

Giacomo Meyerbeer:
Jephtas Gelübde (Jephtha's Vow)
- Orchestral Score

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Text compiled, edited and introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

Music edited by

Mark Starr

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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MEYER-BEER

Giacomo Meyerbeer. Contemporary lithograph of the young composer (c. 1820)

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FOREWORD

Most singers, musicians and opera lovers will be surprised to learn that Meyerbeer composed an opera entitled *Jephtas Gelübde*. After some initial curiosity, many may also be skeptical that an unknown opera could be very good or even remarkable and fresh—especially since this is Meyerbeer’s first opera, and he was only 20 when he composed it. The primary question must be: is the music that Meyerbeer composed of great interest? Does this opera deserve to be revived in the theatre based on its musical merits?

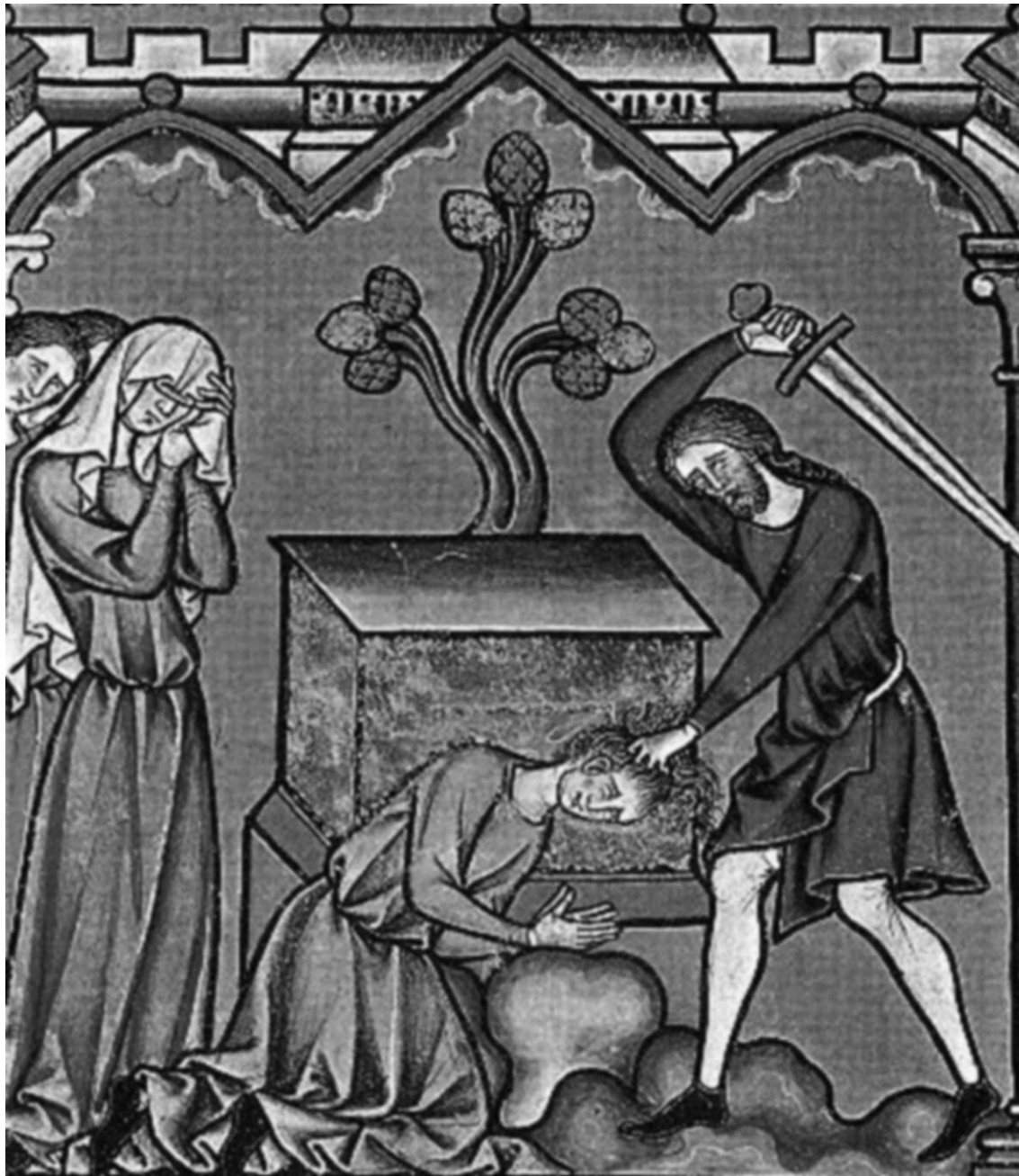
Here is a hitherto unpublished opera, unperformed for 200 years, a completely unknown *bel canto* work by a major but unjustly neglected composer—with music that is worth reviving in the 21st century. It is this excitement of discovery that is the justification for publishing this performing edition.

The opera, whose final rehearsals were conducted by the composer in person, was admirably produced by the Munich Court Opera on 23 December 1812. Already its novelty was a source of comment. A contemporary notice commented:

“A delicate sensibility, united to a profound and mature insight into the workings of the impassioned human heart, is manifested throughout in a grand and elevated style that gives promise of something great in the future.”

This reviewer was a man of refined feeling, and at the same time a prophet. Posterity has not even taken the trouble to examine this highly significant youthful work, assuming from its limited performances that it failed to please the public and was of slight value. It has been uncritically accepted that the opera was “bombastic”, “scholastic”, and a by-product of the ludicrous Abbé Vogler’s subversive influence. In fact, Meyerbeer’s progress to mastership can be seen in a completely new light once one knows the *Jephta* score. That this score enfolded seeds for the loftiest growth has been perceived by no one since that Munich review.

—R.I.L.



Jephtha's Sacrifice. From the Maciejowski Bible (c. 1250)

INTRODUCTION

Alois Wilhelm Schreiber's and Giacomo [Jakob] Meyerbeer's *Jephtas Gelübde*:
God, War, Death and the Covenant of Love

1. Origins and First Performance

There is no detailed record of the composition of *Jephtas Gelübde*. The first specific mention occurs in Meyerbeer's diary which he began in April 1812. The 20-year-old composer travelled in March of that year with his tutor, the Abbé Vogler, to Munich, where, on 23 December *Jephtas Gelübde*, "an *opera seria* in three acts, with ballet, the poem by Alois Schreiber, set to music by J. Meyerbeer", was performed at the Court Opera. The composer himself described the occasion in his diary:

"... At last on the 23 December (a Wednesday) my opera *Jephtas Gelübde* was produced for the first time. The rehearsals had begun on 18 November, but were interrupted several times. The opera was performed 3 times. Deliberate and accidental hindrances of every sort intruded, and even on 20 December I was not certain whether the opera would be performed on the 23rd. Anxiety, annoyance and vexation of every sort bothered me in these 6 weeks. I was nevertheless rewarded by an almost perfect performance. Apart from Jephta (played very poorly by Lanius), I had reason to be satisfied with everyone. All the pieces apart from No.1, No.8 and No.11 were applauded. Harlas surpassed herself. I wrote 2 new scenes (completely tailored to her individuality) which she sang to perfection. At the end she was called out tumultuously. I also wrote a new scene and cavatina for Weixelbaum; he sang the latter with particular charm. His acting was more natural than usual. The ballet master Crux, in the space of 10 days, purposefully and effectively arranged the many ballets which are integral to the action. The orchestra was simply dynamic in all the ensembles and decisive moments. In individual passages, however, their performance was not polished. *Jephta* was repeated on 29 December then put away for the while because Harlas has left for Vienna."

