould, worked in Italian tastes" (1768, 156).<sup>16</sup> Another critic argued against Sonnenfels, and particularly against a classification as "German," claiming that the opera was Italian because it was not sung in German.

[...] the disguised Frenchman, who wonders why the first singer of the opera *Alceste* was a German, must have been very surprised that the words to this opera are not German. So far the Italian language has been favoured within vocal music only for the comfort of singing or, as the author likes to express it, because of virtuous passages and gagging. Since all these things (which the author is glad to hear) are kept away from the opera *Alceste*, there was not the slightest reason why this opera should have been in Italian. But if Herr von Gluck's composition is nothing but a refined declamation, it is yet another important intervention in the rights of our National Theatre to use it in a German city for an Italian tragedy.

ANONYMOUS 1769, 31<sup>17</sup>

The reviewer vehemently rejects any attempt to describe a German opera written in Italian or musically designed as a refined declamation—the characteristic of French stage works—as representative of German national theatre.

16 My translation. Original quote (German): "[...] nach französischem Leisten in italienischem Geschmache verfertigtes Werk [...]."

17 My translation. Original quote (German): "... der verkappte Franzose, der sich wundert, daß in der Oper *Alceste*, die erste Sängerin eine Deutsche sey, hätte sich eben so sehr wundern sollen, daß die Worte zu dieser Oper nicht deutsch sind. Man hat bisher blos die italiänische Sprache der Bequemlichkeit des Gesangs halber, oder wie sich der Verfasser auszudrücken beliebt, des Solfezieren under Gurgeley wegen, bey der Vokalmusik den Vorzug gegeben, da nun aber alle diese Sachen (welches den Verfasser so herzlich freut) bey der Oper *Alceste* wegbleiben sollten, so war nicht die geringste Ursache übrig, warum diese Oper in italiänischer Sprache hätte seyn müssen. Sollte aber die Composition des Herrn von Gluck nichts als eine verfeinerte Deklamation seyn, so ist es ein abermaliger wichtiger Eingriff in die Rechte unsers Nationaltheaters, daß sie in einer deutschen Stadt an ein italiänisches Trauerspiel sollte verwendet werden."

Two other German reviews from this period show clearly how much importance was attached to the language of an opera. In 1773, two years after the critique of Gluck's *Alceste*, Wieland published an article on operas "bearing the name *Alceste* in the title" (1773, 34).<sup>18</sup> Gluck's *Alceste* is not among them because Wieland's article is only about operas which were written in German. Obviously, only the operatic language, not the musical style or the nationality of the composer, was considered crucial. Even for the already quoted anonymous author of "Ueber die Tonkunst," opera language has the sovereignty of interpretation: although Graun, Telemann, and Handel made great contributions to the opera in Germany—as the anonymous author declares—the text of their musical work is still Italian.<sup>19</sup> That is why only the opera *Alceste*, written by Wieland and set to music by Schweitzer, is regarded by him as the first German opera (Anonymous 1779, "Über die Tonkunst," 238). There was a consensus on the point that the national identity of the opera was determined by the language in which it was performed. Nonetheless, these debates reveal the fragility and uncertainty regarding the question of what makes opera, a multimedia genre, into a national form.

If we consider Sonnenfels's earlier emphasis on the fact that the leading female singer of *Alceste* in Vienna was a "born German,"<sup>20</sup> then this raises another possibility that runs counter to Sonnenfels's emphatic claim. Beyond defining a national musical texture, the language of the performance, or the national affiliation of the composer, the nationality of the actors and actresses could also determine the nationality of an opera. But obviously certain critics assigned the national identity of an opera to the language and, as a result, attributed interpretive authority to it.

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18 My translation. Original quote (German): "[...] welche den Namen *Alceste* im Titel führen."

19 "Hasse Graun, Telemann und Händel haben sich in dem gegenwärtigen Jahrhundert um die Oper in Deutschland sehr verdient gemacht; der Text zu ihrer Arbeit ist aber noch italienisch. Doch sind auch deutsche Opern zu Hamburg zwischen den Jahren 1730 und 1738 aufgeführt worden: mit diesem letztern Jahre hörten sie aber wieder auf, und nach dieser Zeit ist die vor einigen Jahren von Herrn Wieland verfertigte und von Herrn Schweizer in musikgesetzte *Alceste* die erste deutsche Oper gewesen, die auf deutschen Schaubühnen, nämlich zu Weimar, Gotha und Mannheim, aufgeführt worden ist" (Anonymous 1779, "Ueber die Tonkunst," 238).

20 The singer was Antonia Bernasconi (born Wagele) (1741–1803). She was a born German but was successfully trained as a singer by her Italian stepfather Andrea Bernasconi and is considered one of the most outstanding singers of the eighteenth century. Unlike others, she sang in comic as well as in serious operas.

