Religious Conversion and the Dark Side of Music: Kleist’s *Die Heilige Cäcilie oder die Gewalt der Musik* and Hoffmann’s *Das Sanctus*

PAOLA MAYER  
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

Romantic fiction often paired the sublimity of music and the splendour of Catholicism as a religion which appeals to the senses and the emotions. The divine beauty of the music combines with the solemnity of ritual and the devotional fervour of the worshippers to bring about some form of illumination leading to conversion. Tieck’s *Brief eines jungen deutschen Mahlers in Rom an seinen Freund in Nürnberg*¹ can be cited as the prototype of the Romantic conversion narrative. Not all such glorifications of the marriage of religion and music, however, are as genuine or as unequivocal as they appear on the surface. A number of scholars have pointed out that Kleist’s *Die heilige Cäcilie oder die Gewalt der Musik – Eine Legende*² at once creates and ironically undercuts the impression of a miracle brought about by the power of music. Hoffmann’s *Das Sanctus*,³ by contrast, has not – insofar as it is considered at all – been regarded as a critique of conversion to Catholicism through music. And yet there are striking – and as yet unnoticed – parallels between these two works: both texts (or to be more precise, Kleist’s narrative and the embedded story in Hoffmann’s *Das Sanctus*) involve armed conflict between Catholicism and another religion; in both there is a failed or fruitless attack on a Catholic church; in both the experience of hearing a high mass brings about a conversion in the main character or characters, yet in both the conversion is flawed in some way; in both the fate of the main characters brings about further conversions, motivated by fear or trauma; in both music is divided against itself, as the effects of the musical conversion experience involve the death of the chief female musician and the introduction of discordant sound in the sublime harmony of sacred music. This essay aims to explore the extent and significance of these commonalities and to determine whether *Das Sanctus* requires a critical reevaluation such as *Die heilige Cäcilie* has undergone since the 1970s.

It is possible that these texts are so closely akin because Hoffmann conceived *Das Sanctus* as a kind of response to or emulation of *Die heilige Cä-
Hoffmann knew and admired Kleist’s works. In a letter to his friend Julius Eduard Hitzig dated April 28, 1812, he praises Kleist’s drama *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* enthusiastically and asks for details of the death of «den herrlichen Kleist» (*Briefwechsel* 1, 335). Hitzig obliged and also sent him the collected narrative texts, to which Hoffmann replied, «Kleists Erzählungen kenne ich wohl; sie sind seiner würdig» (July 1, 1812 [*Briefwechsel* 1, 339]). Since Kleist only wrote eight narratives, it is safe to assume that Hoffmann read *Die heilige Cäcilie*, the more so as the reference to music in the title could hardly fail to attract the musician and music enthusiast Hoffmann. Furthermore, Kleist’s style is renowned for its ironic ambiguity, which in this tale involves the impossibility to decide between the natural and supernatural – the kind of double perspective rightly regarded as Hoffmann’s trademark. Hoffmann may have learned from Kleist’s technique.5

It is however not necessary to assume an intertextual link to explain the parallels between these texts. They could simply be similar reactions to the flirtation with Catholicism that was popular among Romantics; more specifically, they could be similar responses to Tieck’s narrative of religious conversion through the power of music, *Brief eines jungen deutschen Mahlers*. Tieck’s protagonist, a Protestant, attends a high mass in a Catholic church on the occasion of a festivity («ein großes Fest» [*Werke* 1, 115]), attracted partly by the promise of sacred music («eine lateinische Musik»), partly by the presence of his beloved. His motivation is thus worldly, though not iconoclastic as is the case in Kleist’s tale. The music which immediately overwhelms him is likened to a great force of nature – in this Tieck follows the typical discourse of the sublime – and there are multiple references to its power: «über uns hub die allmächtige Musik, in langsamen, vollen, gedehnten Zügen an, als wenn ein unsichtbarer Wind über unsern Häuptern wehte: sie wälzte sich in immer größeren Wogen fort, wie ein Meer, und die Töne zogen meine Seele ganz aus ihrem Körper heraus» (*Werke* 1, 115); «ein Pater trat vor den Hochaltar, erhob mit einer begeisterten Gebehrde die Hostie, und zeigte sie allem Volke, – und alles Volk sank in die Kniee, und Posaunen, und ich weiß selbst nicht was für allmächtige Töne, schmetterten und dröhnten eine erhabene Andacht durch alles Gebein» (*Werke* 1, 116). This power literally forces him to his knees: «eine geheime, wunderbare Macht zog auch mich unwiderstehlich zu Boden, und ich hätte mich mit aller Gewalt nicht aufrecht erhalten können» (*Werke* 1, 116). The majesty of the ritual and the fervour of the congregation complete the work begun by the music, and the young painter converts to Catholicism. After the conversion he feels peace and contentment («ich fühle mein Herz froh und leicht») as well as a closer kinship to and better understanding of his art: «Die Kunst hat mich allmächtig hinübergezogen, und ich
Religious Conversion and the Dark Side of Music

darf wohl sagen, daß ich nun erst die Kunst so recht verstehe und innerlich fasse» (Werke 1, 116). The remaining paragraphs of the text affirm and explain this union of art and Catholicism. Kleist and Hoffmann, both passionate about music and suspicious of Catholicism, adapt this scene and respond to it in similarly ambivalent fashion, echoing Tieck’s portrayal of the sublimity of music, but problematizing its symbiosis with institutionalized religion.

The scholarship on Kleist’s Die heilige Cäcilie is quite extensive, so that it is unnecessary to add one more full-scale interpretation. After a brief survey of research, the following discussion therefore concentrates on correcting some misconceptions and drawing attention to the points on which the affinity to Hoffmann’s Das Sanctus rests. Until the late 1960s, Die heilige Cäcilie received scant attention and was taken at face value as a glorification of Catholicism, as the narration of a miracle achieved through the power of music. In 1967, Werner Hoffmeister suggested a disjunctive reading of the «or» in the title and posed the following question: «war es die heilige Cäcilie oder allein die Gewalt der Musik, die ein Wunder vollbracht hat?» (46). He and later also Wolfgang Wittkowski decided in favour of music and were the first to build the case for an interpretation of Die heilige Cäcilie as a narrative of «die Entstehung einer Legende» (Hoffmeister), or a «Legendenparodie» (Wittkowski). Since then, other scholars have added further evidence for the tale’s critique of the Catholic church authorities and their fabrication of a miracle, so that this reading can be regarded as conclusively established.