2. The Librettist

The librettist Dr Alois Wilhelm Schreiber (1761–1841) was an academic, a professor of Aesthetics at Heidelberg University, who wrote numerous lyrics and novels, as well as popular histories and travel books about the Rhine area. The Old Testament subject had been treated musically before Meyerbeer, but only Handel's oratorio *Jephta* (1751) and the opera *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774) by Gluck, utilizing a kindred material, would appear to have exercised any influence on the young composer. Chapter 11 of the Book of Judges describes Jephtha as leading the Israelites in battle against Ammon and, as the result of a rash vow, sacrificing his daughter after defeating the Ammonites. He had sworn that, if successful in battle, he would sacrifice the first living creature he met on returning home—as he arrived, his daughter ran out to meet him, and he was forced to offer her up.

Schreiber's libretto *Jephtas Gelübde*, the first to be set by Meyerbeer, is in itself an interesting literary artefact, and also reflects Reform Judaism's adaptation of Jewish tradition to suit Enlightenment ideals (as supremely embodied in Lessing's play *Nathan der Weise*, 1778–9). Schreiber had already provided the text for Meyerbeer's oratorio *Gott und die Natur* (1811) where a theology of creation and an eschatological faith in resurrection had been propounded. Now in his libretto, the poet has devised a domestic drama within the topical context of national warfare, all shaped by the terms of reference of a well-known biblical narrative. The libretto works effectively as a drama in its own right because of some well conceived dramatic scenes and because of a certain strength of language notable for its powerful imagery.

3. A Biblical Pastoralism

The work opens within the established conventions of the late 18th-century pastoral heritage of the *opéra-comique* and the *Singspiel*. The idyllic first scene for Sulima, Tirzah and their friends (No. 1) is developed in terms of the vintage, a situation that captures a sense of agricultural activity and autumnal ripeness, and one that carries the

overtones of the pressed grapes and wine of the Passover and the Eucharist. The Biblical context, the simple agrarian culture of early ancient Israelite Canaan, is effectively sketched, with the *larmoyante* characteristics of the Rococo pastoral. Sulima (the name is a variant on the Hebrew *shulamith*, “peaceable”) emerges as the obedient daughter, with a deeply-felt love for her father, allied to a strong sense of duty—two qualities crucial to her later dramatic role. This filial love is reinforced by her sense of probity, revealed in the relations with her beloved Asmavett (or *amets-maveth*, “strong until death”), and also with Asmavett’s rival in love, Abdon (“destruction” or “place of perdition”). A sense of righteousness through adherence to the Law, the Torah, underpins the situation effectively. This reinforces the notions of God and country that emerge early on and become a major feature of the thematic underpinning of the plot, both on superficial and submerged levels. The use of emblematic names has already indicated these deeper purposes. Jephtha’s integrity is established in terms of his dedication to both religious and patriotic concepts, admirably recounted by Sulima to the aspiring young soldier Asmavett. These become touchstones of value, and through the vector of self-sacrifice, help to develop the central sacrificial motif of the story. Asmavett can hope to gain Jephtha’s attention and admiration only if he is prepared to confront the enemy that threatens the pastoral paradise of the Promised Land, and prove himself in loyal opposition to the invading Ammonites.

4. Militarism and Politics

The introduction of this aggressive motif begins to expand the range of thematic reference, as militarism and politics press in on the pastoral order, contentment and predictability. Jephtha’s own situation reinforces these signs of contradiction, by his social exclusion through illegitimacy, and the role he is called on to play despite his personal hurt and grievances. It is not an exaggeration to see in this situation a disguised allusion to contemporary events. The context of the Napoleonic Wars, which by the time the opera was written were entering into the last tumultuous stages characterized by French aggression, was stirring up great patriotism in the German states, especially Prussia. The Emancipation of the Prussian Jews in 1812 allowed Jews to participate for the first time in the patriotic response. Indeed, Wilhelm Beer (1797—1850), Meyerbeer’s second younger brother, was among the Jewish volunteers, joining the Prussian army at just sixteen years old. Meyerbeer himself seems to have had a crisis of conscience over his reluctance to be part of the military movement, instead following his artistic destiny which, of course, would bring renown of another kind. It became for him a typically Romantic struggle with conflicting impulses of self-actualization opposing obedience to social expectation and military discipline. The motif of exclusion within exclusion so dominant in this scenario must have spoken deeply to the heart of the young composer, who felt rejected from society as whole because of his Jewishness, and from Prussia in particular because of his inability to respond to the war effort.

5. A Destructive Principle

The unravelling of the pastoral frame of reference in the libretto is continued in the frustrations of threatened love experienced by the young couple. They see their love as a source of hope, it “strews roses on barren soil”, as they declare in their first duet (No. 2). This motif will be developed when Jephtha arrives. In the concerted number (No. 5), the call of love counteracts the autumnal imagery of decline, and, like roses and thorns, joys and sorrows are seen as inextricably intertwined in life. But the appearance of Abdon constitutes a radical threat to any conventional pastoral joy. This character assumes the role of an Elizabethan/Romantic villain—hero/avenger (in the mode of Charles Robert Maturin’s imminent dramatic adaptation of the type in his play *Bertram*, 1816). Schreiber’s depiction is in the type of Iago, a malevolent observer who seeks, out of jealousy and the sheer principle of evil, to bring about a “monstrous birth” based on ruination of any light and happiness (William Shakespeare, *Othello* [1604], 1.3.410). In this respect Abdon is presented as a malcontent, but, as is revealed in his spoken observations, one fuelled through his social displacement by Jephtha as military leader. His foiled love, or rather passion, for Sulima carries an immediate vividness of application, but actually serves no vital dramaturgical role in the scenario. Abdon is a foil to Asmavett and (more significantly) to Jephtha, but his role becomes one of decorative thematic counterpoint rather than one of organic causal necessity to the development of the plot. He could be removed, and there would be no harm done to the progress of the action.

Thematically, however, Abdon is interesting, and in his darker, overtly sexual and ambitious characteristics, generates a more sinister inverted side to the themes of the story. He has all the marks of the Byronic villain–hero, like the Giaour (1813) or Manfred (1817): an outsider, consumed with rancour and smouldering passion, but with no adequate focus for his attentions. Sulima is too underdeveloped and innocent; Asmavett is too idealistic and stereotyped to be an effective rival. Abdon’s irruption into the pastoral framework introduces a register of passion, eroticism and moribund imagery. He becomes a countersign both to the pure and childlike love of Sulima and Asmavett, with his sensual fantasies and phallic sword, and to the noble and high-minded motivation and leadership of Jephtha, but never an effective agent of the drama. Thus in the act 1 finale (No. 6) his embittered asides serve to highlight Jephtha’s natural leadership. His role is totally emblematic: in the imagery of violent feeling (in his daydreams of sexual union with Sulima), death (“Die Schatten in Leichental” in the act 2 trio, No. 8), envy (of Asmavett and Jephtha in act 2), and destructiveness (in his espousal of Sulima’s sacrifice as a tool of his personal vengeance on her and on her father in act 3). But his role peters out with no dramaturgical closure.

