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‘ANYTHING BUT CONVENTIONAL’:  
FAITH AND FOLK IDIOMS IN DVOŘÁK’S *BIBLICAL SONGS*

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## Abstract

In the nineteenth century considerable ambiguities arose regarding sacred and secular categories in music. Although such ambiguities have often been discussed in relation to the mass, this study uses the genre of the lied – in particular, Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* – as a means of examining the interaction between these categories. The problems inherent in the idea of 'sacred lieder' are discussed, including case studies of Schubert's 'Die Allmacht' and Wolf's 'Nun wandre, Maria' from the *Spanisches Liederbuch*. The *Biblical Songs* are located within Dvořák's biography, to show the great extent to which they were a reflection of his personal situation. In-depth analysis of the music and texts of the songs, both individually and as a cycle, reveals that they are representative of a point of interaction between secular lieder for concert performance, and devotional lieder for a domestic context. A comparison with Brahms and his *Four Serious Songs* reveals two very different responses to biblical texts: whereas Brahms's solution places emphasis on secular love, Dvořák's songs show a progression from doubt and confusion about God through to faith and rejoicing. Furthermore, whereas the *Four Serious Songs* demonstrate a highly individualistic solution to the pessimism expressed earlier in the cycle, Dvořák's use of folk idioms at key locations in the *Biblical Songs* places emphasis on communality and tradition. However, the cycle also reveals a more complex expression of faith than is often assumed of Dvořák.

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# Part One: Context

## Introduction

On 19 March 1896, the premiere of Antonín Dvořák's Cello Concerto op.104 took place before a large crowd in London. According to the anonymous review published in *The Times* the following day, this new work was received with 'much enthusiasm.'<sup>1</sup> Hidden in the middle of the review, however, are a few lines about one of Dvořák's much lesser known works, the *Biblical Songs* op.99. The composer had recently orchestrated the first five *Biblical Songs*, and these new versions were performed for the first time at this same concert. 'The songs', the reviewer states, 'which were sung with much intelligence by Mrs. Katharine Fisk, are set to passages from the Psalms, and in anything but a conventional manner.'<sup>2</sup> The reviewer is not particularly clear about that which he or she finds unconventional. However, what this comment *does* reveal is a tension that underlies the status of sacred song in the second half of the nineteenth century: the reviewer seems to have particular expectations of songs with psalm texts which Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* did not meet.

The tension articulated by this reviewer is not unusual, as conventions of genre were regularly broken by composers in the nineteenth century. Traditionally sacred genres became particularly ambiguous, as music which originated within the functional confines of the church service moved into the concert sphere. The place of the mass in the nineteenth century has been well documented in this

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<sup>1</sup> Anon., 'Two Orchestral Concerts', *The Times*, 20 March 1896, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

regard.<sup>3</sup> Works such as Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* are evidence of an increasingly complicated relationship between the sacred and the secular, between the church and the concert hall. Brahms's *German Requiem* is another example of sacred/secular ambiguity: although the traditional Catholic requiem mass invokes the resurrection of Christ as a means of salvation for the dead, Brahms's chosen texts mention neither Christ nor the resurrection, significantly challenging the meaning of the genre.<sup>4</sup> Rather, Brahms adapts what is usually a sacred genre for his personal and, perhaps, nationalistic ends.

Dahlhaus uses the *German Requiem* to underline a change that took place regarding the idea of sacred music in the nineteenth century:

Brahms seems to have disregarded not only the liturgy but also the specifically Christian character of the occasion. This is not merely a sign of the composer's individual conception of religion—one in which a forlorn hope is made a substitute for faith—but also, it would seem, a conscious enactment of a process that had already taken place long before in the concert mass without creating a clear break in the history of nonecclesiastical sacred music. Namely, the articles of faith, rather than being captured in works of music, instead dissolved into a vague, if strong, feeling referred to by Schleiermacher, the most influential theologian of the nineteenth century, as the 'feeling of utter and prostrate dependence.'<sup>5</sup>

This increasing vagueness with regards to a specific faith certainly challenges the traditional conception and role of sacred genres. However, the *Times*

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, James W. McKinnon et al., 'Mass', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol.16, pp.58-85. In particular see '19<sup>th</sup> century', pp.81-83.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Botstein, ed., *The Complete Brahms: A Guide to the Musical Works of Johannes Brahms* (New York: Norton, 1999), p.377.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1989), p.185.



reviewer's comments about Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* are evidence that tensions between the sacred and the secular also existed within the genre of the lied.

In order to understand why this reviewer may have found the *Biblical Songs* unconventional it is necessary to know something of the context of lied in the second half of the nineteenth century. While it was undoubtedly during this period that public recitals of lied began to flourish, the bourgeois home nevertheless remained the primary destination for large numbers of lied, including the many *geistliche Lieder*, or sacred songs that were being published.<sup>6</sup> These devotional songs (which have received little attention whatsoever from musicologists), were written specifically for a domestic market, and are not among the songs of today's lied 'canon.' Beethoven's *Gellert-Lieder* (1802) are a good example of songs which are primarily suited to a domestic devotional context – although his status has ensured that these songs are still widely available. The texts that Beethoven chose for this group of six songs were a selection of poems from Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's *Geistliche Oden und Lieder* (1757), which are steeped in the language of the scriptures. In his preface to the collection, Gellert stated that he intended these poems to be used as a 'tool of public religious education.'<sup>7</sup> Such verses, many of which contain highly personal interactions with God, would have been read in the home as a means of instilling devotion. Similarly, Beethoven's musical settings cater to a domestic music-making market, as evidenced by the predominance of

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Youens, 'Wolf, Hugo, §7: Mature Songs', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol.27, p.482.

<sup>7</sup> William Youngren, *C.P.E. Bach and the Rebirth of the Strophic Song* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), p.211.

simple piano accompaniments, voice doubling, and short, strophic settings of up to fifteen verses.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Dvořák's op.99 group were settings of biblical texts (as indicated by their title) would have created expectations of certain stylistic conventions appropriate to such sacred songs. However, while some of the *Biblical Songs* would have been appropriate in a domestic, devotional context, others among them express great anguish and doubt about God, using musical language that is highly dramatic and tonally complex. It is these aspects that would have surprised this late nineteenth-century reviewer – the fact that he or she singled out the fourth song, a musically unchallenging setting of the comforting Psalm 23 that *would* be appropriate for private devotion, as his favourite, is revealing. The *Biblical Songs*, therefore, demonstrate a fascinating tension between notions of sacred and secular, and the worlds of public performance and Christian devotion in the late nineteenth-century. Although this tension is regularly examined with regards to the nineteenth-century mass, the interaction between the sacred and the secular in lieder is something that has been given much less attention by scholars. Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* provide a lens through which this tension can be investigated.

Dvořák composed the *Biblical Songs* over a three-week period in 1894, from 5 March to 26 March. At the time, the composer was in the middle of three years of employment at the National Conservatory of Music in New York, where he held the post of artistic director. During this period, Dvořák composed some of

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<sup>8</sup> The final song, 'Busslied', is an exception.

his most well-known works, which are now part of the standard repertoire in their respective genres: the Ninth Symphony ('From the New World'), the two 'American' string quartets, and the Cello Concerto. These works, particularly the Ninth Symphony, have also been written about extensively by musicologists. It is unfortunate that the *Biblical Songs* have received less attention, for a closer examination reveals interesting connections with Dvořák's biography.

Daniel Jacobson's article in *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895* is one of few discussions of the *Biblical Songs*.<sup>9</sup> In this article, Jacobson makes some interesting points about key schemes in the *Biblical Songs*, and suggest that the genesis of the songs was the result of biographical events: Dvořák was a 'devout Catholic', one of his close friends had recently passed away, and his own father was dying. However, restrictions in length mean that Jacobson's analysis can go little further than a few sentences on each song, so that the relationship between text and music, as well as the potential influence of Dvořák's religious beliefs and biography on the work is left unexamined.

Clearly, an inquiry into Dvořák's views on faith has direct relevance to an understanding of songs which use texts from the Bible. However, while there is a consensus among scholars that Dvořák certainly did have a Christian faith, references to his beliefs are generally made only in passing – usually in connection with the *Biblical Songs*. John Clapham, for example, calls the songs 'a sincere and devout reaffirmation of the Czech composer's unshakable faith in

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Jacobson, 'The "Biblical Songs", Opus 99', in *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, ed. John Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), pp.255-66.

the divine wisdom and love of the Almighty.’<sup>10</sup> Michael Beckerman, in *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer’s Inner Life*, describes Dvořák as ‘deeply religious’ and as a ‘religious Catholic.’<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly however, Beckerman’s book, which looks in depth at how Dvořák was influenced by the *Hiawatha* story, the American landscape, African-American music, and his mental health, touches only very briefly on the composer’s religious ‘inner life.’ This lack of discussion seems unjustified given the composer’s apparent level of devoutness. However, this oversight is common in the vast majority of recent Dvořák scholarship. Given that Schubert’s sexuality and Wagner’s anti-Semitism have been allowed to impact an understanding of *their* music, is it not time to allow for the impact of Dvořák’s faith on *his*?

The purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to address two omissions from musicological literature: I will use the *Biblical Songs* as a means of investigating the tension between the sacred and secular in the lied, and to examine the influence of Dvořák’s faith on his music. I begin by outlining the context of sacred lieder in general, including case studies of two predecessors to the *Biblical Songs*: Schubert’s ‘Die Allmacht’, and a song from Wolf’s *Spanisches Liederbuch*, ‘Nun wandre, Maria.’ This is followed by an examination of the background and genesis of the *Biblical Songs* themselves. Here, I discuss in turn four areas which are of significant importance for an understanding of the songs: Dvořák’s faith, the American context, nationalism and religion in Bohemia, and

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<sup>10</sup> John Clapham, *Dvořák* (Newton Abbot [Eng.]: David & Charles, 1979), p.130.