In Tieck’s Brief eines jungen deutschen Mahlers the scene depicting conversion during a high mass is intended to attest that Catholicism is the better religion, because it inspires more ardent devotion in its adherents and exhibits the closest affinity and alliance with the arts. Kleist’s Die heilige Cäcilie seems to do the same more sensationally. Both texts are set during the age of the religious wars in Europe, but only Kleist’s plot actually involves armed conflict. The Protestants’ motivation for entering the church is neutral in Tieck’s text (they do so to see the beloved girl and to hear the music), but hostile to the point of iconoclasm in Kleist’s. This would make the miracle of their conversion all the more awe-inspiring, if only it could stand up to inspection. The events furnish no reliable evidence for an intervention by St. Cäcilie. Rather, this explanation is imposed, post factum and without direct knowledge, by the archbishop and the pope. The one written testimony is valueless since it is
not given by anyone who witnessed the events in question. The church’s chief spokesperson, the abbess, is presented in a quite negative light: her behaviour toward the mother of the stricken brothers shows her as arrogant, unfeeling, and more like a secular political ruler than a spiritual leader. Moreover, her account discredits itself by its internal contradictions. The other account on which the miracle thesis rests, Veit Gotthelf’s, is also vitiated by self-interest and obvious prevarications. Furthermore, it has been shown that Kleist was sharply critical of Catholicism and of the causal linking of piety and art put forward by such Romantics as Tieck, Friedrich Schlegel, and Adam Müller.10

Welcome as this approach to the tale is, in some respects it has gone too far. Scholars who wish to discredit the «miracle» tend to deny all possibility of the extraordinary, inexplicable, or possibly supernatural and to conflate what should be two distinct issues. The first mystery posed by the text is: who conducted the mass? Though one must agree that no good reason exists to believe it was St. Cäcilie, it does not follow that nothing marvelous or unaccounted for by natural causes attaches to the conductress. It is indeed possible that Sister Antonia herself conducted the mass, but this in itself would be an event so extraordinary as to border on the miraculous. It has been suggested that Antonia may not have been seriously ill, that the assurance of her unconscious state may be another of the abbess’s prevarications,11 but this is clearly not the case. The narrator relates how, before the performance, and thus before the possibility of a miracle could have occurred to anyone, the sister sent to enquire after Antonia’s condition reports – to the abbess, not to any party it might be desirable to hoodwink – that «die Schwester in gänzlich bewußtlosem Zustande darniederliege, und an ihre Direktionsführung […] auf keine Weise zu denken sei» (Werke 3, 291).12 The nuns’ astonishment upon the appearance of the conductress («Auf die erstaunte Frage der Nonnen») confirms the truth of this.13 A recovery, literally minutes later, so complete that Antonia appears «frisch und gesund,» would indeed be extraordinary in the literal sense of the word. Alternatively, Wittkowski (28) suggested an out-of-body experience, such as that of the Count vom Strahl in Das Kätchen von Heilbronn, whereby, by some phenomenon of magnetism, Antonia’s spirit conducted the mass while her body lay unconscious in the cell. This is plausible, but hardly what most people then or now would consider natural. In Kleist’s time, magnetism was regarded as a dark and mysterious force, operating on the borders between the natural world and the spirit realm,14 and the fact that the phenomenon occurs just at the moment when it is needed is in itself near-miraculous. Lastly, a change made from the first to the second version heightens the aura of mystery surrounding the conductress. The nuns now ask «Antonia» not only «wie sie sich plötzlich so erholt habe» (Werke 3,
292 and 293), but also «wo sie herkomme» (Werke 3, 293). Whereas in the first version they receive the practical and unremarkable answer «daß keine Zeit sei, zu schwatzen» (Werke 3, 292), in the second the evasive reply, «gleichviel, Freundinnen, gleichviel» (Werke 3, 293), suggests that there is something to conceal. The performance of the mass, though it does not represent a miracle worked by a saint, does nevertheless show music associated with an unknown force or forces, the effects of which transcend the sphere of the natural and rationally explainable.

Further misconceptions pertain to the text’s actual unerhörte Begebenheit, the brothers’ conversion. First of all, the effect of the music on the brothers does not depend on, and should not be conflated with, the question of the conductress’s identity. Hence, the disjunctive reading of the title’s «or» is not a real alternative: the brothers’ change of heart was effected by the music, regardless of who conducted it. Secondly, the role played by religion does not depend on the intervention of St. Cäcilie and should not be dismissed with the miracle. In Kleist’s narrative music and religious conversion are causally linked as they were in Tieck’s. Regardless of who conducted it, the mass in question was religious music, performed as an integral part of a religious service, and hearing it was a religious experience for the brothers. Their actions on hearing it – removing their hats, kneeling, reciting Catholic prayers – are unequivocal evidence of conversion, and indeed closely resemble the behaviour of Tieck’s young artist. The changes Kleist made to the second version strengthen the religious, specifically Christian though not necessarily specifically Catholic, dimension of the brothers’ transformation. In the first version, at the onset of the music the brothers kneel and pray, in the second, they take off their hats, kneel, place their hands «kreuzweis» on their breasts, press their foreheads to the floor, and recite Catholic prayers (Werke 3, 299). Back at the inn, in the first version they wrap themselves in «dunkle Mäntel», eat bread and water and sing the Gloria at midnight (Werke 3, 298); in the second version already at the inn they fashion themselves a cross which they worship and, once in the asylum, wear «Schwarze Talare,» worship the crucifix «mit gefalteten Händen,» and claim to have special insight into the divinity of Christ (Werke 3, 295). Once again, Kleist added a suggestion of the miraculous to the second version: whereas in the first version the brothers knelt one after the other, in the second they kneel «in gleichzeitiger Bewegung» both in the church and at the inn (and presumably on all subsequent occasions), and all four die at once, after having performed their Gloria one final time.

The nature and role of music’s power have also been extensively debated. Some scholars, notably Heine and Lubkoll, have attempted to send music the way of St. Cäcilie by denying it any role in the brothers’ change of heart. It
cannot be proved that music was the cause, they claim, because the timing
does not constitute proof (Heine), and because the effect was not the same
on all present (Lubkoll). To this, they add a false syllogism: from absence of
proof for the power of music, they proceed to decisive negation of it and so
to the assertion that the text is unresolvably ambiguous. Let us examine what
evidence the text offers for the power of music. The ancient Italian mass had
a striking effect on all present: it transports the nuns «durch alle Himmel des
Wohlklangs» and holds the congregation spellbound, «als ob die ganze Be-
völkerung der Kirche tot sei.» Even the other iconoclasts, though not struck
with awe like the brothers, fail to disturb the performance by the slightest
whisper or fidget (Werke 3, 292 and 293). As to the four brothers, an ex-
traordinary change comes over them «beim Beginnen der Musik» (version 1,
Werke 3, 300) or «bei Anhebung der Musik» (version 2, Werke 3, 299), and
for the rest of their lives the central moment of each day is the singing of the
Gloria which was the highlight of that mass – clear evidence that it was music
that had seized and turned their spirit.