6. Et in Arcadia ego

The imagery of death is expanded beyond Abdon’s personal frustrations in act 2. Here, with Sulima’s ritualized mourning at her mother’s tomb (No. 7), the pastoral register is expanded to enclose the traditional *memento mori* “Et in Arcadia ego”. This is part of the developing themes of bereavement and sacrificial death that increasingly come to dominate the opera. Notions of justice are propelled into a clash with personal passion and self-importance (whether this is frustrated ambition with Abdon, or personal worth with Jephtha). Abdon sees himself as a descendant of Cain, with his propensity for evil crouching at the door (cf. Genesis 4:7). His aria is a classic statement of vengeance for its own sake, filled with urgent feeling, lies and hatred. He develops a register of Edenic and postlapsarian images, with the Garden of Love transformed into a field producing contagious nettles, a Paradise Lost by love denied, and ruled by the serpent of despair that gnaws bloodily at his heart (No. 4, and the dialogue, act 1 scene 3). This wasted idyll feeds into the act 2 finale (No. 11) where Jephtha’s triumphant homecoming is ruined by the untimely emergence of Sulima from his house, to be the victim of his rash and self-centred oath. The oath is now a vector for “the snake-bite of despair” (act 2 finale). Abdon here, and in the act 3 finale (No. 15), is like an emotional succubus, secretly and damagingly feasting on Jephtha’s sorrows.

7. Sacrifice, Death and New Life

The world of offering and dying grows darker in act 3 where the emblems of death and the rash promises of sacrifice are intensified. In Jephtha’s tortured soliloquy (No. 12), the vision of the underworld of Sheol, with its shrouded ghosts and desolating loss, deepens his human anguish. The memories of his dead wife, of Sulima’s innocent childhood, and the incumbency of sacrifice, look proleptically to the goldsmith Eleazar’s soliloquy in act 4 of Fromental Halévy’s *La Juive* (1835) (“Und ich soll sie morden”). Could Halévy’s librettist Eugène Scribe have seen or known about the libretto of *Jephta* from Meyerbeer, one of his principal collaborators?

Sulima’s total resignation and tranquillity again recall Rachel in the Scribe–Halévy opera, and pull together the recurrent theme of Sulima’s total filial devotion to her father, present from the first pages of the libretto. She reveals herself as a character of prophetic power, strength and resolution, in contrast to the despair of her rather feeble beloved, and the self-centred egocentricity of Jephtha’s immovability. She has a vision of the divine love that gives the afterlife a new dimension, far beyond that of the shadowy Sheol, as a true homeland of rest. The faith in resurrection, a relatively late development in Old Testament understanding (cf. Daniel 12:2), is a theological anachronism in terms of the Book of Judges, but continues the ideas Schreiber had already proposed in his earlier oratorio text for Meyerbeer. Sulima’s faith encompasses a radical insight developed in her earlier lamentation at her mother’s tomb (No. 7). Her act 3 aria is a true mortal valediction and an entry into new perceptions (No. 13), elaborated further in the trio that follows with Jephtha and Asmavett (No. 14): “Ah, the earth offers only suffering, our homeland lies beyond”. The drama rapidly moves out of the personal focus of private decisions to the wider theme of human and divine justice.

8. A New Perception of the Divine

The advent of the act 3 finale sees the resurgence of the imagery of mortality and holocaust, but here human vengeance and retribution are contrasted with a new Biblical perception of the divine justice and mercy. This is where the venerated heritage of Gluck's *tragédie lyrique* is most in evidence. In the midst of an incremental sense of antique grandeur, sustained by the composer's nascent sense of ceremony and circumstance, the imagery of sacrifice gives way to a new spiritual greatness, where intercession reveals a divine clemency and true worship in spirit and in truth. Genuine moral intention and pliancy of heart, in the manner of the issues explored in Heinrich von Kleist's *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* (1811), are announced salvifically by the High Priest as *deus ex machina*, when he emerges from his prayerful deliberations in the Temple. Perceptions of a God of sacrifice and vengeance give way to a life-affirming vision of a God of love and compassion (cf. Psalm 103), present in the beauty and detail of his creation which is in turn reflected in the hearts of humankind, and in the discernment of the intention of the heart (cf. Psalm 104). This insight is celebrated in the closing chorus of the opera. The scenario in this respect is again ahead of the Biblical narrative (Judges 11) where the primitive stage in Israel's development prevails in the survival of Canaanite notions of human sacrifice. Rather, it consciously reflects the later enlightened insights of Genesis 22 (albeit paradoxically since this is an earlier text in the Biblical narrative), where the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham is halted by divine intervention, and a new dispensation inaugurated, based on the revelation of the divine loving-kindness (*hesed*).

9. A Personal Imperative for Life

It seems that many of the religious themes developed by Meyerbeer in his French operas are already present in *Jephtas Geliübde*. Did this scenario possibly form a stimulus for themes the composer would work out later in life? Sulima and Sélika (in *L'Africaine*, 1865), from his first and his last operas respectively, both in their own ways represent themes of sacrifice and unfulfilled love in a selfless woman. The story of his first opera is a traumatic one and possibly provided enough material to form the basis for a life-long struggle with the nature of what is required of us by God, by society, by our own inner perceptions of self, and by the very propitiatory purpose of sacrifice itself.

The format of the biblical story is also a powerful one for communicating other social and political thoughts. Sulima is a dutiful daughter, Jephtha proves his obedience to his people and to God, and human sacrifice is prevented by an act of grace. Meyerbeer himself had just become a fully-fledged Prussian citizen, but was always to be aware of wider social perception of himself as a Jew, especially in the German-speaking countries. As a young man, and particularly at this time, he was also sensitive to his obligations to the state, which he chose to disregard. This story and its arrangement as an operatic fable seems to address these issues all at once.

10. Symphonic Anticipation

The orchestral apparatus is similar to that used by Meyerbeer in his early oratorio *Gott und die Natur*, excepting that the percussion is augmented by cymbals, triangle, side drum and tambourine, with harp and guitars already reflecting the young composer's special interest in fresh and original instrumental colours. The overture resembles Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* in form and content. A similar conflict between paternal love and devotion to country is used as the basic structuring principle of Meyerbeer's overture. But the young composer himself musically conjures up the foreboding of future horror, depicted long before the actual catastrophe. With a characteristic urge toward pictorial distinctness, even at this early stage he consciously outvies his model. Gluck sets forth an abstraction of the dramatic idea, whereas Meyerbeer paints a picture of the tragedy itself, a symphonic anticipation of the essential features of the action. In the process he provides a musical tone poem of the dramatic events, and also of the emotional and ethical concerns arising from them.

Thematically the overture is pulled between the private music that opens act 3, Jephtha's inner turmoil caused by his vow (No. 12), and the public rejoicing at the end of act 2 that greets his triumphal return from the conflict with the Ammonites (No. 11), the imperative of national survival. It is an enthralling recital. The desperation, darkness and rawness of the vow, the gaiety of the crowd, the tender oboe music representing the vulnerable power of love, and the

way all these elements intertwine and struggle with one another to reach some sort of resolution, are rendered with a sureness of touch and maturity that seem astonishing. Here the hand of the future master is clearly in evidence.

11. Ceremony and Grandeur

The opera gives extensive evidence of Meyerbeer's concern, even in his first work, for the elements of ceremony and grandeur. The substantial crowd scenes of the three finales alone require extensive stage organization, and are characterized by order emerging from fear and confusion (act 1), celebration disintegrating into dissent and conflict (act 2), and the rituals of mourning transformed into general celebration (act 3). The welding of the people into a fighting force culminates in a ritualized dance; the victorious return from battle is accompanied by a triumphal march and ends in civil confrontation; the preparations for sacrifice are heralded by a death march, the prayers of the priests and a renewal of civil confrontation, before the final celebration of a new unity born of reprieve and rejoicing. The triumphal and death marches represent the two poles of experience explored in the work: the pull between life and death, light and darkness, faith and superstition.