<sup>11</sup> Michael B. Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer’s Inner Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003), pp.136 & 157.

the potential influence of American folk music on the composer. In the third chapter I discuss each of the *Biblical Songs* in turn, primarily as individual entities. Here I examine the relationship between music, text, and the position of the protagonist. In the fourth chapter I discuss the extent to which the *Biblical Songs* can be viewed as a song cycle, and the implications of such a progression. The final chapter makes a comparison between the *Biblical Songs* and Brahms's *Four Serious Songs* to show the very different responses to the Bible evidenced in each group.

As Joanna Cobb Biermann points out, links between a composer's biography and music should be made with caution.<sup>12</sup> However, as lied scholars such as Susan Youens have shown, appropriate connections can be extremely fruitful because of what they reveal about both composer and song.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Dvořák and his *Biblical Songs*, such links are indeed enlightening. As we shall see, a close examination of the songs reveals Dvořák's highly unique use of biblical texts, as well as providing a fresh perspective on the composer's faith.

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<sup>12</sup> Joanna Cobb Biermann, 'Cyclical Ordering in Beethoven's Gellert Lieder, Op.48: A New Source', *Beethoven forum* 11 (2004), p.176.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Susan Youens, *Hugo Wolf and His Mörike Songs* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Susan Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

# 1 The Problem of ‘Sacred Lieder’

Carl Dahlhaus accounts for the church’s withdrawal from the mainstream of music history during the nineteenth century by asserting that the period between the French Revolution and the First World War was essentially a bourgeois age.<sup>1</sup> In his opinion, ‘the sociopsychological roots of an ideal of church music as an escape from the world can be seen in the bourgeois tendency to separate these two spheres and consign religion to a ghetto, thereby protecting it from “reality” and at the same time preventing it from interfering in that reality.’<sup>2</sup> This tendency to place religion in a ‘nature reserve’, separate from the rest of life, had a significant impact on sacred music in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of Dahlhaus’s bourgeoisie, church music needed to display a sort of ‘noble simplicity’ and purity,<sup>4</sup> an attitude which is exemplified in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘Ancient and Modern Church Music’ (1814). In this article, Hoffmann uses a dialogue between friends to demonstrate the prevailing viewpoints of the day. Early on in the discourse, the character ‘Cyprian’ says the following of Beethoven’s Mass in C (first performed in 1807 and published in 1812): ‘While Beethoven may have given us some pleasant, even great music in his mass, he has by no means given us a mass. What has happened to the austere

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<sup>1</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, p.179.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.182

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.183

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp.179 & 181.

church music?’<sup>5</sup> After a brief interruption by ‘Theodore’ (possibly Ernst *Theodor* Amadeus Hoffmann himself), who counteracts that ‘Cyprian’ is ‘unjustifiably severe on all recent composition’, ‘Lothar’ states that ‘nevertheless...as far as I am concerned, Beethoven’s mass sounds too jubilant and too earthy in its rejoicing. I would certainly like to know in just what way the various parts of the liturgy differ to allow the composer such complete liberty of contrasts in setting them.’<sup>6</sup>

The viewpoints of ‘Cyprian’ and ‘Lothar’ give a clear impression of some sort of church music aesthetic that is not being adhered to by Beethoven. Their particular concern seems to be the mood of Beethoven’s mass, which rather than being ‘austere’, is in fact ‘too jubilant.’ Theodore’s opinion is somewhat less conservative; however, it still contains the notion of a particular style that is appropriate for church music: ‘The sublime church music of ancient times is superior to that of recent times, for it was always faithful to its holy style. At the same time I think that the richness which music has gained in more recent times, chiefly through the employment of instruments, should be utilized in churches, not to produce mere idle display, but in a noble and worthy manner.’<sup>7</sup> Thus, although Theodore praises the more recent use of instruments in church music, they are to be employed in the fitting ‘style.’ Interestingly, he also equates the ‘religious’ with that which is humble and respectful: ‘It takes a rare degree of genius and depth of spirit to employ vocal embellishments and all the resources

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<sup>5</sup> R. Murray Schafer, *E.T.A. Hoffmann and Music* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975), p.101.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.105.

of instrumentation humbly and respectfully – in short, religiously.’<sup>8</sup> From the assessment of both Hoffmann and Dahlhaus, it would seem that this generation (primarily an Austro-German one in this context) had a particular view of Christianity, and of what they expected from a church service, causing church music to take on the character of their bourgeois religious ideals. Essentially, composers of music for the church were forced to retreat into an imposed musical aesthetic, cut off from contemporary developments in composition.

This change in the conception of church music can also be related to a fundamental change in the function of musical composition that crystallised around the year 1800. In her book, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay on the Philosophy of Music*, Lydia Goehr explains the development of the idea of the ‘work-concept.’ In general, prior to the nineteenth century ‘musical performances were background affairs within a church or court’, rather than the ‘immediate focus of attention.’<sup>9</sup> The composition of music was, therefore, tied to particular occasions; ‘the idea that one first composed a work which then was publicly performed here and there hardly existed.’<sup>10</sup> Within this context, the church played a primary role in the development of the western music aesthetic, meaning that histories of the church and music were inextricably linked. In the nineteenth century, however, this was no longer the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>9</sup> Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.192.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.179.



case, as composers began to assert their independence, and consequently, the independence of their compositions.<sup>11</sup>

This change in the function of music may also have presented a problem for church composers. Whereas previously music had been something to be ‘worshipped, danced, and conversed to’,<sup>12</sup> the new understanding of music’s ability to be transcendent *in and of itself* was likely to have been seen as a threat to traditional forms of religion. In such a climate, composers of church music may have been placed in an awkward position because of the potential for the association of nineteenth-century composition with that which was seen as a threat to the established church.

However, I would suggest that the influence of a bourgeois age on the formation of a church music aesthetic and the new status of the musical work were not the only reasons for the church’s withdrawal from the musical mainstream. We know of the fascination in nineteenth-century Europe with the legend of Faust, particularly in Goethe’s telling. It is not insignificant that this story was the inspiration for numerous nineteenth-century compositions. As Jim Samson explains, ‘Faust challenged the Godhead, and Romantic composers responded.’<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Leon Plantinga speaks of a nineteenth-century climate ‘in which the public fancied something of the demonic in its heroes.’<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. See in particular chapter 8, ‘After 1800: The Beethoven Paradigm’

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.192. Italics my own.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Samson, ‘Romanticism’, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol.21, p.600.

<sup>14</sup> Leon Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), p.176.

Paganini is just one example of several such embodiments of the ‘anti-hero’ – with his exceptional skill on the violin he was seen by many as being under demonic influence.<sup>15</sup> F.-J. Fétis remembered that ‘the extraordinary expression of his face, his livid paleness, his dark and penetrating eye, together with the sardonic smile which occasionally played upon his lips, appeared to the vulgar, and to certain diseased minds, unmistakable evidences of a Satanic origin.’<sup>16</sup> The potential for connecting some types of nineteenth-century composition and performance with the demonic can only have caused the gap between church composition and the mainstream of music history to widen.

Thus, rather than attempting to bring Christianity and contemporary musical language together, it would have been much safer for composers of church music to retreat into Dahlhaus’s bourgeois aesthetics. However, it is within such a climate that we find expressions of Christianity manifested in genres not traditionally aligned with the church.

## The Genre of Sacred Lieder

Before continuing this discussion there are two matters of definition that require clarification, namely, the meanings of the words ‘sacred’ and ‘lieder.’ In current usage, the word ‘sacred’ has an extremely broad definition, as evidenced in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Insofar as western music is concerned, however, ‘sacred’ usually connotes that which has an association with religion –

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<sup>15</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, p.139.

<sup>16</sup> From F.-J Fétis, *Biographical Notice of Nicolo [sic] Paganini* (London, n.d.), p.59, quoted in Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, p.175.

generally, but not exclusively, Christianity. Graham Dixon and Richard Taruskin's definition of 'Sacred Opera' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* is useful here:

The term 'sacred opera' has no standard usage: it may be applied to dramatic works written for, or performed in, an ecclesiastical or other religious context, but equally to operas designed for normal theatrical performance and involving a religious theme or bearing some moral or spiritual statement, or even ones that involve a deity, in the form of a god or an oracle.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, I suggest, sacred lieder could refer to both the songs played and sung by individuals for the purpose of devotion, but equally to songs written for public performance, with strong sacred themes.

The word 'lied' is also in need of clarification. This term is sometimes used to refer specifically to art songs – perhaps those that are part of the 'lied canon' – but of course it is also the German word for songs of any kind. As we know, the whole notion of the canon has come under attack in recent years.<sup>18</sup> In the case of this thesis, the idea of a 'lied canon' with select German members places Dvořák outside the song-composing sphere that he would have considered himself a part of – the *Biblical Songs* were published by Simrock and proofread by Brahms.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it obscures the fluidity which would have existed between sacred songs which were written as ephemera for a domestic

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<sup>17</sup> Graham Dixon and Richard Taruskin, 'Sacred Opera', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. S. Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol.4, p.118.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Disciplining Music: Musicology and Its Canons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); William Weber, 'The History of Musical Canon', in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Dvořák in a letter to Josef Tragy dated 2 April 1894, in Milana Kuny, ed., *Antonín Dvořák: Korespondence a Dokumenty*, vol. 3: Korespondence Odeslaná. 1890-1895 (Praha: Editio Supraphon, 1989), pp.254-55.

environment, and songs for the concert stage by the so-called ‘canonical’ composers. Thus, I will henceforth refer to all songs of the Austro-German song-composing tradition with sacred themes as sacred lieder.