The nature and effects of the power of music are central to the tale’s subver-
sive relationship to its predecessors. Maier and Hammermeister argued con-
vincingly that Kleist critiques early Romantic theories on music in that its ef-
fects here are unpredictable and can be devastating and dehumanizing.16 This
is a crucial observation, though it should be qualified to some extent, since a
demonic or destructive potential was always present in Romantic thinking
about music, starting with Wackenroder.17 It would thus be better to speak of
a «schauerliche Steigerung des Verrückungsprozesses» already suggested by
Wackenroder, as Schmidt does (273). The portrayal of music in the tale owes
much to discourses on the sublime,18 in its combination of beauty and terrify-
ing destructive power: the performance displays the «höchste und herrlichste
musikalische Pracht» and affords the nuns «himmlischer Trost,» leading them
«durch alle Himmel des Wohlklangs» (Werke 3, 292 and 293); to the mother
of the iconoclastic brothers, who thinks of its effects on her sons, it is the voice
of a «fürchterlicher Geist» who visited on her sons «das ganze Schrecken der
Tonkunst» (Werke 3, 311). It is ambivalent above all due to the nature of the
religious conversion it provokes. Thus to regard it as autonomous rather than
religious art is to rob it of its critical impact.

Music can operate destructively even on its pious devotees and, indirectly,
on itself. Sister Antonia, the chief female musician, dies soon after the perfor-
mancc of the mass. If it was indeed she who conducted it, one must conclude
that she has been worn out by the emotional and physical demands of her
art.19 With the death of Sister Antonia, divine harmonious music is silenced
and replaced by a grotesque parody and perversion of itself in the Gloria daily
intoned by the «converted» brothers. Their singing of the *Gloria* is described in the first version as «schauerlich und grausenhaft» and «nicht ohne musikalisches Wohlklang, aber durch sein Geschrei gräßlich» (*Werke* 3, 298) – an oxymoron which Kleist subsequently dropped. The second version goes much further: «[sie fangen] mit einer entsetzlichen und gräßlichen Stimme, das Gloria in excelsis zu intonieren an. So mögen sich Leoparden und Wölfe anhören lassen, wenn sie zur eisigen Winterzeit, das Firmament anbrüllen» (*Werke* 3, 303) and again, «dieses schauderhafte und empörende Gebrüll, […] wie von den Lippen ewig verdammter Sünders, aus dem tiefsten Grund der flammenvollen Hölle, jammervoll um Erbarmung zu Gottes Ohren [heraufdringend]» (*Werke* 3, 303). True, these are only the accounts of unreliable witnesses (the innkeeper who wishes to be rid of no-longer-profitable guests, the former iconoclast and current good citizen Veit Gotthelf who seeks to avoid trouble), but they are the only ones the text offers, and their vivid and horrific imagery cannot fail its effect on the reader. This outcome is yet another way in which *Die heilige Cäcilie* subverts Tieck’s *Brief eines jungen Mahlers*. There, conversion through music resulted in better art; here, music destroys itself in serving religion. This conclusion too may not go far enough. Does music’s forcible conversion of the brothers truly serve religion? The answer depends on how one assesses their mental state after conversion.

Hinderer pointed out that Sulzer, in his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, already raised the possibility that the passions aroused by music might be so intense as to overwhelm reason and provoke «Raserey» (183). In the first version of *Die heilige Cäcilie*, something of the sort happens. Some uncertainty is introduced in the second version, in that the accounts of the brothers’ condition are those of witnesses rather than of a presumably objective narrator. This has made it possible for scholars who read the tale as an attack on political and ecclesiastical institutions to argue that the brothers are wrongly declared insane.20 Witnesses are divided on whether the brothers lead a cheerful and contented life or one that is « öde,» «traurig» and «ge- 
spensterartig.» Even the horrific descriptions of their singing are, as noted earlier, only the opinion of witnesses. Nevertheless, none of this alters the basic case. Both a cheerful and a melancholy frame of mind are compatible with madness, and Puschmann rightly pointed out that the brothers’ life corresponds to contemporary accounts of certified madmen (75). In preparing the second version, Kleist made certain changes to the text that highlight the abnormality of the brothers’ mental state and behaviour. The very excess of their reaction upon hearing the music and the instant transformation of their attitude toward Catholicism into its mirror opposite suggest the overthrow of reason. In the first version, the brothers behave like any other de-
vout worshipper: «[daß sie] beim Beginnen der Musik, ganz still geworden, andächtig, Einer nach dem Andern, auf’s Knie gesunken wären, und, nach dem Beispiel der übrigen Gemeinde, zu Gott gebetet hätten» (Werke 3, 300). In the second version, they fall to their knees «mit kreuzweis auf die Brust gelegten Händen,» press «die Stirn inbrünstig in den Staub herab» and murmur «die ganze Reihe noch kurz vor von [ihnen] verspotteter Gebete» (Werke 3, 299). Their life thereafter is described in the first version in terms compatible with Catholic normality, as «öde[s] und traurige[s] Klosterleben» (Werke 3, 298); in the second the choice of words evokes a sphere beyond or outside the human: «dies geisterartige Leben» (Werke 3, 295) and «stille[s], gespensterartige[s] Treiben» (Werke 3, 301). Their devotional activities are monasticism taken to unprecedented extremes, since not even the strictest orders require some twenty hours a day spent in fixed and silent contemplation of a crucifix. The brothers’ singing of the Gloria is a form of automatism and repetition compulsion. It starts every night at precisely midnight, with the brothers leaping to their feet as one, and the singing continues for precisely an hour. Since no Gloria composed any time from the Renaissance to Kleist’s own day lasts remotely that long, one is forced to the conclusion that the brothers repeat it over and over. Their singing is loud enough to threaten the windows, and involves so much effort that they are literally streaming with sweat. The brothers’ postconversion behaviour thus constitutes a parody or perversion of monasticism and, as such, forms a part of Kleist’s attack on Catholicism.21