12. Dance as a Vector of Meaning

Act 1 moves from light to darkness, act 2 from darkness to light and back to darkness again, act 3 from black despair to the light of life and love. At the very heart of the opera is the love duet for Sulima and Asmavett (No. 9), and at the centre of the duet is the word "Licht" (light). These symbolic movements in the scenario are characterized and underpinned by dance, the importance of which is reflected even in the generic designation of the opera ("a serious opera with ballet"). Dances of a range of mood and styles punctuate the action: from the innocent games of Sulima's friends in the pastoral opening scenes (No. 1), through the eerie stylized Dance of the Warriors at the end of act 1 (No. 6), the celebratory dances of the young women welcoming home the conquering army in the act 2 finale (No. 11), the gloomy obsequies of mourning before the Temple (with its exotic instrumental colouring—muffled and unmuffled drums, guitars and harps, and a stage band of clarinets and bassoons), to the final joy of release in the act 3 finale, which provides another opportunity for dance (No. 15). For the première the choreography was effectively devised by the Bavarian court ballet master Anton Crux, who until 1778 had been *premier danseur* in Mannheim under Étienne Lauchery.

The diary entries for Meyerbeer's later sojourns in Vienna (1813) and Italy (1818) record many visits to the ballet, especially in Milan (for the monumental Neo-Classical works of Salvatore Viganò and Gaetano Gioia). It is evident that this interest was present from the very first of his operatic creations. The importance of dance became a constant factor throughout the composer's career, and *Jephtas Gelübde* demonstrates that his central role in the creation of the Romantic ballet emerged from a very early interest.

13. A Concern with Form

Meyerbeer's consistent concern for form and its malleability is also constantly in evidence, from the innocent folk-like simplicity of the pastoral opening chorus and canonical ensemble of act 1 (No. 5), to the architectural unfolding of the multi-movement act 2 finale with its disposition of large forces and grandiose inspiration (No. 11). The charming but fundamentally ineffectual tenor role (written for Georg Weixelbaum) is given beautiful romances (No. 3 and 9), affecting duets (Nos. 2 and 10) and a trio (No. 14), full of the sentiments of love and sweet parting, underscored by mellifluous and decorated high-flown melody and extreme tessitura (especially the cavatina, No. 9). The bass-baritone villain (created by Georg Mittermaier) expresses himself in a very original vengeance aria, with all its furious runs (No. 4), but, apart from his pleading with Sulima in the trio with Tirzah (No. 8), has no other solo. The heroine emerges as gentle but strong, devoted to the memory of her dead mother, unquestioning in obedience to her revered father, caught up in a vision of faith that carries her beyond a fear of death. Her two solos are conceived on a grand scale, with accompanying chorus (No. 7), and with obbligato violin (No. 13), and are torn between modes of mourning and exultation, threnody and panegyric. Her complex and demanding vocal lines (written for the soprano Hélène Harlas)

reflect the nature of her experience and character, with the melismas and embellishment a correlative of faith and resolution, even in the trio of parting with Jephtha and Asmavett (No. 14).

14. A Psychological Engagement

Jephtha himself is conceived powerfully, and shown to be a man suffering from the burdens of the past—the guilt of illegitimacy, social exclusion, bereavement in widowerhood, socially disregarded ability, and finally the anguish of his great public vow that seems to solve many of these problems and bring success, only to ensnare him in the most painful potential loss of all, the life of his daughter. All these elements are reflected in his strangely varied vocal presence (conceived for Christian Lanius), veering between restrained observation and impassioned outburst, long periods of silence, and the extended elaboration of his great act 3 monologue (No. 12). Here all the elements of his character and experience are brought together in a dark and deeply affecting psychological study remarkably perceptive for a first opera. The weight of the past, the anguish of the present, the demons of unresolved emotions and loyalties seemingly divided between faith and love, are all conjured up and sustained. The extended and stormy introduction, the extraordinary use of three solo bassoons and muffled drums, the mournful intrusion of the grieving offstage Chorus of Virgins (cf. Judges 11:38), the vocal demands made on the singer, capture in sound something of the dark dullness and grief of the entangled reflections. Jephtha's alternation between outburst and silence is exemplified in the finales where, although the arbiter of the action of the opera, he is silent for much of the time (brooding until the inspiration of his vow in act 1; silent for one third of the great second finale; supine as though exhausted by his anguished outburst in the final scene). Asmavett and Abdon, whose solo expressions are limited, are used to develop the elements of confrontation that shape the great ensembles, as extensions of voices for and against Jephtha, and by implication, Sulima, and the issues of life and faith implied in the actions of both.

15. A Technical Mastery, an Enduring Perception of Beauty

The work represents a young composer's apprehension of a rich musical heritage. The score of *Jephtas Gelübde* shows that from Handel he had learned the musical portrayal of Old Testament incidents; Gluck's example taught him psychological profundity. Meyerbeer's accomplished writing for the human voice, his instinctive feel for the vocal types and the style of singing required for various situations, and the different requirements of the operatic schools of his day, is already clearly in evidence in this work. So is his famed mastery of orchestration, and his expert handling of so many traditional operatic forms. This is not a learning piece (like the exaggerated experimentation of Wagner's *Die Feen* or *Das Liebesverbot*). All the musical characteristics that Meyerbeer would develop in later works are already present here in a remarkably sophisticated way. However, technical mastery in itself, operatic expertise at such an early age, will still not be enough draw people to hear this opera. The focus of concern will always be the nature and quality of the music itself: are the musical themes beautiful, fresh, memorable, exciting and even breath-taking?

What is amazing about this opera, with an overture and 15 numbers, is that there is not a weak piece in the score. Some pieces are incidental and occasional, others much stronger; but all are carefully structured and controlled in length and purpose. Nothing needs to be cut. The finale to Act 2 is monumental in design and strikingly purposeful music by any standard. So are the psychological probings of Jephtha's act 3 Soliloquy, Sulima's rhapsodic arias of hope from acts 2 and 3, Abdon's desolating Revenge Scene in act 1, and the melting *bel canto* of the duet for Sulima and Asmavett at the heart of the opera. The issues of love, death and duty addressed by this story, and realized in this fresh and unknown music, have the power to address the heart still.

16. An Auspicious Beginning

Some days after the première, on 2 January 1813, Meyerbeer left Munich in order to bring out his second opera, *Alimelik*, in Stuttgart a fortnight later. According to the Abbé Vogler, Meyerbeer had learned everything that it was possible for him to teach and for his pupil to learn, and was now on the way to winning the admiration of the world. So, already in this first opera, with its surprisingly textured contexts, the young eagle had learned to fly.

“I am flooded by memories of every kind when I think of my 9 months’ stay in Munich, the pleasant ones far outweighing anything unhappy. Munich will always remain remarkable for me (beyond even the delightful social contacts I made), because it was there that my first opera was staged, there that my musical apprenticeship ended [...], and finally because it is the first place where I won serious artistic regard [...].”
(Meyerbeer's Diary, 1813).

—Robert Ignatius Letellier
Cambridge, 11 August 2011

LIBRETTO

JEPHTAS GELÜBDE

Ernsthafte Oper in drei Aufzügen mit Ballett

Gedichtet von

Professor Alois Schreiber

In Musik gesetzt von

Jakob Meyerbeer

Personen:

Jephtha
Sulima, seine Tochter
Tirza, ihre Vertraute
Asmavett, ein Krieger
Abdon, Vorsteher eines Stammes
Drei Boten
Drei Vorsteher der Stämme
Der Hohepriester
Volk, Priester, Leviten, Krieger
Amonitische Gefangene, Jungfrauen, Kinder

Die Handlung geht in und bei der Stadt Maspha vor.