When the genre of the lied moved into the public concert sphere in the second half of the nineteenth century, public performances of songs with biblical texts remained far from common. On the other hand, a large number of what can be termed sacred lieder in the broader sense of these words were performed, which is unsurprising given nineteenth-century preoccupations with things spiritual in general. Peter Russell’s thematically arranged volume on German lieder contains a useful chapter on lieder with religious subjects. He suggests a fairly wide use of the term ‘Christian’ when he says that ‘an editor who wished to do so could compile a substantial devotional anthology of Christian solo songs in German simply by drawing on all the major song-composers from Mozart to Strauss.’<sup>20</sup> Included among such songs are those of Wolf, ‘a professed non-believer’, and ‘a single religious song by the unreligious Strauss.’<sup>21</sup> Clearly for Russell it is not the convictions of a composer that make a song sacred – although the composer’s beliefs can certainly impact on how we interpret a religious song. Neither does a composer’s use of a religious text necessarily make a song particularly sacred, as Brahms’s *Four Serious Songs* show.

There are many nineteenth-century lieder which refer much more generally to notions of the sacred, perhaps addressing a divine creator or a moral issue, but

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Russell, *The Themes of the German Lied from Mozart to Strauss* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), p.368.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

with no obvious connection to a specific faith. Furthermore, there are those lieder which evoke faiths other than Christianity. Examples include settings from Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*, such as Schumann's 'Talismane' (1840) and Wolf's 'Erschaffen und Beleben' (1889). Interestingly, as Russell states, the story-telling, didactic, and exhortatory elements found in religious folk-songs are not often found in lieder 'making way for more personal and subjective expressions of religious faith or experience.'<sup>22</sup> Such lieder, with a more ambiguous or exotic sense of the sacred, were more acceptable in the concert sphere – personal devotion to the Christian God was generally confined to a domestic context – and it is therefore these representations of the sacred which we find much more regularly amongst members of the 'lied canon.'

In order to provide a compositional context for the *Biblical Songs*, it is necessary to look at some examples in greater detail. Given that the *Biblical Songs* are specifically connected to Christian tradition, I have chosen two songs which also evoke this faith: Schubert's 'Die Allmacht', and Wolf's 'Nun wandre, Maria' from his *Spanisches Liederbuch*. An investigation of these songs reveals two different responses to Christian themes in the nineteenth-century lied.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## Schubert and ‘Die Allmacht’

Schubert’s lied ‘Die Allmacht’ [The Almighty] has been referred to both as a psalm and a *geistliches Lied*.<sup>23</sup> However, as we see with the *Biblical Songs*, performances of ‘Die Allmacht’ were not merely confined to a domestic devotional context. Given the song’s religious content, an investigation into Schubert’s apparent ‘devout belief in a divine presence’<sup>24</sup> will be useful if we are to understand its genesis and meaning.

As is the case with a large number of nineteenth-century composers, Schubert had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with the church and conventional Christianity. Befitting his Austrian nationality, he was brought up in the Catholic Church, where he sang as a choir boy in his youth, and was thus exposed to the rich traditions of Catholic liturgical repertoire. As we know, Schubert went on to compose a wealth of sacred music throughout his short life. However, he could be scathing about the Catholic institution. In an 1818 letter to his brothers, Ignaz and Ferdinand, and sister Therese, he stated the following:

You, Ignaz, are still quite the old man of iron. Your implacable hatred of the whole tribe of bigwigs does you credit. But you have no conception of what a gang the priesthood is here: bigoted as mucky old cattle, stupid as arch-donkeys and boorish as bisons.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Otto Erich Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Eric Blom (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1946), p.718; Leo Black, *Franz Schubert: Music and Belief* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003), p.21.

<sup>24</sup> Glenn Stanley, ‘Schubert’s Religious and Choral Music: Toward a Statement of Faith’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.207.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to brothers Ferdinand and Ignaz, and sister Therese, Zseliz, 29 October 1818, in Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, p.110.

As Glenn Stanley states, it seems that Schubert ‘bitterly opposed the institution and dogma of the Catholic Church.’<sup>26</sup> However, although he was out of sympathy with this institution, the composer remained a man of significant religious tendencies. A letter written to his parents in July 1825, close to the time when Schubert composed ‘Die Allmacht’, is often quoted as evidence of this fact. In it, Schubert explains the reaction of some of his friends when he played one of his compositions (likely his ‘Hymne an die Jungfrau’ op.52/6):

They also wondered greatly at my piety, which I expressed in a hymn to the Holy Virgin and which, it appears, grips every soul and turns it to devotion. I think this is due to the fact that I have never forced devotion in myself and never compose hymns or prayers of that kind unless it overcomes me unawares; but then it is usually the right and true devotion.<sup>27</sup>

In September of the same year, shortly after writing ‘Die Allmacht’, Schubert wrote a letter to his brother Ferdinand, which expresses horror at what the composer deems to be an inappropriate use of the cross of Christ:

It was here that the Bavarians on one side and the Tyrolese on the other of the Salzach, which here makes its tumultuous way far, far, below, indulged in that frightful massacre at which the Tyrolese, concealed in the rocky heights, fired down with hellish shouts of triumph on the Bavarians, who endeavoured to gain the pass, but were hurled wounded into the depths without ever being able to see whence the shots came. This most infamous act, which went on for several days and weeks, was marked by a chapel on the Bavarian side and a rough cross in the rock on the Tyrolese, partly to commemorate and partly to expiate it by such sacred symbols. Thou glorious Christ, to how many shameful actions must Thou lend Thy image! Thyself the most awful monument to mankind’s degradation, Thy image is set up by them as if they said “Behold! We have trampled with impious

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<sup>26</sup> Stanley, ‘Schubert’s Religious and Choral Music: Toward a Statement of Faith’, p.207.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Schubert’s father and stepmother, Steyr, 15 July 1825, in Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, pp.434-35.

feet upon Almighty God's most perfect creation; why should it cost us pains to destroy with a light heart the remaining vermin, called Man?"<sup>28</sup>

While it is impossible to make any definitive statements about Schubert's religion in light of such statements, they certainly show a certain reverence for the Christian God. Schubert's mention of the 'Holy Virgin' and the 'glorious Christ' suggests a belief that was perhaps further grounded in Christian tradition than the broader, deistic view of God which was also common in the nineteenth century. That he at least held a 'devout belief in a divine presence' seems clear.<sup>29</sup>

This being the case, we can see in part what inspired Schubert to write a lied such as 'Die Allmacht.' However, it was a chance meeting at the famous Austrian resort of Badgastein that specifically impelled Schubert to compose this song. In 1825, the year of the song's composition, Schubert had already been suffering from the symptoms of syphilis for at least two years. During the year of 1825 itself, however, Schubert experienced a welcome respite from his infirmity – to the extent that he may even have thought himself cured – and he went on an extended summer holiday to the Salzburg region.<sup>30</sup> Here, at Badgastein, Schubert encountered Johann Ladislaus Pyrker, the Patriarch of Venice, to whom he had dedicated his op.4 songs to texts by Schmidt, Werner and Goethe after their first meeting five years earlier. During his stay at

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<sup>28</sup> Letter to Schubert's brother Ferdinand, Steyr, 21 September 1825, in *Ibid.*, p.467.

<sup>29</sup> See note 24.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Winter, 'Schubert, Franz, §1(X): Life: Respite, the Summer of 1825', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol.22, p.669.



Badgastein, Schubert was inspired to compose two songs, 'Die Allmacht' and also 'Das Heimweh' [Homesickness] to texts written by Pyrker himself.

Given the lack of access to information on the now obscure Pyrker and his works, here I rely heavily on Susan Youens' chapter on Schubert and Pyrker found in *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles*. In her opinion, 'one cannot recommend Pyrker to the pious as a model.'<sup>31</sup> Although he went on to become an archbishop, Pyrker's life seems to have been characterised more by a hunger for power than by devout faith. Youens refers to his autobiography, *Mein Leben*, as a 'self-exculpating, self-glorifying façade' which is 'insufficient to conceal roiling nastiness of several kinds.'<sup>32</sup> She then concludes her remarks about the autobiography by saying that 'Dante had places in Hell reserved for the likes of this man.'<sup>33</sup> However, Youens also suggests that as with Wolf's Mörike songs, Schubert knew little of Pyrker's true personality when he composed 'Das Heimweh' and 'Die Allmacht.' Indeed, Pyrker could also be charming, and Schubert was only in his acquaintance for a short period. Had he known more of him and his self-serving lust for power, it is unlikely that Schubert would have liked Pyrker, and in that case, as Youens notes, 'Die Allmacht' might never have been composed.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles*, p.96.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Youens calls Pyrker's Old Testament epic, *Perlen der heiligen Vorzeit* [Pearls of Holy Antiquity], from which Schubert chose his text for 'Die Allmacht', a 'secular script of artistic creation' – Pyrker regards the success of his work in 'wordly terms', and does not acknowledge God as a participant in the creative process.<sup>35</sup> As we might infer from the title, the work is divided into a series of 'pearls.' The text of 'Die Allmacht' is taken from the 'pearl' about Elisha, who was a disciple of Elijah, a prophet and a miracle worker. At the point where the words of 'Die Allmacht' appear in Pyrker's narrative, the Israelite and Judean armies are lost, thirsty and despairing, and Elisha is called on to sing. Youens notes that Schubert set only the first half of Elisha's song, not because he disliked the content of the second section, which expresses condemnation of war ('one imagines...Schubert's sympathies with such sentiments'), but rather because he did not want to include obvious references to the Old Testament or to the violence of combat.<sup>36</sup>

Given Schubert's situation, surrounded by the stunning scenery of Badgastein, we can see what may have drawn him to this first half of Elisha's song, which is primarily about the greatness and power of God as revealed in *nature*:

Great is Jehova, the Lord! For heaven and earth proclaim his might! You hear it in the roaring storm, in the loud, surging call of the forest stream, in the greenwood's rustling; You see it in the golden waving wheat, in the glowing brilliance of the beautiful flowers, in the radiance of the star-strewn heavens. It resounds terrifyingly in the rolling thunder and flames in the lightning's swiftly flickering flight. But your beating heart will

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.115.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.191.

tell even more palpably of Jehova's power, the eternal God, if you gaze up in prayer and hope for grace and mercy.<sup>37</sup>

The extent to which Schubert was impressed by the scenery on his holiday is evident in a letter written to his brother Ferdinand in September, 1825:

About an hour out of Neumarkt the country begins to become amazingly beautiful. The Waller Lake, which spreads its bright, blue-green water to the right of the road, animates this delightful landscape most gloriously. The altitude is very high, and thenceforward it drops continually towards Salzburg. The mountains rise higher and higher, and especially the legendary Untersberg rises from amid the others as by magic...The sun darkens and heavy clouds run across the black mountains like nebulous spirits; but they do not touch the Untersberg's brow, they creep past it as though terrified of its dreadful interior.<sup>38</sup>

The link between this description of Schubert's travels and the images of nature presented in Pyrker's text imply a personal reading of 'Die Allmacht' – Schubert was so impressed by his surroundings that he wished to express something of the magnificence of nature in song.