The power of music, in short, was so overwhelming as to provoke a trauma serious enough to deprive the brothers of reason and free will and to reduce them to dehumanized automata.22 The church authorities have no hesitation in proclaiming this visitation a miracle, but to any unprejudiced observer, it cannot help but call divine justice into question. If it was God who struck down the brothers, his punishment is utterly merciless, since, by depriving the sinners of reason and free will, it puts all possibility of reform and expiation beyond their reach. Conversion to Catholicism thus becomes vitiated and pointless as soon as it occurs and, like music, is immediately self-defeating. Only the mother’s reconversion to Catholicism would seem to be genuine, if one can accept a conversion motivated by grief and the fear of the «fürchterlicher Geist» who spoke through the music as genuine. And so, the symbiosis of music and Catholicism portrayed by Tieck’s text is problematized through the questions raised by Kleist’s: is it indeed God who was manifested in the music or is music allied to some other, mysterious force? To what extent can music be regarded as a divine, or even sublime entity? If it was God, can he be seen as just and merciful or does the punishment grossly exceed the crime?
Does the brothers’ spectacular change of heart attest to a symbiotic relationship between music and religion and does it benefit either?

Unlike Kleist’s *Die heilige Cäcilie*, Hoffmann’s *Das Sanctus* has been largely neglected by scholarship, probably because it seems unusually unproblematic and as such something of an anomaly in Hoffmann’s work: a tale with a happy ending, in which a cure to a psychic ailment succeeds and a musician does not end in madness or death, but rather glows with renewed health, happiness and artistic productivity – all the odder because it is placed in a collection named *Nachtstücke*. The term derived from the visual arts, where it referred to paintings or drawings «mit abgründigen Motiven,» night scenes but also «Hölle- und Spukszenen» in the manner of Pieter Bruegel or Salvator Rosa. Steinecke assigns this tale «eine Sonderstellung» within the collection: «Das ‹Nächtliche› ist in diesem Werk nicht als Entsetzliches und Bedrohlches ausgeprägt, sondern ‹nur› als rätselhafte, unerklärliche Erscheinung» (3, 997).

Discussions of *Das Sanctus* generally focus solely on the frame narrative, not the function of the embedded story (as instrument with which the ‹talking cure› is effected) but disregarding its content and the analogy which leads up to it. And indeed the valuation of the tale as straightforward and happy is only possible if one focusses exclusively on the frame narrative.

A critical reevaluation of *Das Sanctus* informed by the reception history of *Die heilige Cäcilie* suggests that the text conforms with the character and strategies of Hoffmann’s oeuvre as a whole. The embedded narrative of *Das Sanctus* – the tale of the Moorish singer Zulema’s conversion to Christianity in the context of Ferdinand’s and Isabella’s conquest of Granada – problematizes the union of Catholicism and music as radically as did Kleist’s *Die heilige Cäcilie*. Like *Die heilige Cäcilie*, it does so by narrating an instance of conversion through the power of music which is in some way deeply flawed and involves a «miracle» somehow deliberately fabricated or contrived by church authorities. Here, too, the service which music performs for Catholicism has repercussions detrimental to music itself. Viewed in the light of the embedded narrative, the lesson which, in the frame narrative, the travelling enthusiast imparts to the singer Bettina also takes on a different aspect. *Das Sanctus*, then, like *Die heilige Cäcilie*, can be read as a counter-position to Tieck’s *Brief eines jungen deutschen Mahlers*.

Whereas Kleist in *Die heilige Cäcilie* creates complexity by presenting multiple perspectives on a single event, Hoffmann achieves the same result by offering multiple narratives and inviting the reader to regard them as mutually explanatory. Their relationship appears but is not straightforward. The frame and the embedded narratives share the same basic plot: a singer commits an act of disrespect against God by leaving the church during the singing
of the Sanctus, is reprimanded and «cursed» for this sin by a figure of authority, loses her voice, then regains it upon repentance and a change of attitude. The narrator of the embedded tale, the travelling enthusiast, further links the two through an analogy inspired by the character of one or both singers. This analogy also suggests an alternative explanation by presenting music, rather than religion, as the entity sinned against, and in so doing opens up the possibility of a different culprit or culprits.

When the doctor confesses his inability to treat Bettina’s aphony and voices his suspicion that it may be of psychic origin, the travelling enthusiast announces, «Ich ich allein kann euch alles erklären, ihr Herren!» (NS 441, emphasis in original).25 Instead of doing so at once, however, he recounts the following episode. A butterfly has flown into the body of the conductor’s double clavichord, and is trapped between the rows of strings. As it flies around, it touches the strings and produces soft notes and chords. But sometimes it hits a string ungently, and the stronger vibration wounds its wings. This happens repeatedly, and eventually the butterfly dies. The analogy to Bettina’s case resides principally in the character of the musician and her attitude to and relationship with her art. Both the conductor and the doctor assert that Bettina exists only in and for music. The conductor asserts, «singt Bettina nicht mehr, so darf sie auch nicht mehr leben, denn sie lebt nur, wenn sie singt – sie existiert nur im Gesange –» (NS 440); the doctor agrees, «Bettinas ganze Existenz im Leben [ist] durch den Gesang bedingt, denn eben im Gesange kann man sich den kleinen Paradiesvogel nur denken» (NS 441). It is likely the association with the bird of paradise, small, winged and brightly coloured, that recalled to the travelling enthusiast the fate of a similar creature, «einen kleinen buntgefärbten Schmetterling» (NS 441). It too, once inside the clavichord, seemed to exist in music as if in a physical element: «das Tierchen [schien] nur in den Schwingungen wie in sanft wogenden Wellen zu schwimmen oder vielmehr von ihnen getragen zu werden» (NS 441–42). The situation of the butterfly, the travelling enthusiast explains, is an image for the life of the singer, placed in the world as if inside an instrument, and given the ability to draw musical harmonies from it: «Es schien mir nämlich damals, als habe die Natur ein tausendchöriges Klavichord um uns herum gebaut, in dessen Saiten wir herumhantierten.» The musician who acts unskillfully, without proper respect and consideration for the power of the elementary force which is music, is likely to draw disharmonies from it and destroy herself, as the butterfly did: «in dessen Saiten wir herumhantierten, ihre Töne und Akkorde für unsere eigne willkürlich hervorgebrachte haltend und als würden wir oft zum Tode wund, ohne zu ahnden, daß der unharmonisch berührte Ton uns die Wunde schlug» (NS 442). With this, the travelling enthusiast has prepared
an explanation of the behavior of both Bettina and Zulema as a sinful or careless mistreatment of music – not religion – and has predicted a fatal outcome as a result of music’s reactive backlash. The analogy, like most of Hoffmann’s musician tales, presents the musician as the helpless captive of a force infinitely more powerful than him- or herself, a force which he or she can neither understand nor escape and which will eventually destroy its servant.