JEPHTHA'S VOW

A Serious Opera in Three Acts with Ballet

Libretto by

Professor Alois Schreiber

Set to music by

Jacob Meyerbeer

Dramatis personae:

Jephtha
Sulima, his daughter
Tirzah, her confidante
Asmavett, a warrior
Abdon, leader of a tribe
Three messengers
Three tribal leaders
The High Priest
People, Priests, Levites, Warriors
Ammonite Prisoners, Young Women, Children

The action takes place in and near the city of Mizpah.

WORLD PREMIÈRE

23 December 1812

Munich, Hofoper

JephthaChristian Lanius
Sulima Hélène Harlas
AsmavettGeorg Weixelbaum
Abdon..... Georg Mittermaier
TirzaJosephine Flerx
Der Hohepriester(Herr) Schwadke
Conductor.....Ferdinand Franzl

SOURCES CONSULTED FOR TRANSLATION

Jephtas Gelübde; Oper in drei Aufzügen mit Ballet.
Alois Schreiber (Gedicht), Jakob Meyerbeer (Musik). Munich, 1812.

(The first edition of the published libretto contains the text of all musical numbers but lacks the spoken dialogue. Neither a full orchestral score nor a piano-vocal score of the opera was ever published. The spoken dialogue for the present libretto was taken from a copy of the autograph score in the British Library.)

NOTES ON THE BIBLICAL STORY OF JEPHTHA

The story of Jephtha is recounted at length in Judges 10:6–12:7. Jephtha is noted in the Bible for three deeds: defeating the Ammonite army, sacrificing his daughter in fulfillment of a vow, and slaughtering a group of Ephraimites in an inter-tribal war.

Jephtha is described as being prosperous but having a blemished birth (he was the child of a prostitute and was born illegitimately). When he was a young man his half-brothers drove him out of their home; he went to the nearby mountains and became the leader of a band of mercenaries. Years later, the Ammonites laid claim to a portion of Gilead and began invading the land. The elders of Gilead, aware of Jephtha's military acumen, summoned him to command their troops. Jephtha invoked the Lord for success, vowing to sacrifice as a burnt offering anything coming out of his house to greet him upon his return from battle. Jephtha defeated the Ammonite army. When he arrived home, his daughter came out of his house to meet him. She was sacrificed in fulfillment of his vow, having been allowed to bewail her virginity upon the mountains for two months. Jephtha lived six more years as a judge of his people.

The story is anomalous in its origins for several reasons. First, the law of Moses explicitly forbade human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21), and Jephtha, upon whom "the Spirit of the Lord descended" (Judges 11:29) would never have broken such a strict commandment. Second, there is no other mention in the Bible (nor is there any archaeological evidence) that God ever condoned or accepted human sacrifice. Why did Jephtha not consider that making such a vow might anger God against him, instead of swaying Him to his side? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would never allow the slaughter of an innocent person in His name (cf Genesis 22).

The story of the vow belongs to a primitive early strand of Ancient Israel's history. It is probably an ancient tradition, a type of etiology, reflecting the struggle to replace the hybrid religious practices of the native Canaanites (condoning human sacrifice) with the pure monotheism of the invading Hebrews (and its abhorrence of such practices).

AKT 1*[Jephtas Weingarten. Im Hintergrunde Jephtas Haus.]***Introduktion****Nr. 1 – Chor**

WINZERINNEN
Fröhliches Leben
Schwellet die Brust,
Herrliche Reben
Tragen mit Lust.

WINZER
Munter, junge Winzerinnen,
Jede füll ihr Körbchen an
Ist die Arbeit nun getan,
Werden Spiel und Tanz beginnen.

CHOR
Fröhliche Schar,
Pflücke die Traube,
Kränze das Haar
Mit frischem Laube.
Doch koste behutsam die goldene Frucht
Oft hat sie schon tückisch zur Liebe versucht.

TIRZA
Wandrer, komm, der Tag ist schwül,
Hier ist Schatten, hier ists kühl.
Setze dich in unsre Laube,
Labe dich am Saft der Traube!
Die Traube erfreuet des Menschen Herz,
Doch wecket sie auch der Liebe Schmerz.

CHOR
Die Traube erfreuet, u.s.w.

TIRZA
Wanderer, kehrest du zurück
In der Heimat stillem Glück,
Pflanz um deine Hütte Reben,
Die dem Müden Schatten geben.

CHOR
Die Traube erfreuet, u.s.w.

ACT 1*[Jephtha's vineyard. In the background Jephtha's house.]***Introduction****No. 1 – Chorus**

FEMALE VINE-TENDERS
A happy life
Swells our breast,
Splendid vines
Produce in abundance.

A VINE-TENDER
Gaily, young vine-tenders,
Fill your baskets to the brim;
When your day's work is done,
Games and dancing will begin.

CHORUS
O happy troupe,
Pick the grapes,
Wreath your hair
With fresh green leaves.
But sip with care the golden juice,
That too often entices to love.

TIRZAH
Come, traveller, the day is sultry,
It is cool and shady here.
Seat yourself under our vines,
Refresh yourself with our grapes' juice!
Grapes gladden the human heart,
But also awaken the pain of love.

CHORUS
Grapes gladden, etc.

TIRZAH
Traveller, when you return,
To the peaceful joy of home,
Plant vines around your cottage,
So to provide shade for the weary.

CHORUS
Grapes gladden, etc.

Szene 1

Sulima, Tirza.

SULIMA

O wie scheidet das Jahr so reich an Segen! Scheint der Herbst nicht uns zuzurufen. Sehet wie freundlich der Herr ist.

TIRZA

Und siehe, wie reizend in unsern Körbchen das Erwählteste gemengt, was uns die Gärten und der Weinstock schenkten.

SULIMA

Dank eurer Liebe, die alles so fleißig geordnet, eurer Liebe zu mir und meinem Vater. Heut' kommt er zurück. O wie wird das unsere Freude erhöhen! Und wir überraschen ihn mit unsern Körbchen voll Früchten, denn er glaubt die Ernte noch nicht vollendet.

TIRZA

Frommes Mädchen, füllt denn der Gedanke an deinem Vater allein deine ganze Seele? Bewahrtest du nichts von den Früchten für den, der so innig sein Herz dir zugewendet, für...

SULIMA

Schweige, gute Tirza. Es ziemt mir nicht eines Jünglings Bemerkung zu begünstigen ehe mein Vater...

[zu den Gespielinnen, die mit ihren Körbchen voll Früchten sich um sie versammelt]

Geht, meine Lieben! Laßt uns die Körbchen nach Hause tragen. Mein Vater soll durch ein kleines Fest überrascht werden; ich folge euch sogleich.

[Tirza mit den übrigen Mädchen gehen in das Haus, Sulima geht nach dem Hintergrunde, wo sie einen Korb mit Früchten unter einen Weinstock hervorholt.]

Scene 1

Sulima, Tirzah.

SULIMA

The year is passing with such abundant blessings! Autumn seems to call out to us. See how generous the Lord is.

TIRZAH

And see how temptingly the choicest fruits from garden and vine mingle in our baskets!

SULIMA

Thanks to your loving-kindness, your devotion to me and to my father, which has arranged everything so perfectly. He returns today. Oh, how our joy will be increased! And we will surprise him with our fruit-laden baskets, for he thinks the harvest has not yet ripened.