However, 'Die Allmacht' involves something more than the idolisation of nature which was popular in the nineteenth century. The song concludes in the following way: 'Your beating heart will tell even more palpably of Jehova's power, the eternal God, if you gaze up in prayer and hope for grace and mercy.' These words speak of some kind of relationship in which the protagonist is somehow accountable before God. Furthermore, the use of the word 'Jehova' (or 'Jehovah' as it is rendered in English translations) to refer to God is unusual in lieder by major composers. 'Jehovah' is a word which refers specifically to

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<sup>37</sup> This translation of 'Die Allmacht' is taken from Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to Schubert's brother Ferdinand, Gmunden, 12 September 1825, in Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, p.457.

the God of the Bible; a rendering of the Hebrew people's special name for God – Yahweh. Whereas lieder with spiritual themes might refer to a more generic 'Gott', the use of this word locates the song more directly within a Christian, sacred tradition. These two factors perhaps suggest that the song might have been better suited to a private devotional context as opposed to a concert environment, as is the case with the majority of Beethoven's *Gellert-Lieder*. However, the almost didactic nature of the song's ending, and the specifically Christian references, do not seem to have been problematic in terms of the song's reception. 'Die Allmacht' apparently sat comfortably beside other assorted secular songs and chamber music in a concert to be held at the Austrian Philharmonic Society's room on 26 March, 1828, and another at the same venue on 30 January, 1829.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, the music itself provides evidence that Schubert did not envisage a purely devotional, domestic environment for the song. The melody, with a range spanning almost two octaves, frequent leaps, and sustained, ornamented lines, could not be sung by the average amateur. Furthermore, the accompaniment plays a significant role in the piece, as opposed to merely doubling the vocal line, and would require an accomplished pianist. As in 'Erlkönig', Schubert makes use of repeated quaver triplets throughout this song (although the triplets in 'Die Allmacht' are much slower and therefore less frenetic or technically demanding than those of its predecessor).

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp.753 & 851.

Pyrker's description of Jehovah portrays God as a force not only powerful, but also frightening, with might which 'resounds terrifyingly in the rolling thunder.' A hint of this 'terror' is foreshadowed by Schubert as early as the introduction (Example 1.1). The song is in C major, a key often connected with light (the famous example being, of course, Haydn's *Creation*). After repeated statements of the C major tonic in bar 1, this most basic of tonalities is suddenly interrupted in bar 2 by a diminished seventh chord. The surprising nature of this tonal shift is also emphasised by an abrupt move from *piano* to *fortissimo*. Although the music finds its way back to C major for the singer's opening statement, the presence of this loud dissonance foreshadows uneasiness, which Youens suggests could be 'emblematic of the dark forces in the human heart and in the world.'<sup>40</sup> Perhaps it might also signify the terrifying nature of God which is, in fact, evident throughout the song.

Langsam, feierlich

Groß ist Je - ho - vah, der Herr.

*p* *ff* *p* *cresc.* *f*

Example 1.1 – 'Die Allmacht', bb.1-7

Tonal shifts are frequent in 'Die Allmacht', though they are not necessarily as abrupt and surprising as that which occurs in bar two. This free use of tonality gives the impression of a God who is dynamic – he can be found in the 'forest stream' and 'waving wheat' just as much as he can in the 'rolling thunder.' After

<sup>40</sup> Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles*, p.192

the surprising events of the introduction, we might expect at least the opening phrase to stay in the tonic, but this is not the case. Although the singer's first phrase begins in the tonic of C major, it ends on an A major chord, lending a particularly bright quality to the word 'Herr' in bar 7 (Example 1.1).

Schubert also uses texture to convey this impression of dynamism. In bar 18 the words first begin to describe the natural phenomena in which God's might is evident. At this point both voice and piano move to a low register, the dynamic drops suddenly to *piano*, and both singer and accompanist primarily hold pedal notes. These low, hushed monotones give the impression that the narrator is listening for evidence of Jehova's might in the 'roaring storm' and the 'loud, surging call of the forest stream', and draw attention to the only place where the movement *is* taking place – in an inner voice of the piano accompaniment (Example 1.2, b.18). The listener, like the narrator, is forced to listen for this movement.

Example 1.2 – 'Die Allmacht', bb.17-19

This key of this section is also moving towards a new destination. In bar 18, the lowest note in the piano line is C – the tonic. This note proceeds to move in a long chromatic ascent until it finally reaches its destination, Ab, in bar 32. There

is a great sense of relief when this new tonic of Ab is reached, and what follows is the more relaxed section of the song, where God's might is heard in gentler natural phenomena, such as the 'greenwood's rustling', 'waving wheat' and 'beautiful flowers.' This section is more tonally stable than the rest of the song, and is also beautifully lyrical, which sets the listener up for a shock at bar 53. At this point a storm arrives, where God's might is revealed 'terrifyingly in the rolling thunder.' Schubert's music certainly adds to this impression. Clear examples of word-painting occur with ascending, low register, demisemiquaver scales in bars 54, 56 and 58 (Example 1.3). This is accompanied by rapid, chromatically ascending chord changes; Gb major in bar 54, G major in bar 56, followed by a return to Ab major in bar 58.

The image shows a musical score for Example 1.3, bars 53-56 of Schubert's 'Die Allmacht'. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'Furcht - bar tönt sie im Don-ner - ge-roll und flammt in des Blit-zes'. The piano accompaniment features a low register, demisemiquaver scale in the left hand, marked 'f' and 'cresc.'.

**Example 1.3 – ‘Die Allmacht’, bb.53-56**

At this point, the words 'but your beating heart will tell even more palpably of Jehovah's power' accompany a transition from Ab back to the tonic of C major. It is interesting to note that the entire Ab section is focussed on God as experienced in nature, whereas the C major sections which open and close the song are focussed directly on God himself. Thus, the keys of C and Ab can be seen to represent God and nature respectively. As Youens explains, 'in Schubert's conception, the heart draws closer to God by travelling from the Ab

tonality of Nature's beauty (this, says Schubert, is the best vantage point from which to approach God) to God's C major.<sup>41</sup>

The key of C major is appropriately reinstated with words imploring the listener to look to God in prayer and 'hope for grace and mercy.' However, Schubert does not end with these words, instead adding two repetitions of the song's opening statement 'Great is Jehovah, the Lord', which has already been repeated several times throughout the song. As if he has not made the point abundantly clear, in the very last repetition Schubert anticipates the beat, bringing the word 'groß' [great] half way through bar 85, rather than on the first beat of bar 86, with accompanying triple *forte* dynamics. Schubert could have ended 'Die Allmacht' with some final repetitions of C major triplet quavers, but instead he brings back the material from the introduction. This time, the diminished seventh chord interruption is striking because of the way it appears to overtake the voice – the singer clears his or her final note at the moment when this chord is sounded at the start of bar 90. As in the opening, the dissonance resolves back to C major for the song's conclusion, but we are still left with a sense of God's terrifying power, as well as his 'grace and mercy.'

Given the fact that 'Die Allmacht' contains aspects which are connected to Schubert's situation at the time of composition – namely, his travels through the stunning Austrian countryside – we can infer that the song reflects the composer's personal response to his surroundings. Indeed, Schubert's friends often spoke of his songs as expressions of the composer's own narrative voice.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.197.



In his 'Recollections of Franz Schubert', Mayrhofer speaks of the two cycles with texts by Müller as permitting 'a more penetrating glimpse into the composer's soul.' After discussing *Die schöne Müllerin*, which 'although gloomy in some details', offers much that is 'fresh, tender and pleasurable', Mayrhofer has the following to say about *Winterreise*:

Not so with the 'Winter Journey', the very choice of which shows how much more serious the composer became. He had been long and seriously ill, had gone through disheartening experiences, and life for him had shed its rosy colour; winter had come for him.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, there are strong justifications for an autobiographical reading of 'Die Allmacht', which is also the approach taken by Youens. If the song exhibits Schubert's personal response to his natural surroundings, it also reflects something of his conception of 'Jehova.' Schubert's representation of God in this song is intimately connected with nature. In Schubert's vision, God is characterised by both the beauty of flowers and the massive power of thunder – he is to be feared as well as worshipped. Schubert does not retreat from the musical devices of his day because there is a sacred theme in the words of 'Die Allmacht.' Rather, his compositional style is employed to great effect, providing a striking vision of the Almighty.

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<sup>42</sup> From 'Recollections of Franz Schubert' by J. Mayrhofer, 23 February 1829, in Deutsch, *Schubert: A Documentary Biography*, pp.862-63.