Yet, curiously enough, when the travelling enthusiast is asked for the application of the analogy, he denies that it has any, claiming that it is only meant to introduce an idea suggested to him by the fate of the butterfly: «Von einer besonderen Anwendung ist hier nicht die Rede [...] ich wollte [...] nur im allgemeinen eine Idee andeuten, [...] die alles das, was ich über Bettinas Übel sagen werde, so ziemlich einleitet» (NS 442). We are thus forced to explore the ways in which the butterfly’s case is not applicable to Bettina and Zulema. To begin with, the outcomes differ: the butterfly and Zulema die, whereas Bettina is restored to health and song. More importantly, the analogy presents music as an impersonal force without consciousness, its actions purely mechanical and reactive, whereas both main narratives show music working in association with religion, with its assumption of a personal God whose interests are represented on earth by powerful human agencies. From this point of view, the analogy does not have a direct application, but nevertheless suggests a meaning for Zulema’s tale – one which, like Kleist’s tale, drives a wedge into the symbiotic relationship of art and religion: the church authorities who try to subjugate music and make it serve the interests of institutionalized religion are the unskillful musicians who believe themselves the masters of music («ihre Töne und Akkorde für unsere eigne, willkürlich hervorgebrachte haltend»), but who produce disharmonies and bring about destruction – not of themselves as the butterfly did, but of their hapless instrument. The episode of the butterfly thus introduces the idea of music’s sublime and terrible power, familiar to us from the writings of Wackenroder, Tieck, and Hoffmann himself, and also foregrounded in Kleist’s Die heilige Cäcilie. More covertly, it also insinuates the possibility of a critique of Catholic church authorities similar to that found in Kleist’s narrative.

Like Die heilige Cäcilie, Zulema’s story takes place at a time of armed conflict between two religions, here the reconquista of Spain from the Moors by the Catholic sovereigns Ferdinand and Isabella, and specifically the siege of Granada. In both tales, music becomes a weapon in the battle of confessions, as the Catholic church authorities use the miracle of conversion which music seemingly performs to affirm the superiority of their faith. However, in Hoffmann’s tale even more radically than in Kleist’s, the spheres of music and religion do not coincide. Whereas in Kleist’s narrative – as in Tieck’s conver-
sion narrative – beautiful music is associated only with Catholicism, in *Das Sanctus* it is not allied solely with Catholicism, but rather lives equally happily and with as artistically satisfying results in Moorish secular culture. Only the prioress compares «die üppigen Gesänge der Heiden» to «verlockende Sirenenstimmen» (NS 446–47). The Spanish, Catholic general Don Aguillar refers to Zulema as «das Licht des Gesanges in Granada» (NS 447) and, having captured her, is so moved by her song that he is about to release her. Significantly, it is a priest, with his arguments for the benefits of conversion, who prevents this.

A more radical departure from Tieck and Kleist follows: in *Das Sanctus*, music does not of itself bring about religious conversion. Zulema is fascinated by the music of the mass and through it seems to become receptive to the religion which it expresses, but there is no immediate dramatic change of heart, as was the case with Tieck’s painter or Kleist’s iconoclastic brothers. On hearing the chorale, she first becomes «still und andächtig» (NS 448), later kneels before an image of the Virgin Mary, then tunes her zither in the Western mode and tries to reproduce what she heard. All this is still a long way from actual conversion, as the prioress realizes. At this point, the church intervenes and deliberately uses music as a tool to nurture and train this seed into full-blown conversion. The prioress sends, not the novice mistress, but the choir conductress to instruct Zulema – in music and in religion – and it is she, not the narrator, who states that music has converted Zulema: «und so geschah es, daß im heiligen Gesange der Kirche der Glaube in ihr entzündet wurde» (NS 448). The music Zulema now produces does not bear out this claim. When she sings mass with the nuns, she does not harmonize with them, but rather causes disturbance: her voice stands out from the others, indeed, drowns («übertönt») them out, her pronunciation is «fremdartig,» her singing has a «sonderbare, ganz eigentümliche Art» (NS 446). The actual rite of admission into the Catholic church, the baptism, does not remove the distance, but rather heightens it to actual disharmony: the choir conductress noticed «daß Julia [Zulema’s baptismal name] oft auf seltsame Weise von dem Choral abwich, fremdartige Töne einmischend» (NS 448). Zulema occasionally disrupts the chorale by inserting Moorish words into the Latin, then tunes her zither again in the higher, Moorish mode, and begins again to sing Moorish love songs. The musical disharmony reflects the spiritual one: Zulema never truly accepted the new faith and cannot relinquish her old culture. Only religion, not music, demands exclusive allegiance to one culture; the musician Zulema could perform music of different provenances, both sacred and secular, as Bettina and the conductor in the frame tale do. In both *Die heilige Cäcilie* and *Das Sanctus* the Catholic church authorities are exposed in an act of
self-interested fabrication. In Kleist’s tale they manufacture a legend around a change of heart spontaneously occasioned by music, while in Hoffmann’s the conversion itself is manufactured rather than spontaneous. Not surprisingly, it proves to be a faulty construction.

Zulema’s position in the battle of confessions highlights the divergence in the paths of religion and music. Whereas the iconoclastic brothers in Die heilige Cäcilie were active representatives, indeed leaders, of one of the warring parties, Zulema finds herself in the unhappy role of a bone of contention. The nuns and the Spanish army leader Don Aguillar (who is in love with Zulema) on one side and Zulema’s Moorish lover Hichem on the other vie for possession of her and use music as bait with which to draw her to their side. Just as the nuns used music to persuade her to conversion, Hichem uses it to lure her out of the church during the mass. Zulema’s choice of words on this occasion suggests that there is no free decision on her part: “hörst du denn nicht die prächtigen Töne des Meisters? – dort bei ihm, mit ihm muß ich singen!” (NS 449, my emphasis).