TIRZAH

My virtuous friend, is it only the thought of your father that fills your whole soul? Will you not set aside any of the fruit for the one who has so tenderly devoted his heart to you, for...

SULIMA

Hush, dear Tirzah. It is not proper for me to favour a young man's attentions before my father...

[to her childhood friends, who gather round her with their baskets of fruit]

Go, dear friends! Let us carry these baskets to the house, and surprise my father with a little feast. I will join you in a moment.

[Tirzah and the rest of the young women go into the house; Sulima goes to the back where she produces a basket of fruit from under a grapevine.]

Szene 2

Sulima, Asmavett.

ASMAVETT [*erscheint, indem Sulima ihren
Gespielinnen folgen will*]
Sulima! Theure!

SULIMA [*mit jungfräulichem Erschrecken*]
Asmavett!

ASMAVETT
Zürnest du, Sulima?

SULIMA
Zürnen? Weshalb?

ASMAVETT
Als ich den Pfad durch die Weinberge herabging, da
hörte ich die Gesänge deiner Gespielinnen, es zog
mich hierher!

SULIMA
Und du vergessest meine Bitte, mich nicht
aufzusuchen, bis mein Vater wieder zurückgekehrt ist.

ASMAVETT
Vergieb! aber ich vermag meinem Herzen nicht
widerstehen, das mich immer zu dir zieht. Ach,
Sulima! [*zu ihren Füßen*] Ich liebe dich
unaussprechlich.

SULIMA
Steh auf, Asmavett! Soll ich vor meinen Gespielinnen
erröthen wenn ich die Sitte verletzte, die den
Jungfrauen ein Heiligtum ist?

ASMAVETT [*aufstehend*]
Du verwirfst meine Liebe?

SULIMA
Nur unter meines Vaters Augen spreche ich von
meiner Neigung.

ASMAVETT
Darf ich vor ihm von meiner Liebe sprechen?

Scene 2

Sulima, Asmavett.

ASMAVETT [*appears just as Sulima is about to
follow her friends*]
Sulima! Dear one!

SULIMA [*with maidenly fright*]
Asmavett!

ASMAVETT
Are you angry, Sulima?

SULIMA
Angry? Why?

ASMAVETT
As I came down the path through the vineyard, I
heard your friends singing, and it drew me here!

SULIMA
And you have forgotten my plea not to come to see
me until my father's return.

ASMAVETT
Forgive me, but I cannot resist this heart of mine,
always drawing me to you. Ah, Sulima! [*kneeling
before her*] I love you so much!

SULIMA
Get up, Asmavett! Should I blush before my friends
by violating the custom that young women hold as
sacred?

ASMAVETT [*standing up*]
Are you casting aside my love?

SULIMA
Only under my father's watchful eye will I speak of
my feelings.

ASMAVETT
May I speak to him of my love?

SULIMA

Mache dich seines Herzens werth, und du wirst dann
meiniges werth seyn.

ASMAVETT

O zeige mir den Weg zu seinem Herzen!

SULIMA

Gott und das Vaterland sind ihm das Höchste.

ASMAVETT

Das Vaterland, das ihn verstieß?

SULIMA

O sage das nicht. Es kennt seinen Edelmuth, seine
Tapferkeit. Neid und Mißgunst nur ärgten den Flecken
seiner Geburt, die er einer Liebe verdankt, welche
nicht durch das Gesetz geheiligt war. *Sie* zwangen
seinen Vater ihn zu verstoßen, und zu enterben. Das
Vaterland denkt groß von ihm, wie er es verdient. Ach,
daß der Herr es in die Hände der Feinde gegeben hat.
O Asmavett, kannst du es ertragen, daß Amons rohe
Schaaren dem auserwählten Volk Verderben drohen.
Wär' ich wie du, ein Jüngling, waffenfähig, ich griff
voll Vertrauen auf Jakobs Gott zum Schwerte,
zerstreute wie einst Gideon die Feinde, und wäre
Jephtas Liebe dann gewiß.

ASMAVETT

O welch ein Geist spricht, Sulima, aus dir. Du merkst
jede Kraft, die in mir schlecht ist, und alles Gute dank'
ich dir. Dein Wort ist gleich dem Worte der Propheten,
die edle Thaten großen Lohn verheißen – Ringt nicht
mein Volk in dem Stunden der Gefahr? Ich stelle mich
in seiner Krieger Reihen, wie treuer Streiter für den
Väter Gott, begeistert soll mein Beyspiel manchen
merken. Ich kehre siegreich aus dem Streit zurück, und
den Vaterliebe sey mein Lohn. Doch darf ich darauf
dein Liebe hoffen?

SULIMA [*mit Verschämtheit*]

O dann bist du des schönsten Preises werth!

SULIMA

Prove yourself worthy of his heart, and then you will
be worthy of mine.

ASMAVETT

Oh, show me the way to his heart!

SULIMA

God and country are most precious to him.

ASMAVETT

The very country that disowned him?

SULIMA

Do not say that! The people know his nobility, his
courage. Envy and malice heightened the stigma of
his birth, which he blames on a love not blessed by
the Law. *This* forced his father to reject him, to
disown him. Our country thinks highly of him, as he
deserves. Alas, that the Lord should now give it into
the hands of the enemy! Oh, Asmavett, how can you
bear it that Ammon's ruthless hordes threaten the
Chosen People? Were I a man like you, able to bear
arms, I would seize my sword, filled with
confidence in Jacob's God, and destroy our enemy
as Gideon once did! I would then be certain of
Jephtha's love.

ASMAVETT

Sulima, how the Spirit speaks through you! You
mark every base feeling in me, and it is you I thank
for any good in me. Your voice is like that of the
prophets who promise great reward for noble
deeds. "Do not my people struggle in the hour of
danger?" I will place myself in the ranks of his
warriors as a loyal champion for the God of our
fathers; others will follow my example with fervour.
I will return victorious from battle, rewarded with
your Father's love. But could I then hope for your
love?

SULIMA [*with embarrassment*]

Oh, you will then deserve the loveliest prize!

Nr. 2 – Duett

ASMAVETT

Deine Liebe ist mein Leben,
Ohne sie such' ich den Tod!

SULIMA

Darf das Mädchen Liebe geben
Wenn der Blick des Vaters droht?

ASMAVETT

Doch ein Wörtchen darfst du sprechen,
Das wie (der?) Ton der Heimat klingt.

SULIMA [*traurig*]

Willst du junge Rosen brechen,
Eh' der Frühling welche bringt?

ASMAVETT

Werd ich je den Frühling sehen?

SULIMA

Hoffnung läßt nicht untergehen.

BEIDE

Die Hoffnung, sie streut
Rosen auf dürrer Sand;
Die Hoffnung, sie beut
Gern der Liebe die Hand.

ASMAVETT

Lebe wohl, im Schlachtgewühle
Brech' ich mir den Myrtenkranz.

SULIMA

Jüngling, lebe wohl, ich fühle
Deine heiße Liebe ganz.

ASMAVETT

Sulima, wenn ich dort falle,
Eine Träne weihst du mir?

SULIMA

Jüngling, meine Freuden alle
Steigen in das Grab mit dir.

ASMAVETT [*Asmavett will weggehen. Er hält nach
einigen Schritten sofort zurück.*]
Lebe wohl, und denke mein!

No. 2 – Duet

ASMAVETT

Your love is my life,
Without it I would seek death!

SULIMA

How can a maiden give her love
When a father's eye keeps watch?

ASMAVETT

But you could say a single word,
That would sound like the call of home.