## Wolf and ‘Nun wandre, Maria’

Unlike Schubert, there is little room for debate over Hugo Wolf's views on Christianity. He, too, was raised in the Catholic Church, by a mother who remained a committed Catholic throughout her life, so he was therefore well acquainted with Catholic ritual and music. However, if he ever had any Christian belief, it is Youens's assessment that he had given it up by the time he was in his early twenties.<sup>43</sup> Frank Walker, who wrote the definitive English language biography of Wolf, has a similar opinion: ‘long before 1896 he had made up his mind about such things, and, influenced largely by Nietzsche, had rejected Christianity entirely.’<sup>44</sup> Wolf himself testified to his rejection of Christianity in a letter written to his mother in April 1892 where he describes himself as an ‘unbeliever.’<sup>45</sup> Most interestingly however, Wolf was prolific in writing songs that might be termed sacred – more prolific, in fact, than any of the other major lieder composers. These lieder are primarily located in two of his major songbooks: the *Mörike-Lieder* (1888) and the *Spanisches Liederbuch* (1889-1890). A number of these songs are not only spiritual in a general sense, but specifically evoke to Christian themes and images. Furthermore, Wolf does not mock the idea of God in his songs, as he might have done, but in some cases goes as far as actually furthering the Christian message of a text with his music.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Susan Youens, *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.254.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (London: Dent, 1968), p.416.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Youens' reading of the ‘Auf ein altes Bild’ in Youens, *Hugo Wolf and His Mörike Songs*, pp.161-67.

A series of factors in Wolf's life go some way to explaining this apparent contradiction. In a letter written to a Nietzschean friend Rosa Mayreder in September 1897 he wrote the following: 'As you know, on the subject of Christianity I share your views completely, which, however, does not hinder me at all from appreciating its artistic sides.'<sup>47</sup> Not only does this comment imply that Wolf did not hold Christian beliefs, but it also suggests why he wrote so many songs about different aspects of the faith. If Wolf was not a believer himself, it seems that he nonetheless retained a fascination with the spiritual. Indeed, as Youens states, 'the lack of a professed creed does not preclude participation in the common longing for the spiritual dimension of existence.'<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the imagery of Christianity was a significant part of his cultural environment – particularly that of this youth. He valued the 'artistic sides' of Christianity, perhaps in the same way that one might appreciate the artistic sides of folk myth or legend.

Another justification for Wolf's convincing settings of Christian-orientated texts is suggested by the pleasure he expressed over his ability to assume a variety of 'masks.' Writing to Kauffmann on 15 December 1891, not long after the completion of the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, he spoke of his progress with the songs of the *Italienisches Liederbuch*: 'It [the songbook] is once again an entirely different world, and you will be not a little astonished at my Proteus-

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<sup>47</sup> Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography*, p.416.

<sup>48</sup> Youens, *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music*, p.254.

nature, that can now enter this skin.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, prior to the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, Wolf had already shown his ability to portray extremely diverse characters and emotions in the *Mörke-Lieder*, which include songs about fantastical creatures, animals, prayers, and sexual encounters. In this context, it seems that biblical or Christian characters simply provided further material for song composition.

Paul Heyse and Emanuel Geibel's translations of Spanish poems, known as the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, were a popular choice for song composers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Published in 1852, this poetic volume was assembled near the end of a period of enthusiastic German interest in Spanish culture, which began around 1760.<sup>50</sup> Heyse and Geibel's anthology contains a selection of poems from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including those by poets such as Cervantes and Lope de Vega. The anthology is arranged into two sections, with thirteen 'geistliche lieder' and ninety-nine 'weltliche lieder.' Before Wolf turned to the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, a number of others had already set poems from the collection, but these were generally lesser-known composers.<sup>51</sup> A survey of these songs shows that the 'geistliche' poems had not been as popular as the 'weltliche' verses.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Letter from Wolf to Kauffmann, 15 December 1891, in Hugo Wolf, *Briefe an Emil Kauffmann*, ed. Edmund von Hellmer (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1903), pp.58-59, quoted in Youens, *Hugo Wolf and His Mörke Songs*, p.4.

<sup>50</sup> Margaret G. Sleeman and Gareth A. Davies, 'Variations on Spanish Themes: The *Spanisches Liederbuch* of Emanuel Geibel and Paul Heyse and Its Reflection in the Songs of Hugo Wolf', *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society: Literary and Historical Section* 18 (1982), p.159.

<sup>51</sup> Youens, *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music*, p.200.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.352, n.14.

Not so with Wolf, who set all but three of the ‘geistliche lieder’ (and he probably left these out because they were not suitable for song), compared with thirty-four out of the ninety-nine ‘weltliche lieder.’ This is, perhaps, evidence of Wolf’s appreciation of Christianity’s ‘artistic sides.’ These poems, which have a particular emphasis on the Catholic spirituality of Spain, show Wolf’s ongoing fascination with the faith that he himself had rejected. Eric Sams also suggests that Wolf’s focus on the religious texts, ‘with their heavy emphasis on guilt and redemption’, may have been inspired by personal feelings.<sup>53</sup> Wolf liked to compose texts that had not been set before, particularly avoiding those that had been used by well-known composers, so it was to his advantage that many composers had steered clear of these religious verses. His publisher Schott, however, was not impressed with this selection, deeming Wolf’s chosen poems ‘unsuitable for music.’<sup>54</sup> Unsurprisingly, this was a source of great indignation to Wolf, who wrote the following in a letter to Gustav Schur in June 1890: ‘Enclose in your answer to Schott that it is at my discretion and not the publisher’s to select poetry. That is all we need . . . ! A whole series of uncomposable poems! O thou Caliban, since I composed them, they were composable.’<sup>55</sup>

Wolf retained Heyse and Geibel’s sacred/secular divisions in his own *Liederbuch*. However, there is a theme that links the two sections together,

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<sup>53</sup> Eric Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1983), p.250.

<sup>54</sup> Youens, *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music*, p.202.

<sup>55</sup> Wolf in a letter to Gustav Schur, 16 June 1890, in Ernst Decsey, *Hugo Wolf*, vol.3 (Berlin and Leipzig: Schuster and Loeffler, 1903-06) p.31, quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 352, n.15.

causing the *Spanisches Liederbuch* to form a cohesive whole. As Frank Walker states, ‘love, sacred or profane, dominates the minds and hearts of all his [Wolf’s] characters.’<sup>56</sup> However, it is with religious love that we are concerned here, and I have chosen the third of the sacred songs, ‘Nun wandre, Maria’ [Now journey on, Mary] as an example of Wolf’s use of a biblically-inspired text. My particular reason for choosing this song out of the many examples of ‘sacred’ lieder in Wolf’s œuvre, is that the use of a religious text here is very different to what we find in ‘Die Allmacht’, or in the *Biblical Songs* for that matter. In ‘Die Allmacht’, the absence of a named protagonist and the connection with Schubert’s situation leaves the song open to autobiographical interpretation. However, in ‘Nun wandre, Maria’, Wolf’s intention is that the listener should clearly identify the protagonist as Joseph himself – he specifies this in the sub-heading, ‘Der heilige Josef singt.’ This composer’s intention is to recreate a scene from ancient Israel. Indeed, after completing this song on 5 November 1889, he wrote the following to his friend Friedrich Eckstein: ‘If you wish to experience this event, then you must hear my music.’<sup>57</sup>

The text of ‘Nun wandre, Maria’ is Heyse’s translation of the Spanish poem ‘Caminad esposa’ by Francisco de Ocaña, which was originally published in 1603.<sup>58</sup> The setting is Joseph and Mary’s journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the census, as described in Luke’s gospel account. Mary is, of

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<sup>56</sup> Walker, *Hugo Wolf: A Biography*, p.261.

<sup>57</sup> Wolf in a letter to Friedrich Eckstein, 5 November 1889, in Ernst Decsey, *Hugo Wolf*, vol.2 3 (Berlin and Leipzig: Schuster and Loeffler, 1903-06), p.31, quoted in Youens, *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music*, p.256.

<sup>58</sup> Sleeman and Davies, ‘Variations on Spanish Themes: The *Spanisches Liederbuch* of Emanuel Geibel and Paul Heyse and Its Reflection in the Songs of Hugo Wolf’, p.176.

course, heavily pregnant and on the verge of labour. The poem is narrated from Joseph's perspective, as he attempts to encourage and comfort the woman to whom he is pledged to be married:

Keep onward, Mary, keep on. Already the cock crows, and the place is near. Keep onward, my jewel, keep on. For soon we shall be in Bethlehem. There you will find rest and sleep. Already the cock crows, and the place is near. I see your strength fading, dear wife – I can hardly bear to see your pain. Take heart, we will surely find shelter there. Already the cock crows, and the place is near. Would that your time were over, Mary. I would gladly give this little ass! But come, the cock crows, and the place is near.<sup>59</sup>

In their study of Heyse and Geibel's *Spanisches Liederbuch*, Margaret Sleeman and Gareth Davies point out a number of interesting differences between the Spanish and German versions of the poems. These differences are summarised as a disparity in the tone of the two renderings; as they state, 'many of the German versions strike us as being much more intimate and direct.'<sup>60</sup> 'Nun wandre, Maria' is no exception, where 'the tenderness of Joseph towards Mary is the dominant note, a quality lacking in the original.'<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, 'whereas the Spanish Joseph addresses his wife formally...Heyse chooses the intimate, loving 'Geliebte, du Klienod mein.'<sup>62</sup> Sleeman and Davies explain that these differences are no doubt a reflection of the style of poetry that was popular in Germany at the time when Geibel and Heyse were making their translation. Their works reflect a more 'Romanticised' agenda than the Spanish poets had in

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<sup>59</sup> Translation taken from Lois Phillips, *Lieder Line by Line* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.346-47.

<sup>60</sup> Sleeman and Davies, 'Variations on Spanish Themes: The *Spanisches Liederbuch* of Emanuel Geibel and Paul Heyse and Its Reflection in the Songs of Hugo Wolf', p.209.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

mind. Perhaps it is this aspect of Geibel and Heyse's poems that prompted Youens to refer to even these religious-themed texts as having a 'mystic-erotic tinge.'<sup>63</sup>

The ten 'geistliche lieder' of the *Spanisches Liederbuch* are grouped into further thematic subdivisions. In Youens' analysis, songs one and two are 'dedicatory songs to the virgin', songs three to six deal with the Nativity and the Christ-child, songs seven and eight with the penitent sinner, and the final two songs with the Crucifixion.<sup>64</sup> As we might expect in an anthology based on the poetry of a Catholic country, the Virgin Mary plays an important role. In the opening poem, 'Nun bin ich dein', Mary is on a pedestal as the 'Frau auserlesen', a 'hieratic, indeed remote, figure.'<sup>65</sup> In the second song, 'Die du Gott gebarst', she is invoked as intercessor. How different then, is the Mary of 'Nun wandre, Maria' – in light of the first two songs she is suddenly *human*, herself a participant in earthly sufferings, 'so that we glimpse in her as in ourselves a mingling of the human and the divine.'<sup>66</sup>

Ocaña's original poem, 'Caminad esposa', was written in the *villancico* form popular from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century.<sup>67</sup> This poetic form is

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<sup>63</sup> Youens, 'Wolf, Hugo, §7: Mature Songs', p.484.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.479.