Viewed in this light, Zulema’s sin and punishment take on a different aspect. Under Hichem’s spell, she commits the sin of leaving the church during the Sanctus and is punished for it by the loss of her voice, brought about by the conductress’s curse. According to the Catholic church, as represented by the choir conductress, this punishment is a divine visitation (loss of voice here parallels loss of reason in Kleist’s text) which affirms music’s status as handmaiden of religion: “Sünderin, die du den Dienst des Herrn entweihst, da du mit dem Munde sein Lob verkündest und im Herzen weltliche Gedanken trägst, flieh von hinnen, gebrochen ist die Kraft des Gesanges in dir, verstummt sind die wunderbaren Laute in deiner Brust die der Geist des Herrn entzündet!” (NS 450). This account, however, does not fit the facts. The conversion which the conductress’s words of condemnation presuppose had not really taken place, and the “sin” is carried out without volition, almost under a spell, so that one might question the justice and mercy of a God whose punishment thus exceeds the crime. The conductress also implies that God had given Zulema the gift of song so that she could sing his praise, but, as the nun very well knows, Zulema produced beautiful song long before she came into contact with Christianity.

Zulema’s regaining of her voice further undermines the glorification of religion while seeming to complete it. When Granada falls and Hichem is killed, Zulema emerges from a burning house, dressed as a nun and singing the Sanctus in a strong, lovely voice, proceeds to the church, finishes singing the mass, then falls dead. From the Catholic viewpoint, the meaning of these events is clear: God restores her voice to Zulema in the moment when she recog-
nizes her sin, truly converts to Christianity and devotes her gift to praise of its creator. He then – presumably – rewards her with instant death and admission to heaven. This «miracle,» like the one putatively performed by Kleist’s St. Cäcilie, seems rather futile and self-defeating. St. Cäcilie’s intervention only saved the convent from secularization for a space of some fifty years; in *Das Sanctus*, the gift which should proclaim the glory of God to all is restored for a space of half an hour or so, then extinguished forever. Here as in Kleist’s narrative, the possibility of following up conversion with a pious Christian life is immediately put out of the convert’s reach – there by loss of reason and free will, here by death. In both tales, the further conversions which follow on the «miracle» – the mother of the four iconoclastic brothers, the now leaderless and defeated Moors who follow Zulema out of the burning house – are caused by fear and trauma and are therefore also tainted.

As with *Die heilige Cäcilie*, the Catholic account with its miracle proves to be dubious at best, and the reader is forced to consider the power of music alone. Here, the two tales diverge. Not only does music in *Das Sanctus* not produce a dramatic change of heart, it also does not inflict the punishment. By the analogy to the butterfly the loss of voice is explained as follows: Zulema, «leichtsinnig» like Bettina and the butterfly, handles music carelessly, without due respect for its power and sublimity, produces disharmony, and is destroyed by music’s backlash. This explanation also does not fit. There is no reaction on music’s part, but rather a curse deliberately uttered by a human agency representing a human institution. The effect of the curse can easily be explained in psychological terms, as the travelling enthusiast does for Bettina’s parallel case in the frame narrative. It works because Zulema is terrified by it into a psychosomatic illness. The return of her voice and her death are less easily explained, even in psychological terms. Zulema suffers several traumas: being torn between opposing parties with psychological ascendency over her, being robbed of her existence in music, being caught in a burning house. These could explain her death, perhaps even her second conversion (as a reaction to shock), and the second conversion in turn may have brought belief that the curse is lifted and so restored her voice. However, there remains the coincidence that her second conversion occurred just at the moment of her lover’s death, though she did not know about it. As with *Die heilige Cäcilie*, one cannot altogether dismiss the presence of a mysterious, possibly supernatural force. The psychological dimension raises the possibility of a different application for the butterfly analogy – one which contributes to the critique of Catholicism. The nuns, and to a lesser extent Hichem, are the unskillful musicians who wrongly imagine they control music, but in fact cause catastrophe by their mishandling of it. The nuns misuse music to force
a conversion, damage the musical instrument (the singer) psychologically out of anger at the failure of their persuasion, and ultimately cause its destruction, a process to which Hichem contributes by applying his own psychological pressure through the medium of music. Thus, the marriage of music and religion, which in Tieck’s tale benefitted both, works to the detriment of music: the capture and conversion of Zulema extinguished Moorish music in Granada, and her death robs the nuns’ choir of what had just become its chief- est ornament.

This divergence of the interests of music and religion in itself militates, to those familiar with Hoffmann’s attitude to music, against a reading that accepts the glorification of Catholicism at face value. A parallel to *Kater Murr* is instructive in this respect. There too, a symbiotic relationship appears to exist between music and monasticism: the monastery is a haven of peace, safety and freedom from the petty cares of existence for the composer Johannes Kreisler, its divine office furnishes the inspiration and outward stimulus for his compositions, the abbot at first seems a wise and beneficent protector and patron. But the abbot soon reveals himself as a hypocritical opportunist who seeks to entrap Kreisler into taking his vows as a monk in order to serve the interests of the prince, and life in the monastery becomes inimical to music with the arrival of a «saint.» As soon as music and religion part company, Kreisler, and with him the narrator, side unequivocally with the former.26

The relationship of Zulema’s story to the frame narrative rests on three issues. First, they are functionally linked in that hearing of Zulema’s parallel illness brings about Bettina’s cure. Secondly, by means of the embedded tale the travelling enthusiast intends to teach Bettina a lesson about right and wrong attitudes to music. Lastly, so to speak over Bettina’s head, the two narratives are parallel—to each other and to Kleist’s *Die heilige Cäcilie*—in that they constitute a disturbingly ambiguous statement on the relationship of music and religion.

As early as 1922 Jolowicz presented a medical reading of *Das Sanctus*. In Bettina’s case, he sees a successful psychoanalytic cure prefiguring Freud’s method. By telling the story of Zulema, the travelling enthusiast shows Bettina the originating cause and psychosomatic character of her ailment, and by the very fact that a rational understanding of this is achieved, the symptoms dissipate.27 This interpretation identifies correctly the basic mechanism of ailment and treatment, but it implies a Bettina who is a very inattentive listener. She would seem to disregard the ominous aspects of Zulema’s case (and of the butterfly analogy, which she presumably also heard), particularly the tragic fact that absorption in music resulted in the death of both her precursors. The medical reading also does not address whether Bettina has perceived the lesson on the proper attitude to music.
Schönherr’s essay focuses on this very issue. He sees a conflict between two attitudes toward art: its social misuse as shallow, fashionable entertainment, and the Romantic aesthetic which turns it into a Kunstreligion. By his narrative, the travelling enthusiast deliberately educates Bettina away from superficial misuse of her music and to service to its Romantic sacralization. According to Schönherr, Das Sanctus marks a turning point in Hoffmann’s view of the emancipation of music from service to religious ritual – initially ambivalent, mourning the loss of purposiveness and social integration that went with music’s subordinate role, but here espousing the autonomy of art because of the higher status and greater freedom it permits. This reading accurately describes Hoffmann’s basic position. All his writings on music, both fictional and critical, present it as the highest human pursuit, worthy of quasi religious devotion. Within Das Sanctus, the butterfly analogy signaled, to Bettina and to the reader, that the travelling enthusiast wants the problem defined as one of mistreatment of music and the consequences of this. At the tale’s conclusion, Bettina does seem to have learned proper respect of music, since she delights the travelling enthusiast with her performance of Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater.