SULIMA [*sadly*]

Would you pick a tender rose
Before springtime makes it bloom?

ASMAVETT

Will I ever see the springtime?

SULIMA

You must not give up hope.

BOTH

Hope, it strews
Roses on the barren sand.
Hope, it joyfully
Offers the hand of love.

ASMAVETT

Farewell, I shall win a crown of myrtle
For myself in the turmoil of battle.

SULIMA

Farewell, young man, I feel
Full well your ardent love for me.

ASMAVETT

Sulima, if I should die in battle,
Will you shed a tear for me?

SULIMA

Young man, all my happiness
Will descend into the grave with you.

ASMAVETT [*Asmavett turns to go, but stops after
a few steps.*]
Farewell, and remember me!

SULIMA

Lebe wohl, ich denke dein!

[Von hier an entfernen Sulima und Asmavett sich noch mehr von einander. Der Letztere trotz zeigt Sulima in die Tür des Gartenhauses.]

[Sulima geht in das Haus.]

ASMAVETT *[allein]*

Es hat mich doch kein Traum getäuscht, das Erwachen wäre schrecklich. Nein, ich habe sie gesehen – habe den süßen Ton ihrer Rede gehört – den Odem ihres Mundes getrunken.

Nr. 3 – Arie

ASMAVETT

Sie liebet mich! Ein himmlisches Entzücken
Durchströmet mein Gebein!
Ich möcht' an mich jedes Wesen drücken,
Denn Sulima ist mein.

Auf! auf zur Schlacht,
Wo die Schwerter klirren,
Wo die Pfeile schwirren,
Mir glänzt ein Stern in Todesnacht.

[mit erstrickter Stimme]

Sie liebet mich! O Erd', O Sonne!
Ihr umglänzet mich in hoher Pracht.
O Liebe! Lebens Zauberschein,
Ich bin berauscht in Wonne,
Denn Sulima ist mein.

[Asmavett geht ab.]

Szene 3

[Abdon, der Sulima und Asmavett belauscht hatte, tritt hinter einer Laube hervor.]

ABDON

Ha! was muß ich sehen und hören! Meine schönsten Hoffnungen zerreiet der milchbärtige Knabe. Und sie gestand' ihm ihre Liebe, und gegen mich war sie immer so züchtig und ehrbar, so kalt wie dieses Schwert, ehe es Menschenblut getrunken!

SULIMA

Farewell, I will remember you!

[From this point Sulima and Asmavett draw further apart from each other. The latter nevertheless shows Sulima to the door of the garden house.]

[Sulima goes into the house.]

ASMAVETT *[alone]*

I was deceived by no dream, with fearful waking!
No, I saw her, heard the sweet sound of her voice – drank in the breath from her lips.

No. 3 – Aria

ASMAVETT

She loves me! A heavenly rapture
Flows through my veins!
I could embrace each living creature,
For Sulima is mine.

Come! On to the battle!
Where swords clash,
Where arrows hum,
A star shines for me in the blackness of night.

[with stifled voice]

She loves me! O earth, O sun!
You shine around me in splendor.
O love! Enchanting light of life,
I am drunk with rapture,
For Sulima is mine.

[Asmavett leaves.]

Scene 3

[Abdon, who has been eavesdropping on Sulima and Asmavett, steps forward from behind an arbor.]

ABDON

Ah! What did I see and hear! That beardless boy is destroying my fondest hopes. And she confessed her love for him, but to me she has always been so demure and respectable, as cold as this blade before it has tasted human blood!

[Er befühlt die Schärfe seines Schwertes.]

Ja! du bist scharf und hart, und die Brust des Knaben
ist weich.

Nr. 4 – Arie

ABDON
Dich soll die Hölle fassen!
Verderben auf dein Haupt!
Den muß ich ewig hassen,
Der mir das Liebste raubt.

[Er verliert sich in wollüstiger Rückerinnerung.]

Ha, so zu umfassen,
Im heißen Verlangen
Den blühenden Leib.
Aus den Augen zu trinken
Himmlische Lust,
Und trunken zu sinken
An die klopfende Brust!

Weg, weg, es ist verloren,
Dies längst geträumte Glück,
Und aus des Himmel Toren
Kommt nie mein Stern zurück.

Aber nage, Schlange, nage
Blutiger am Herzen mir.
Aber zage, Frevler, zage,
Schwarze Rache bring' ich dir!

[Abdon ab.]

Verwandlung

Szene 4

*[Vor Jephthas Haus. Sulima, Asmavett, Winzerinnen,
Jephtha tritt ein.]*

Nr. 5 – Mehrstimmiges Gesangstück

SULIMA
Ach Vater, du hier!

[He feels the sharpness of his sword.]

Yes, you are sharp and hard, and the breast of that
boy is yielding!

No. 4 – Aria

ABDON
May you burn in Hell!
May calamity rain down upon you!
I shall forever hate that man
Who stole my beloved from me.

[He loses himself in lustful recollection.]

Ah, to clasp
Her blooming body
In an ardent embrace!
To drink heavenly bliss
From her eyes,
And to sink intoxicated
Upon her heaving breast!

Gone, lost forever is my
Long dreamed of happiness,
And my star's light will never
Shine from Heaven's gate.

So gnaw, serpent, gnaw
More bloodily at my heart.
And beware, blasphemer, beware,
For I bring you horrible vengeance!

[Abdon leaves.]

Change of Scene

Scene 4

*[In front of Jephtha's house. Sulima, Asmavett, vine-
tenders; Jephtha enters.]*

No. 5 – Concerted Vocal Piece

SULIMA
Ah, father, you're here!

JEPHTA

Willkommen, willkommen!

SULIMA

Vater, du hast mir,
Eine kleine Freude genommen.

ASMAVETT

Jephtha, du hast ihr
Ihre schöne Freude genommen.

*[Sulima geht nach dem Tore, und führt die
Gespielinnen mit den Geflechten
zu Jephtha.]*

SULIMA

Mein Vater, nimm von deinem Kindes
Was es herzlich giebt,
Was dein Auge liebt,
Früchte des Baumes, Früchte der Reben,
Wie sie uns, sie uns das Jahr gegeben.

CHOR

Herbstliche Gaben
Liebender Sinn,
Ist was wir haben,
Nimm es gerne hin.
All des Jahres Freuden
Sieh! sie scheiden;
Aber neue Freuden
Läßt die Liebe blühn.

JEPHTA

Ich will es hier empfangen,
Das Schöne ist überall schön.

TIRZA

Was ist schöner als Wiedersehn?

ALLE

Rosen und Dornen weben
Sich in des Menschen Leben,
Aus kleine Freuden,
Aus kleinen Leiden,
Quellt sein schönstes Glück.
Mag das Schöne auch scheiden,
Es kehrt in neuer Gestalt zurück.

[Winzerinnen ab.]

JEPHTHA

Welcome, welcome!

SULIMA

Father, you've spoiled
My little surprise for you.

ASMAVETT

Jephtha, you have spoiled
Her delightful surprise.

*[Sulima goes to the gate, and leads her friends with
their baskets to Jephtha.]*

SULIMA

Father, accept what your child
Affectionately offers you,
What delights your eye,
Fruit of the tree and fruit of the vine
Which this year's harvest has given us.

CHORUS

Gifts of autumn,
In a loving spirit,
Are what we offer,
Accept with pleasure.
See, all the year's joys
Are departing;
But love has caused
New joys to bloom.

JEPHTHA

I will accept it here,
For beauty is beautiful everywhere.