<sup>65</sup> Sleeman and Davies, 'Variations on Spanish Themes: The *Spanisches Liederbuch* of Emanuel Geibel and Paul Heyse and Its Reflection in the Songs of Hugo Wolf', p.176.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.198.



characterised by the use of a repeated refrain, and a six- or eight-syllable line.<sup>68</sup> While aspects of the *villancico* form were disrupted in Heyse and Geibel's translation, the refrain was preserved. 'Nun wandre, Maria' contains four stanzas; the first is a shortened version containing only two lines of text followed by the two-line refrain. The remaining three stanzas are both eight lines long – each concludes with the same refrain. As we shall see, however, Wolf disrupts the poetic form to achieve his dramatic ends.



Example 1.4 – 'Nun wandre, Maria', bb.1-4

Appropriately, the idea of suffering characterises the introductory bars of Wolf's setting of 'Nun wandre, Maria' (Example 1.4). Wolf achieves this by opening the song with a diminished seventh chord and a low dynamic, the use of an ominous pedal on the dominant in a very low register, and a minor key. The result is music which sounds uncertain, and alludes to the struggle of the voyage. Wolf also uses scales of parallel thirds here and throughout the song as a journeying figure. While some have mentioned that this use of thirds represents the close companionship of the two travellers,<sup>69</sup> I mentioned in the introduction that such chains of parallel thirds were, in fact, 'endemic' in the

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Sams, *The Songs of Hugo Wolf*, p.253.

*geistliche Lieder* of the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> However, Wolf puts a twist on this convention, by using it to contribute to the narrative of journey in this song.

It is not only the chains of parallel thirds that are characterised by stepwise movement. Joseph's vocal line also follows a stepwise pattern, albeit in a rhythmically augmented version. In contrast to the chains of thirds, Joseph's line often contains only a single pitch per bar. The clearest example of this occurs in bars 11-16:

11

Dann ru - hest du fein und schlum - merst dort. Schon

14

krä - hen die Häh - ne und nah ist der Ort.

**Example 1.5 – ‘Nun wandre, Maria’, bb.11-16**

Furthermore, almost all of Joseph's line is restricted to the narrow range of a fourth stretching from B to E (as in Example 1.5). The resulting effect is that Joseph's voice has, for the most part, a very calm, measured quality, which is appropriate for his words of comfort and encouragement. The parallel thirds, on the other hand, encompass a much greater range, travelling well above and below Joseph's melody, and move at the pace of a quaver. Thus, it is the right

<sup>70</sup> Youens, *Hugo Wolf and His Mörike Songs*, p.113.

hand of the accompaniment, not Joseph's line that provides a sense of forward momentum in the song, as if an outside force is providing the impetus for their journey. Though Joseph urges Mary on with his words, this line provides the movement necessary for them to reach their destination. Given the biblical context of the words, it could be that Wolf was attempting to portray God's guidance and assistance with these long lines of parallel thirds. The obvious Trinitarian symbolism inherent in the use of thirds adds to the plausibility of such a reading.

17 Wohl seh ich, Herrin, die Kraft dir schwin - den;

19 kann dei - ne Schmer - zen, ach, kaum ver - win - den.

Example 1.6 – ‘Nun wandre, Maria’, bb.17-20

If Joseph's vocal line is predominantly very controlled and regular, the moments when it breaks out of these confinements are revealing. Bars 17-20 (Example 1.6) are representative of a major disruption appropriate to the words ‘Wohl seh ich, Herrin, / Die Kraft dir schwinden; / Kann deine Schmerzen, / Ach, kaum verwinden’ [I see your strength fading, dear wife – I can hardly bear to see your pain]. Up until this point, Joseph's phrases begin on the quaver upbeat, but at the

upbeat to bar 17, his voice is conspicuously absent. Rather, his entrance is delayed until the second quaver of bar seventeen, an awkward entry on the off-beat. Furthermore, the poetic line here is fragmented, both rhythmically and melodically, as opposed to the smooth, measured lines of the opening section. Suddenly, leaps of a fifth are introduced, and the vocal range is widened to span a sixth within a single bar. The chords played by the left hand of the accompaniment also begin to leap wildly. On the word 'Schmerzen' [pains] Wolf introduces extreme dissonance – the notes on beat three of bar 19 are G-G#-B-D-F, which make for an affecting tonal crunch. In this way, Wolf conveys the extreme pain that is inherent in this journey. As in the poem, Mary is not idealised, but is shown to be very human, suffering with her fellow people.

There is a second incident where Wolf breaks Joseph's conventions to serve his dramatic ends. Above, I stated that Ocaña's poem uses *villancico* form, which is characterised by its use of a poetic refrain. In Heyse's translation, this refrain takes the form of the words 'Schon krähen die Hähne / Und nah ist der Ort' [already the cock crows, and the place is near], and is repeated four times. Every time the words 'nah ist der Ort' are heard, the music shifts to a sharper key than that of the previous bar, which lends a particular brilliance to these words, imbuing them with a sense of hope. On a larger scale, Wolf creates a sense of rising expectation throughout the song by means of this refrain. The first time we hear 'nah ist der Ort', the words are sung on a C# (bar 6), and the second time to an E (bar 15). The third time, however, the refrain pushes above Joseph's normal range, reaching a climactic point on F# in bar 25, which is the highest note in the song.

The importance of Mary and Joseph's 'Ort', their destination, is also emphasised elsewhere in the song. In fact, Wolf breaks up the second stanza of the poem in order to draw attention to the importance of Bethlehem. With the words 'Und balde wir werden / In Bethlehem sein' [for soon we shall be in Bethlehem] the music comes to a complete halt, which is the only time this occurs in the song prior to its ending. Wolf uses a Picardy third here to convey Joseph's joy at the idea of being in Bethlehem, and also marks this phrase with a decrescendo, creating the impression of hushed awe and reverence at the thought of this holy location. A sense of expectation is created here: for Joseph, this is the expectation of being in David's city, but from the listener's perspective Bethlehem is also the place where we know that the birth of Christ is about to take place.

Despite his use of poems which began as Spanish folk-songs, Wolf did not create simple, folk-like settings in his *Spanisches Liederbuch*. In 'Nun wandre, Maria', although he uses devices which are suggestive of a folk idiom, such as the parallel fifths which frequently occur in the left hand of the accompaniment, the continual key changes and use of extreme dissonance show that he was applying the harmonic resources of his day to this text. As Youens states, the poetic personas of the *Spanisches Liederbuch* 'speak in the language of extended tonality, with no pretensions to folklike simplicity.'<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Youens, *Hugo Wolf: The Vocal Music*, p.208.

As in 'Die Allmacht', Wolf uses contemporary musical language to represent sacred concepts in this lied, rather than retreating into an imposed sacred aesthetic. Although he does use parallel thirds which were common in devotional lieder for the home, they are adapted to serve his own, dramatic ends. However, unlike Schubert's lied, which represented his personal vision of God in relation to his experience of nature, Wolf's aim is to enter the skin of the protagonist Joseph. The two songs show two very different sides to the idea of sacred lieder: 'Die Allmacht' is a vision of a real and present God, whereas in 'Nun wandre, Maria', the biblical story is invoked for a different reason – perhaps because of the dramatic potential inherent within it, or because of audience familiarity with the wider context of the narrative. Both composers, however, present very powerful and compelling visions of biblical images by making use of the freedom of personal expression provided by what is usually a secular genre.

## 2 Background to the *Biblical Songs*

Unlike studies of earlier centuries, Christian belief does not usually play a prominent role in studies of nineteenth-century music – something we might expect from a period which increasingly regarded the church with scepticism. Indeed, since the church's role in the development and facilitation of new music had greatly diminished, Christianity is often irrelevant to the discussion of music from this period. However, there were clearly some composers in the nineteenth century, including Dvořák, for whom Christian faith remained an important part of their world view, and this continued to impact their music.

Musicologists regularly make the assertion that Dvořák was a devout Catholic, but this claim is made without justification or explanation, as a passing comment rather than as a topic for serious scholarly investigation. However, one can glean information about the composer's faith from letters and articles from his lifetime – in some cases these primary sources have been published in collections of recent articles on Dvořák, however, their 'religious' content has not yet been adequately integrated into studies of his life. The English speaker has access to a number of primary sources through Roberta Finlayson Samsour's translation of Otakar Šourek's *Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences*. In a letter dated 17 June 1887, Dvořák wrote to Czech arts patron Josef Hlávka about his successful completion of the Mass in D major, stating that 'I think it will be a work which will fully answer its purpose.'<sup>1</sup> He then continued:

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<sup>1</sup> Otakar Šourek, *Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences*, trans. Roberta Finlayson Samsour (Prague: Artia, 1954), p.110.

It would be possible to enumerate: Faith, hope and love to God Almighty and thanks for the great gift of being enabled to bring this work in the praise of the Highest and in the honour of art to a happy conclusion. Do not wonder that I am so religious. An artist who is not—could not produce anything like this. Have we not examples enough in Beethoven, Bach, Raphael and many others?<sup>2</sup>

Here, it seems that Dvořák is acknowledging the highly important part that religion plays in his composition – he recognises God’s role in bringing about the musical work. While this acknowledgement of ‘divine inspiration’ could perhaps have come from the mouths of any number of nineteenth-century composers, devout believers or otherwise, further accounts of the composer’s faith suggest more than just a vague belief in a divine presence.