The relationship of music and religion, however, undercuts this reading and casts doubt on the happy ending. Schönherr postulates a complete change of direction between the essay Alte und neue Kirchenmusik, written only two years earlier, and Das Sanctus. The essay condemned the mixing of secular and sacred styles, argued that sacred music on the theatre stage was as inappropriate as operatic music in the church, and claimed that the harmonious union of music and religious faith had produced, in the time of Palestrina and the succeeding generation, a pinnacle of perfection never to be reached again. It seems unlikely that Hoffmann’s views should have reversed completely in just two years. The evidence of Zulema’s tale is conflicting: on the one hand, it does undercut the unity of interests between music and religion, but on the other it retains a connection between music and a mysterious numinous force and presents the high mass, performed in a spirit of religious devotion, as the pinnacle of the artist’s achievement.

The frame narrative reveals a similar ambiguity, centered on the locale for the performance of sacred music. The singing of the mass, and of the Sanctus in particular, is a religious experience for the travelling enthusiast, arousing in him «die Schauer der tiefsten Andacht» (NS 444). It is his annoyance at having this «Andacht» disrupted by Bettina’s departure that causes him to curse her. Admittedly, such devotion does not seem to require a church as physical setting, since Bettina’s performance of Pergolesi’s Stabat Mater in a «mäßig großen Zimmer» also moves him to «andächtigen Entzücken» (NS 455). Yet
the wording of the curse – the crucial moment of the plot and key link to the embedded narrative – reintroduces the element of religion and harks back to the Kirchenmusik essay’s nostalgia for music’s integration into religious ritual. In the embedded narrative, the choir conductress’s curse specifically announced Zulema’s loss of voice, as a punishment exactly matching the crime: «Sünderin, die du den Dienst des Herrn entweihst […] gebrochen ist die Kraft des Gesanges in dir, verstummt sind die wunderbaren Laute in deiner Brust, die der Geist des Herrn entzündet!» (NS 449–50). The events conform to her prediction: so long as Zulema remains with the Moors, she is unable to sing, the moment she dons the nun’s habit and places her gift in the service of Christian ritual, her voice returns with renewed strength and beauty. The travelling enthusiast’s curse does not quite follow this pattern. He identifies the «sin» as one of leaving the church during the Sanctus: «Wissen Sie denn nicht […] daß es sündlich ist, daß es nicht straflos bleibt, wenn man während des Sanctus die Kirche verläßt?» But what he predicts is not that Bettina will lose her voice, but rather that she will not be able to sing in church: «Sie werden so bald nicht mehr in der Kirche singen!» (NS 444). One might be tempted to see this distinction as sophistical and the formulation as merely an image for the loss of voice, but the ending makes clear that the two are not one and the same. After her recovery, Bettina is singing sacred music, but not in church: «[Bettina] die mit herrlicher Glocken-Stimme Pergoleses [sic] Stabat mater (jedoch nicht in der Kirche, sondern im mäßig großen Zimmer) gesungen hatte» (NS 455). Technically, the terms of the curse are still as much in effect as they ever were, and the text highlights this, since the only information given about the venue, beyond a vague suggestion of size, is precisely that it is not a church, a specification further stressed by the use of «jedoch.» The discrepancy between curse and cure is too pointed to be unintentional. What could be its intention? The description «mäßig großen Zimmer» is too vague to support Schönherr’s reading that a space devoted solely to art replaces church as the ideal locale for performance. Two other possibilities present themselves, both of which diminish the optimism of the ending: that Bettina is seeking to avoid Zulema’s fate by avoiding the exact repetition of her solution or that her cure is not complete. The imperfect lifting of the curse serves as a reminder that once again (as in most of Hoffmann’s tales and in Die heilige Cäcilie), something mysterious and beyond human control attaches to music. This was already the case with the uttering of the curse, which acquired an awful solemnity unintended by its author: «Es sollte Scherz sein, aber ich weiß nicht, wie es kam, daß mit einemmal meine Worte so feierlich klangen» (NS 444). This residue of the inexplicable and unpredictable, though less dramatic than in Zulema’s case (her second conversion and her death), yet recalls mu-
usic’s sublimity and power, first evoked by the butterfly analogy. Viewed in the light of others of Hoffmann’s musician tales, notably *Don Juan* and *Rat Krespel*, this reminder has ominous implications for Bettina’s eventual fate. More than ever, Bettina is caught up in an existence in and for music, as the butterfly was trapped in the clavichord, and hence is likely to repeat the ungentle touch of the strings and receive a fatal wound. Should her dedication be so complete as to avoid this, she may well be destroyed by the demands of her art and the intensity of the feelings it evokes, as the singer of Donna Anna (*Don Juan*) and Antonia (*Rat Krespel*) were.

Comparison with Kleist’s *Die heilige Cäcilie* has helped bring to light several features of *Das Sanctus* that undermine its seeming simplicity and optimism. As in *Die heilige Cäcilie*, the stories of both Zulema and Bettina, while appearing to affirm the harmonious union of music and religion as Tieck’s narrative of conversion through music did, in fact drive a wedge between the two – in Zulema’s tale, by exposing how the church authorities misuse music, and by questioning the justice of a death which precludes all but the briefest enjoyment of the restored gift of music; in Bettina’s, because it is uncertain whether true «Andacht» for music depends on integration with religious worship and its prescribed locale. In both narrative strands, as in *Die heilige Cäcilie*, the presence of something inscrutable and potentially supernatural cannot be denied, which at once enhances and undercuts the divinity of music. Seen in this light, *Das Sanctus* more closely fits the pattern of the *Nachtstücke* than is generally assumed. Seen in this light, both Kleist’s and Hoffmann’s tales represent a critique of the more optimistic instances of early Romantic discourse on music and of early Romantic discourse on religious conversion through the medium of art.