### 3 National Character and National Taste

In the 1770s the national identity of the composer Gluck came into focus because Gluck, as a German composer, was celebrated by some German and French critics as the perfectionist of French opera. So the question has to be if a German composer can influence the national character and/or national taste of a country other than his or her own. This is a good opportunity to shed light on this subject from an imagological point of view.

In 1775, alongside Sonnenfels, another Viennese follower, Friedrich Justus Riedel,<sup>21</sup> joined Gluck in the German-speaking public. Riedel published a book that celebrated Gluck as a revolutionary of French national taste (Riedel 1775). This publication includes four French contributions in German translation on the Parisian performance of Gluck's opera *Iphigénie en Aulide*. They demonstrate the exceptional success of the German composer in France, which Riedel attributes to two aspects:

1. The writings prove Gluck's success in front of his French audience, which immediately included him in the ranks of French operatic heroes. For all four authors, Gluck rates on the same level as the French national composers Lully and Rameau. Lully created the French opera, Rameau composed first and foremost outstanding ballets, and Gluck has all "talents united"—that is, the common tenor (Riedel 1775, 2–3, 28, 88–90). The French themselves regarded Gluck as a perfectionist of the French opera, resolving its previous shortcomings in the spirit of ancient tragedy.
2. The acceptance of Gluck's music by the French public was critical to his success. All four authors vehemently emphasized the extraordinary impact that Gluck's music had on them, providing Riedel with evidence that the German Gluck had conquered the French stage and reformed French national taste.

It can therefore be deduced that the relationship between national character and national taste is based on the effect of music: music corresponding to national taste manifests itself in the effect it exerts on the national character, that is, on the members of a nation. Artists that obtain extraordinary popularity in a nation are then—like Gluck—included in the ranks of national heroes.

The considerations of the French authors also revolve around how a foreigner could influence French national taste to such an extent. The subsequent reflections provide deeper insights into the concept of national taste, because these aspects of aesthetic context concern the creative power of the artist and his or her relationship with national taste.

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21 Friedrich Justus Riedel (1742–1785) was a German writer and critic. He lived in Vienna from 1772 until his death.



The French author of the second letter of Riedel's collection extensively discusses the relationship between genius and national taste and argues against his apparently sceptical addressee for putting the work at the centre of judgement, regardless of nation and genre. He writes:

I believe and have always believed that genius is one and the same, and that one can never dodge its vivid and profound impressions. The sun rules high above our heads, without distinction over all beings, and spreads its light over the whole horizon in one moment. It is in this way that true genius prevails over the whole world. Thousands of rays emanate from the centre of its focus, apt for all nations. Whichever country you are from, whatever climate you might always inhabit, you may only have eyes to see the light. One may only have one soul to feel the impressions of genius.

RIEDEL 1775, 28<sup>22</sup>

According to this, genius is spread over nations just as the sun and has an impact above and beyond the climatic influence of the country, which is in his opinion responsible for national character<sup>23</sup> and national taste. In other words, for the French author, the aesthetic talent of a composer is above national taste and the only thing that should be judged in art. In this way, aesthetic judgement is linked with, but not limited to, national taste.

In his extensive critical reply to Riedel's writing, Johann Nikolaus Forkel is particularly concerned with the statement that Gluck is the "reformer of French national taste" and thus provides further insights into contemporary considerations for shaping national taste between taste and genius.

Is it therefore possible that an entire nation could stubbornly oppose the guidance and powerful impulse of its nature and inward character? Is this otherwise persistent desire of nature so feeble and powerless that it

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22 My translation. Original quote (German): "Ich glaube und habe immer geglaubt, daß das Genie, Eines und dasselbe ist, und daß man nie seinen lebhaften und tiefen Eindrücken ausweichen kann. Hoch über unsern Häuptern herrscht die Sonne, ohne Unterschied über allen Wesen und breitet ihr Licht in einem Augenblicke über den ganzen Horizont aus. Auf eben diese Art herrschet das wahre Genie über die ganze Welt. Mitten von seinem Brennpunkte gehen tausende Strahlen aus, treffend für alle Nationen. Aus welchem Lande man seyn, welches Clima man immer bewohnen mag, so darf man nur Augen haben, um das Licht zu sehen; man darf nur eine Seele haben, um die Eindrücke des Genies zu empfinden."

23 For the relationship between climate and national character, see Neumann (2009, 27–31, 98–113).

has missed the true and only proper taste of its character, and would only be pointed in the right direction by a foreigner centuries later?