TIRZAH

What is more wonderful than meeting again?

ALL

Roses and thorns intertwine
Themselves in the lives of men;
Out of little joys,
Out of little pains,
Life's happiness is made.
Though beauty may vanish,
It comes back in another form.

[The vine-tenders leave.]

SULIMA [*Jephtha umarmend*]
Theurer Vater!

JEPHTA [*die Umarmung erwidern*]
Gute Sulima.

SULIMA
O wie wird mein Herz so froh, da ich dich
wiederseh'n. Ich zählte Tage und Stunden bis zu
diesem Augenblick, und nun erscheint er früher als ich
es hoffen dürfte. Welch einem Zufall verdank' ich
dieses Glück?

JEPHTA
Den Feinden Israels, den Ammonitern, die furchtbar
sich zu unser Grenze sammeln. Ich wußte dich ohne
Schutz, allein, da eilt ich dann, den Vater dir zu
bringen. Vor meinem Hause fand ich Bothen der
Aeltesten und Vorsteher der Stämme unsers Volks, die
mich hieher beschieden, wo man in dieser Stunde ob
der gemeinen Noth Rath halten will.

ASMAVETT
Auch dringt schon die Gefahr, denn flüchtig Volk ist
von der Grenze gekommen. Um deinen Beystand,
Jephtha, wird man flehen, denn in der Trübsal Stunde
gilt der Held.

JEPHTA
Die sollten Zuversicht zu meinen Beystand hegen, die
mich aus Vaterhaus und Land verstießen, die mich
gehaßt, mich höhrend an meiner Abkunft Schmach
gemahnt?

ASMAVETT
Droht die Gefahr, so schweigt der Neid. Die Hand des
Herrn liegt schwer auf unserm Land, und Jephthas
Edelmuth denkt nicht an Rache, wenn er sein Volk
erretten kann.

JEPHTA [*Asmavetts Hand mit Zufriedenheit
ergreifend*]
Wir werden hören was sie wollen. Doch schlägt in
deiner Brust nicht auch ein Herz für die gemeine
Noth? Die Treue spricht, der Muth aus deinem Blick.
Kühn waffne dich, der Glück steht dir zur Seite. Als
mein wackerer Jüngling kenn' ich dich. Auf! zeige
dich dem Volk durch deine Thaten!

SULIMA [*embracing Jephtha*]
My dear father!

JEPHTHA [*returning the embrace*]
Dear Sulima!

SULIMA
My heart is so happy to see you again! I have
counted the days and hours until this moment, and it
has come sooner than I dared hope. What chance has
made this happiness possible?

JEPHTHA
Israel's enemy, the Ammonites, who are gathering
frighteningly on our borders! I knew you were
alone, unprotected, so I hurried to bring your father
back to you. Gathered before my house, I found
emissaries from the Elders and Leaders of the tribes
of our people, who have summoned me here for
consultation in this hour of common peril.

ASMAVETT
The danger is indeed pressing! People are already
fleeing from the border. They will implore you to
help them, Jephtha. A hero is needed in this hour of
woe.

JEPHTHA
Those who once drove me from my childhood home
and this land, who hated me, who sneered and
reminded me of the disgrace of my birth, would now
place their hopes on my help?

ASMAVETT
When danger threatens, envy falls silent. The hand
of the Lord lies heavy on our land, and Jephtha's
noble mind will not contemplate revenge if he can
save his people.

JEPHTHA [*grasping Asmavett's hand with
satisfaction*]
We will hear what they want. But surely your heart
too is filled with dismay at our common distress?
Loyalty and courage shine in your eyes. Bravely arm
yourself, good fortune is with you. I know you to be
a valiant young man. Come! Show yourself to our
people through your deeds!

ASMAVETT

O wie erhebt mich, Jephta, dein Vertrauen. Dein Wort füllt mich mit Muth zu Kampf und Sieg. Mit Freuden folg' ich deinem Wink. – Doch ehe ich der Gefahr entgegengeh'n, laßt mich mein Innerstes dir anvertrauen. Sieh, Vater Jephta! sieh mich gütig an, ich liebe deine Tochter.

JEPHTA [*Asmavett mit inniger Theilnahme ansehend*]
Ich sehe dich, und aus dem offenen Auge spricht deines Vaters Bild mich liebend an. Er war mein treuer Freund, und seines Sohnes Glück begründ' ich gerne. – Doch Sulima ist, Asmavett, dir werth, und widerspricht dein Herz nicht seiner Wünschen.

[*Sulima verbirgt ihr Gesicht an Jephtas Brust.*]

JEPHTA [*richtet sein Tochter auf, und küßt ihre Stirn, denn ergreift er Asmavetts Hand*]
Sey mir gesegnet, meines Freundes Sohn! Der Mann soll seyn des Weibes Schutz und Hort, daß sie vertrauensvoll in jeder Noth auf seinem Beystand bau'n (baut?). Geh! deinem Gott, und deines Hauses Herd, und deines Landes Jungfrauen droht ein verwegener Feind. Zieh' hin! bekämpfe ihn. Wie du dem Vaterlande dienst, bereitest du dem eignen Hause Wohl. Kehrst du als Sieger wieder, sey Sulima der Preis den du wirst erringen.

ASMAVETT [*vor Sulima kniend*]

Im Streit für die gerechte Sache geleitet mich des Vaters Augen. Er hat ihn ausgesprochen über mich. Sprich du, o Theure, ein Wort der Liebe, und felsenfester Muth glüht mir im Busen.

SULIMA [*Asmavett aufhebend, mit Innigkeit*]
Liebt dich mein Vater, ehrt dich unser Volk, so folg' ich stolz der Stimme meines Herzens.

ASMAVETT [*schließt Sulima in sein Arme; zu ihr und Jephta*]
Lebt wohl, nicht Worte, Thaten sollen für mich sprechen.

JEPHTA

Entfernet euch, Kinder, die Aeltesten der Stämme nahen sich. Ich folge, Asmavett, dich nach.

ASMAVETT

Oh, Jephtha, how your confidence inspires me! Your words fill me with courage for battle and for victory. Gladly will I follow your direction. – But before I go to confront danger, let me confide my deepest thoughts to you. Oh, father Jephtha, look on me with kindness ... I love your daughter.

JEPHTHA [*looking at Asmavett with affectionate sympathy*]

I look on you, and from your sincere eyes the image of your father lovingly speaks to me. He was my faithful friend, and I will gladly grant his son's happiness. – For Sulima is worthy of you, Asmavett, and your heart does not go against his wishes.

[*Sulima buries her face on Jephtha's chest.*]

JEPHTHA [*raises his daughter's head, kisses her forehead, then grasps Asmavett's hand*]

My blessings upon you, son of my friend! A man must be the shield and refuge of his wife, so that she can rely trustingly on his help in any adversity. Go now! A defiant enemy is threatening your God, your hearth, and the young women of your country. Go forth and confront him! By serving your country you ensure the welfare of your own home. Return a champion, and Sulima will be the reward you receive.

ASMAVETT [*kneeling in front of Sulima*]

Your father's eyes will watch over me in the battle for righteousness. He has assured me of this. If you will speak but a word of love, my dear one, unwavering courage will burn in my heart.

SULIMA [*raising Asmavett, with tenderness*]

If my father loves you, if our people honour you, then I will proudly follow the voice of my heart.

ASMAVETT [*pressing Sulima in his arms; to her and Jephtha*]

Farewell! Deeds, not words, will speak for me!

JEPHTHA

Leave now, my children, the tribal Elders are approaching. I will follow you soon, Asmavett.