Notes

1 Published in 1797 as part of Tieck’s and Wackenroder’s *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*.

2 *Die heilige Cäcilie* was conceived as a baptismal gift for Adam Müller’s daughter Cäcilie, published first in 1810 in the *Berliner Abendblätter*, of which Kleist and Müller were editors, and again in expanded form in Kleist’s collected narratives (1811).

3 *Das Sanctus* appeared in Hoffmann’s *Nachtstücke* in 1817.

4 There are other instances of this in Hoffmann’s œuvre: *Das Gelübde* draws narrative material from Kleist’s *Die Marquise von O.*, and *Ein Fragment aus dem Leben dreier Freunde* does so from *Das Bettelweib von Locarno*.

5 This assumption does not depend on his having read *Die heilige Cäcilie*. The Serapion Brothers, in their conversation on «das Grauenhafte» and «das Schauerliche,» praise
Kleist’s *Das Bettelweib von Locarno* as a most effective and accomplished example of the genre. Hoffmann, *Serapionsbrüder*, 928. I quote Hoffmann from the Winkler edition.

I quote the *Herzensergießungen* from Wackenroder, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. All subsequent references are given in the text as *Werke*.

Examples of this position are the articles by Scherer and Edel. For a summary of scholarship up to 1967 see also Hoffmeister.

For a detailed exposition of this reading see Hoffmeister, Wittkowski, Horn, Heine, Fischer, Lubkoll, Stephens and Schmidt. Sean Allan’s interpretation represents one dissenting voice, claiming that Kleist «presents us with an altogether positive image of the Catholic Church, and one from which almost all of the misgivings expressed in his earlier correspondence are absent» (202), but he is unable to sustain this position without self-contradiction. He claims that the nuns, including the abbess, are wholly positive figures, yet indirectly admits that the «miracle» which the latter asserts is a fabrication by the church authorities, and that what he calls the brothers’ «ecstatic, Dionysian adoration of God» (206) contrasts favourably with monastic Catholicism.

Instances of this are Heine, Lubkoll, Neumann and Stephens. The main points in their accounts – that it was not the power of music but another unidentifiable force, and that all voices in the tale have equal status and are equally unreliable – run counter to textual evidence. As we shall see, the role played by the power of music cannot be denied. As to the second argument, in its critique of the Catholic church, the text makes quite clear which witnesses and which points in their narratives discredit themselves, as various scholars have shown.

Several scholars quote Kleist’s letters of September 5, 1800 and September 11, 1800 to Wilhelmine von Zenge (*Werke* 4, 109 and 112ff.), which criticize Catholicism. Wittkowski shows how Kleist, while admiring Friedrich Schlegel and Adam Müller, was critical of them on this one point and suggests that his *Brief eines Malers an seinen Sohn* and *Brief eines jungen Dichters an einen jungen Maler* can be read as an ironic reversal of Schlegel’s *Aufforderung an die Maler der jetzigen Zeit* (32).

See for instance Horn. Beginning with Hoffmeister and Wittkowski, most scholars have assumed that Antonia conducted the mass.

I quote Kleist from the Deutsche Klassiker edition.

These formulations are the same in both versions (*Werke* 3, 290–92, version 1, and 291–93, version 2).

E.T.A. Hoffmann’s oeuvre provides the clearest examples of this view. One need only think of the conversations of the Serapion Brothers or of such stories as *Das öde Haus, Der Magnetiseur, Der unheimliche Gast*. 

Von Mücke’s argument (109f.) that the ancient Italian mass represents autonomous art, because of its difficulty and because it is not a part of the service as an oratorio would have been, completely misunderstands the nature of a musical mass and its place in Catholic ritual.

Von Mücke and Lubkoll present a similar view, mainly on the grounds that the text shows the dangers of autonomous art. This notion is problematic, since music is still closely associated with religion and an integral part of its ritual.

See particularly the Berglinger novella and the essay *Das eigentümliche Wesen der Tonkunst, und die Seelenlehre der heutigen Instrumentalmusik* from *Phantasien über die Kunst, für Freunde der Kunst*. Puschmann (55ff. and 63ff.) and Schmidt (272ff.) pointed out close textual links between *Die heilige Cäcilie* and texts from the *Herzensergießungen* and the *Phantasien*. 
Greiner and Hammermeister argue for a critique of Kant’s theory of the sublime, because the effects of music here are the very opposite of those Kant attributes to the sublime.

In this respect, the text parallels, rather than subverts, the Berglinger novella. Puschmann pointed out the similarity to Berglinger who died of a Nervenfieber after conducting his greatest work (55f.). Antonia’s death also constitutes a parallel to Hoffmann’s Don Juan, Rat Krespel and, most significantly, Das Sanctus.

Neumann and Heine argue that the brothers are declared mad as part of a politically motivated effort to marginalize and silence dissent. Wittkowski sees the «ernste und feierliche Heiterkeit» (Werke 3, 297) which the asylum attendants ascribe to the brothers, and the report that they die «eines heitern und vergnügten Todes» (Werke 3, 313), as incompatible with madness (21 and 23). Brown goes so far as to claim that the effect of the music on the brothers was positive, and Allan saw their behaviour as a form of true ecstatic worship.

Horn forcefully makes this point when he states that «[die] Gleichsetzung von rechtem Glauben und Irrsinn» turns the tale into «eine bitterböse Karikatur auf eine Legende» (192). See also Schmidt (281).

Schön herr and Mattli are exceptions to this trend. Schön herr rightly argues that the tale reflects Hoffmann’s ambivalent attitude to the autonomy art achieves in Romantic aesthetics. Yet he also ignores the embedded narrative and the analogy of the butterfly, and his conclusion – that Bettina is reeducated into a subservience to Romantic aesthetics – rests on a reading of the venue of the ending which the wording of the text cannot support. Mattli places Das Sanctus in the context of Hoffmann’s other tales involving the death of a female singer, pays due attention to the analogy of the butterfly and to the embedded narrative, and thus highlights certain ominous undertones in the happy ending.

I cite Hoffmann’s works from the Winkler edition. References are given in parentheses, NS = Nachtstücke.

Die Elixiere des Teufels offers further proof that Hoffmann tended to be critical of monasticism.

Later interpretations of the frame tale essentially present variations of this notion. See Mattli 57–58, notes 77–80.

The text gives no information as to where this room is, what its usual purpose might be, or who, if anyone, is present besides the travelling enthusiast. There is thus nothing to support Schön herr’s claim that it is «free of all heteronomous functions and references,» and «an auratic site where the self-referentiality of art itself becomes a cult» (15).

See Mattli 91.

Works Cited