FORKEL 1778A, 55–56<sup>24</sup>

Forkel's scepticism resonates in the rhetorical question of whether an entire nation could be wrong for centuries about the "true and appropriate taste for its character," in short, about national taste, and could be put on the right track by a foreigner. Despite the documented extraordinary effect of Gluck's music on French audiences and its integration into the history of French musical heroes, Forkel questions Gluck's contribution in modifying French opera.

According to Forkel, it is possible for foreigners to influence the national taste of a nation. Even before Gluck there were artists who met with the approval of more than one nation. However, he insists that a change in national taste—particularly one provoked by a foreigner—can only be achieved by extraordinary means. As stated by Forkel, for this to happen, profound knowledge of human nature and a feeling for the beauty of the arts and sciences are indispensable attributes—in other words, the artist must not only have great genius but also master the rules of art. Forkel justifies his vehement commitment to the perfect mastery of the composition principles, which in his eyes is essential for a reformer of national taste, as follows:

The principles of these men were based so much on the attentive study of the nature of our hearts and our feelings for the beauty of the arts and science and abstracted with so much caution and acumen from many repeated experiences that there was no reason to object to them; that, notwithstanding their founded correctness, they were still of such a sublime nature that they could not be noticed by anyone, nor could they be put into practice with success.

FORKEL 1778A, 54<sup>25</sup>

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24 My translation. Original quote (German): "Sollte es also wohl möglich seyn, daß eine ganze Nation der Anleitung und dem wirksamen Trieb ihrer Natur und innern Charakters widerspenstig entgegen arbeiten könnte? Sollte dieser sonst unaufhaltsame Trieb ihrer Natur so kraftlos und ohnmächtig gewesen seyn, daß sie den wahren und ihrem Charakter einzig und allein angemessenen Geschmack verfehlt hätte, und nun erst nach Jahrhunderten von einem Ausländer hin auf den richtigen Punct gewiesen werden müßte?"

25 My translation. Original quote (German): "Die Grundsätze dieser Männer waren so sehr auf aufmerksames Studium der Natur unsers Herzens und unserer Gefühle für das Schöne der Künste und der Wissenschaft gegründet, und mit so viel Vorsicht und Scharfsinn von vielen wiederholten Erfahrungen abstrahiert, daß man mit Grund nichts wieder sie einzuwenden wußte, als daß sie ihrer gegründeten Richtigkeit ungeachtet, doch noch immer von einer so erhabenen Natur und Beschaffenheit waren, daß sie weder von jedermann bemerkt, noch mit glücklichem Erfolg in Ausübung gebracht werden konnten."

In this way, Forkel stresses that both lovers of music and connoisseurs must be convinced of the quality of the composition. Forkel forcefully questions the authority of the French reviewers cited by Riedel, who, in his view, are not appropriate judges of the arts because they lack expertise. At various levels, he tries to prove the amateurism of their musical knowledge. Forkel expressly opposes the “genius argument” of the French critics, which Gluck applied to the established rules and theories, and demonstrates that Gluck’s compositions are musically flawed.

Therefore, Forkel maintains that the exceptional qualities necessary to transpose national taste are not present in Gluck’s work. Although lovers of Gluck’s music may be touched and convinced, the connoisseur is not satisfied. For that reason, he finds it questionable whether Gluck’s operas have influenced French national taste in a substantial way.

Even if national sounds are discernible within the debate about the best operatic music, the discussion on national taste in particular is closely linked to aesthetic considerations about the relationship between genius and craft. Beyond national boundaries, aesthetic aspects decide upon the acceptance of an opera.

#### 4 Conclusion

What was the function of national categories within this German discourse about Gluck’s operas? In the search for a German national theatre, which was particularly intense in the 1770s, public debates demonstrated that defining the opera genre within the context of national categories was not an easy task. Needless to say, this required a discussion on the decisive features of a German opera: actors, composers, musical texture, and language were offered as categories for “German.”

The discussion on Gluck’s French success prompted further considerations on the national designation of art: Can a foreigner shape national taste and in this way influence the national character of a nation? At this point contemporary aesthetic discussions are linked to the concept of nationality. National character and national taste are discernible in the intense effect music has on the inhabitants of a country; foreign composers, too, therefore had the opportunity to exert an extraordinary effect on a nation. According to a French critic, the genius of the artist stands above the respective nationally shaped tastes. Consequently, it appears that aesthetic categories hold more power than national characteristics. The fundamental impact of the aesthetic debates in the eighteenth century is now visible: the German critic Forkel insisted that in addition to genius, the mastery of artistic craftsmanship derived from

tradition is necessary—only then can the *Liebhaver* (lover), who is susceptible to the effect, as well as the *Könner* (expert), be convinced of a work of art—detached from national identity.

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