Jaroslav Kvapil, the librettist for Dvořák’s opera *Rusalka*, wrote an article entitled ‘The Birth of *Rusalka*’, in which he relates an interesting occasion where Dvořák encountered a conflict between his beliefs and his work:

Sometimes he [Dvorak] came with a terrible worry and, at times, with questions that left me at a loss for an answer. I remember one such conversation. In the Third Act of ‘*Rusalka*’, the mad Prince has the following lines:

‘-on Heaven and Earth I lay my curse,  
I curse both god and spirits all,  
Answer then, answer now my call!’

This did not please Dvořák at all. He said to me: ‘Listen, I am a believer. I can’t curse God in my music.’ And I had to go into a long explanation that the libretto does not in any way force him to do that and that ‘to curse god’ is not the curse the Lord God. He allowed himself to be persuaded and composed to the words as I had written them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.111.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.213.



The difference between ‘god’ and ‘the Lord God’ is not entirely clear here – perhaps Kvapil means that ‘to curse god’ is a generic expression meaning to curse fate, or, simply, to curse. It is interesting that Dvořák saw the Prince’s character as a potential representative of his own views here, as if he himself was the narrator. His attitude implies a deep level of connection between his belief and his music.

Two recollections from Dvořák’s time in America (1892-1895) attest to the composer’s regular church attendance. Prominent New York music critic James Huneker remembered that ‘He was a fervent Roman Catholic, and I hunted a Bohemian church for him as he began his day with an early Mass.’<sup>4</sup> Such diligent attendance also extended to holidays. Dvořák spent his 1893 summer in Spillville, Iowa, where he became good friends with the parish priest, Father Bílý.<sup>5</sup> In his *Reminiscences*, Josef Jan Kovařík, a young Czech violinist and family friend of the Dvořáks, described a typical day for the composer: ‘He got up about four o’clock and went for a walk—to the stream or the river—and returned at five. After his walk he worked, at seven he was sitting at the organ in church...’<sup>6</sup> Seven o’clock was, in fact, the time for morning mass in the parish.

While one might raise the objection that Dvořák may have been attending church merely out of force of habit, cultural obligations, or perhaps, as in

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Beckerman, ed., *Dvořák and His World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c1993), p.182.

<sup>5</sup> John Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), p.399.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.397.

Spillville, simply to play the organ, other accounts strongly suggest that his faith extended beyond the formalities of church-going. The author of Dvořák's first biography, Dr. Josef Zubatý, recalls Dvořák's piety in his 'Recollections of Antonín Dvořák'. In the extract reproduced in Šourek's *Letters and Reminiscences*, Zubatý emphasises the sincerity of Dvořák's belief, which apparently extended beyond denominational boundaries:

Dvořák's piety was a piety of the heart, of one who is devoted to God from conviction and not to some particular religious community. The same Dvořák who devoted his art to a text of the Catholic confession glorifies without hesitation in the Hussite Overture the most glorious period of our history when Catholicism was overpowered by Hussitism, and I think nobody would be more surprised than he if anyone should see in that composition a proof of his religious insincerity or lukewarmness.<sup>7</sup>

Further evidence of the sincerity of Dvořák's faith was recalled by Jeannette Thurber, who was the President of the National Conservatory in New York where Dvořák took up the post as artistic director. Her recollections, while again emphasising the importance of church to the composer, also provide insight into his attitude to prayer:

Dvořák was not only one of the most original composers of his time, but one of the most emotional. This was partly due to the depth of his religious feeling. He was a most conscientious church-goer, and often spent hours on his knees in prayer.<sup>8</sup>

Dvořák himself wrote of the importance of prayer to his children in October 1894, while in America:

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<sup>7</sup> From Dr. Josef Zubatý's 'Recollections of Antonín Dvořák' quoted in Šourek, *Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences*, p.112.

<sup>8</sup> Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895*, p.382.

Go—and remember what I say—often to church, you know Otilka, what I told you—especially on Sundays see that you go to church. Pray fervently, it is the one thing that can comfort you and us. Look to it that the others, too, Mařka and Toník, say their prayers...<sup>9</sup>

Church-going was not simply a cultural or musical activity for Dvořák; rather, his emphasis on the importance of prayer as a means of comfort suggests a sincere belief in God.

The accounts we have of Dvořák's relationship with Brahms are also enlightening with regard to his faith (and Brahms's for that matter). Richard Heuberger, who was a member of Brahms's Vienna circle, recorded a number of insights that contrast Dvořák's belief with Brahms's apparent lack thereof. In a letter written in February 1896 he stated the following:

Brahms said that Dvořák was a fanatical Catholic...He told Brahms then that he read every day in the Bible. 'I don't find that comical at all,' said Brahms. 'A man so industrious as Dvořák by no means has time to get stuck on doubts; rather all his life he stands by what he was taught in his childhood.'<sup>10</sup>

Since Brahms himself was an avid reader of the Bible,<sup>11</sup> it is more likely to be Dvořák's 'fanatical' Catholicism that Brahms was critical of here. It is not the fact that Dvořák read the Bible, but the way in which he read it that Brahms would have disagreed with. The difference between the two composers' views is also highlighted in another letter by Heuberger the following month:

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<sup>9</sup> Šourek, *Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences*, p.179.

<sup>10</sup> Beckerman, ed., *Dvořák and His World*, p.75.

<sup>11</sup> Inge van Rij, *Brahms's Song Collections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.79.

Brahms referred somewhat less politely to the difference between his views and Dvořák's, when discussing the oratorio *St. Ludmila*: 'The text, to be sure, is too silly for me! Miracles! Pure nonsense! Dvořák believes in that, he can do it!'<sup>12</sup>

Although these comments might give the impression that Brahms did not think particularly favourably of Dvořák, this was not the case. Brahms played a large part promoting Dvořák's music in the latter's younger days, and although in the early years of their acquaintance Dvořák took a rather subservient tone with Brahms in their correspondence, later on their friendship seems to have been much more balanced. However, Dvořák was greatly distressed when he learnt of Brahms's lack of faith, saying 'such a man, such a fine soul, yet he doesn't believe in anything, he doesn't believe in anything.'<sup>13</sup> I will return to the different ways in which these two composers responded to biblical texts in music in chapter five.

Looking at his own accounts, and the accounts of others, it would seem that Dvořák was a man of genuine and deeply felt Christian faith. This belief extended beyond cultural obligations, as revealed by his insistence on the importance of prayer, and the fact that he thought about matters of faith insofar as they related to his work. He also attended church with incredible regularity. If belief in God and participation in communal worship permeated Dvořák's life to such a great extent, it is highly likely that his faith had a significant influence on his compositions – especially his religious works.

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<sup>12</sup> Beckerman, ed., *Dvořák and His World*, p.75.

<sup>13</sup> Recorded by J. Suk, *Aus meiner Jugend* (Vienna, 1910), quoted in Clapham, *Dvořák*, p.147.

## Dvořák in America: The genesis of the *Biblical Songs*

A fundamental aspect of nineteenth-century lieder is the way in which they existed as both personal expression and as commodities.<sup>14</sup> A lied could be written for highly personal reasons, meaning that in extreme instances, the composer might be uncomfortable about hearing his or her song performed publicly. However, a lied could also be composed for commercial gain. In this case a composer might write a song according to current public taste, rather than out of his or her own depth of feeling. This is the case with the majority of lieder with a scripturally oriented basis for their texts – they were written because of a large market for devotional songs. Of course, most lieder were influenced by a combination of personal expression and the marketplace. The way in which the *Biblical Songs* inhabited this dual existence has implications for our understanding of their personal meaning. To what extent was Dvořák writing these songs primarily to make a profit, as were a number of composers who made use of religious texts, and to what extent were they a vehicle for the expression of his own feelings?

There is strong evidence to support the fact that the *Biblical Songs* were closely linked to happenings in Dvořák's life around the time he wrote them. Early in 1894, a couple of events occurred which are generally thought of as having impelled Dvořák to compose the songs. The conductor Hans von Bülow, who

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, David Gramit, 'The Circulation of the Lied: The Double Life of an Artwork and a Commodity', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Lied*, ed. James Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.301-14.

was a close friend and supporter of the composer, died on 12 February 1894.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, around this time Dvořák received word that his own father was gravely ill. František Dvořák died on 28 March, only two days after Dvořák completed the songs. These deaths undoubtedly had a huge personal impact on Dvořák, suggesting that the *Biblical Songs* were a response to troubling times, as is implied by Clapham and Jacobson.<sup>16</sup> However, without denying the effect of these events on Dvořák, it is also important to consider the songs in the wider context of his American sojourn, which brings to light further revealing facts about Dvořák's state of mind during his time as the artistic director of the Conservatory.

Dvořák first learned about the possibility of travelling to America to teach in June 1891 when Jeannette Thurber, the president of the National Conservatory of Music in America, first offered him the artistic directorship of the school. Thurber had a particular agenda in wanting to bring Dvořák to her country. The famous composer, whose compositions were by that time well known in America, would certainly have brought prestige and experience to the Conservatory. However, Thurber's purpose in creating this institute was to provide a top quality music school for Americans, where American music could be developed on home soil. Dvořák was viewed as the kind of 'cultural nationalist' who could inspire young Americans and perhaps help to create an American school of composition.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jacobson, 'The "Biblical Songs"', Opus 99', p.255.

<sup>16</sup> Clapham, *Dvořák*, p.130; Jacobson, 'The "Biblical Songs"', Opus 99', p.255.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Horowitz, 'Dvořák and the New World: A Concentrated Moment', in *Dvořák and His World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c1993), p.94.

The correspondence surrounding Dvořák's decision to take up this position suggests that the choice was not at all easy. As Graham Melville-Mason states, although the offer excited him, he had concerns surrounding details of payment, the well-being of his children while he and his wife, Anna, were away, and also the New York climate.<sup>18</sup> He wrote of his worries in a letter to his good friend Alois Göbl in August: 'What people say of America is very mixed. As always in this world some are for and some against.'<sup>19</sup> Despite Dvořák's concerns, however, there were certain factors that attracted him to the position. The final salary offer, which was twenty-five times what he earned at the Prague Conservatory, and equivalent to six figures in today's terms, would have been a clear incentive.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, as Beckerman identifies, Dvořák apparently shared Thurber's vision for the Conservatory.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the thriving music scene of late nineteenth-century New York, which was at this time 'inundated with phenomenal vocalists and instrumentalists', was also an attraction.<sup>22</sup> Dvořák's son, Otakar, remembered an occasion where the family actually had a vote about the matter over lunch. This poll went in favour of those 'for' the trip to America.<sup>23</sup> In total, the negotiations over Dvořák's contract had lasted for six months. It was finally signed, however, on 23 December, 1891.

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<sup>18</sup> Graham Melville-Mason, 'From London to New York: Dvořák's Introduction to America', in *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), p.31.

<sup>19</sup> Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, p.386.

<sup>20</sup> Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>22</sup> Horowitz, 'Dvořák and the New World: A Concentrated Moment', p.92.

<sup>23</sup> Otakar Dvořák, *Antonín Dvořák, My Father*, trans. Miroslav Nemec (Spillville, Iowa: Czech Historical Research Center, c1993), p.13.

Dvořák arrived in New York on 27 September 1892, with his wife, and just two of his six children. Another member of their party was Josef Jan Kovařík, who had just finished his studies at the Prague Conservatory, and was returning home to his family in Spillville where Dvořák would end up spending his first summer in the States. Dvořák described some of his first impressions of America in a letter to Dr. Emil Kozdnek, dated 12 October. ‘The city itself is magnificent, lovely buildings and beautiful streets and then, everywhere, the greatest cleanliness.’<sup>24</sup> In the same letter, he wrote of a large concert that had taken place in his honour on 9 October. This extract shows both Dvořák’s uneasiness with such attention, and also reveals the high level of expectation placed on him by the American musical community:

There were 3000 people present in the hall—and there was no end to the cheering and clapping. There were speeches in Czech and English and I, poor creature, had to make a speech of thanks from the platform, holding a silver wreath in my hands. You can guess how I felt! Besides you will learn about it later from the newspapers. What the American papers write about me is simply terrible—they see in me, they say, the saviour of music and I don’t know what else besides!<sup>25</sup>

Writing on 12 December 1892, Dvořák again mentioned that ‘the Americans expect great things of me and the main thing, is, so they say, to show them to the promised land and kingdom of a new and independent art, in short, to create a national music.’<sup>26</sup> However, despite the huge weight of responsibility on his shoulders, Dvořák also wrote that ‘we are all well and liking it here very much.

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<sup>24</sup> Dvořák to Dr. Emil Kozdnek, 12 October 1892, in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895*, p.389.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Dvořák to Mr. and Mrs. Hlavka, 27 December 1892 in Ibid., p.390.



And why shouldn't we when it is so lovely and free here and one can live so much more peacefully—and that is what I need.'<sup>27</sup> He also enjoyed visiting the pigeons (which he had kept himself at his country retreat in the small Czech village of Vysoká) at the Zoological Garden in Central Park.<sup>28</sup>

Although reports of Dvořák's first year in America (mid-1892 to mid-1893) are generally positive, evidence concerning his state of mind in his second year (mid-1893 to mid-1894), the year in which he wrote the *Biblical Songs*, reveals that Dvořák was not in the most settled of states. As Beckerman indicates, Dvořák's frame of mind during his time in the USA was 'considerably more complex and variable' than has previously been thought.<sup>29</sup> Clapham mentioned agoraphobia in connection with Dvořák in his 1979 biography, suggesting that something was awry with the composer,<sup>30</sup> but it is Beckerman's much more recent publication, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, that has offered a more detailed treatment of Dvořák's mental state during his time in America. Much of what he has to say is significant if we are to consider the *Biblical Songs* as a means for Dvořák's personal expression.

Beckerman points to a large wealth of evidence in asserting that Dvořák did indeed suffer from agoraphobia. Firstly, it is necessary to explain that

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> From Josef Jan Kovařík's *Reminiscences*, quoted in Ibid., p.392.

<sup>29</sup> Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.190.

<sup>30</sup> Clapham, *Dvořák*, p.104.

agoraphobia is not simply a fear of open spaces, as is the common perception. In fact, a sufferer of the condition fears exposed spaces because ‘help may not be available in the event of having an unexpected or situationally predisposed Panic Attack or panic-like symptoms.’<sup>31</sup> There are a number of accounts of the uneasiness that Dvořák experienced when travelling or walking by himself in New York. One example was recorded by Barushka Klírová, who lived with the Dvořák family in 1894. As she recalled, ‘it seldom happened that he walked alone. He did not like loneliness, and therefore, Mrs. Dvořák or Prof. Kovařík went with him.’<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, one of his students recalled the following: ‘The Master sent me (certainly because I was the youngest) to look in front of the Rudolfinum and see if ‘his Mary’ was waiting there. She was a servant who waited for him—Dvořák never walked alone.’<sup>33</sup> Beckerman seems justified in suggesting that if a robust and physically healthy man like Dvořák did not feel comfortable walking around by himself, he may indeed have suffered from agoraphobia.<sup>34</sup>

Dvořák also exhibited other symptoms of excessive anxiety. For example, he was horribly afraid of thunderstorms. As one of his American students Harry Patterson Hopkins recalled that ‘if there were an electric storm which Dvořák feared, there could be no thought of a lesson till it passed. These storms were the

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<sup>31</sup> From the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (DSM-IV), p.396, quoted in Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.181.

<sup>32</sup> Barushka Klírová in Miroslav Ivanov, *Dvořák's Footsteps: Musical Journeys in the New World* (Kirkville, Mo: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1995), p.119, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>33</sup> Karel Leitner, *Antonín Dvořák: Jak učil* [Antonín Dvořák: how he taught] (New York: New York Papers, 1942), quoted in *Ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

bane of his existence.<sup>35</sup> Hopkins also noted that if a storm was nearing, Dvořák would play the piano very loudly to block out the sound of the thunder.<sup>36</sup>

In the biographical literature on Dvořák, much attention has been given to the fact that he also suffered from feelings of extreme homesickness while in America – another factor that is likely to be linked to agoraphobia.<sup>37</sup> Jeanette Thurber remembered that ‘on the whole, Dvořák seemed to be happy in his new surroundings, although he suffered much from homesickness, being intensely patriotic...Thoughts of home often moved him to tears.’<sup>38</sup> Dvořák’s sister-in-law, Terezie Koutecká, also testified to his homesickness in a letter written shortly before he began composing the *Biblical Songs*. She had been to visit the Dvořáks in America, and also travelled with the family to Spillville. On leaving, she wrote a letter to Göbl with this entreaty, dated 25 February 1894:

At the urgent request of brother-in-law Dvořák, I take the liberty of troubling you after some time with a few lines...In spite of his splendid position and material prosperity he is terribly homesick for his country...On my departure from New York, when they all accompanied me on board, Dvořák broke into tears and said: ‘If I could, I should go with you and were it only between decks.’<sup>39</sup>

The perspective provided by Dvořák’s son Otakar offers an even bleaker picture of the composer’s homesickness. Although this recollection cannot be definitively dated, we do know that it refers to the time shortly after Dvořák’s

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<sup>35</sup> Harry Patterson Hopkins in Olin Downes, ‘A Dvořák Reminiscence: The Man and Musician Recalled in Memories of American Pupil’, *New York Times*, August 12, 1934, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.182.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, See pp.184-87.

<sup>38</sup> Jeanette Thurber in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895*, p.381.

<sup>39</sup> Šourek, *Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences*, pp.174-75.

stay in Spillville in the summer of 1893. Thus, this statement must refer to some period during the academic year of 1893-1894, which is, of course, the time when Dvořák composed the *Biblical Songs*. Otakar's memory shows that Dvořák was homesick to an alarming degree, but note also the fact that Otakar needed to walk with his father, and the use of keywords such as 'depressions' and 'fears':

Under the influence of stress my father increasingly smoked and started to have problems with his nerves and depressions. After Spillville's quiet the rush of the big city changed him and brought me a new task – to accompany Father to the conservatory. Sometimes he was afraid of the wagons and other vehicles on the streets. Never before had he expressed so many fears to me. No wonder that Father did not want to renew the contract. He wanted to return to his birthplace and never leave again. *He almost started to hate America.*<sup>40</sup>

These are only a few of the many accounts of Dvořák's longing for his home country. Given the evidence, Beckerman makes the assessment that for Dvořák, 'homesickness' could be a code word for what might today be termed 'depression.'<sup>41</sup>

One further aspect may have made life difficult for Dvořák in America. The religious climate experienced by Dvořák in the New World would have been quite different to that of his homeland. In Bohemia, almost the entire population was Catholic, but in North America, Protestants greatly outnumbered Catholics. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a great religious revival occurred in the United States, known as the Second Great Awakening. In the

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<sup>40</sup> Dvořák, *Antonín Dvořák, My Father*, p.36. Italics my own.

<sup>41</sup> Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.186.

context of America's recent independence from the crown, this revival of evangelical Protestantism shaped the religious direction of the young republic.<sup>42</sup> An emerging threat to this Protestant cultural base was, however, the growth of the Roman Catholic community. The Catholic population was in fact being enlarged by the increasing number of European immigrants, and was a cause for great concern amongst many Protestants.<sup>43</sup> This group of Protestants viewed America as having a special role 'in the divine plan for the world and Rome as the very antithesis of republican principles and virtues.'<sup>44</sup> Essentially, Catholics were on the outside of mainstream Christianity in America.<sup>45</sup> We do not know specifically if Dvořák experienced hostility because of his status as a Catholic immigrant during his time in America, but this could well have played a role in his feelings of isolation. From the death of loved ones to ongoing anxiety issues and homesickness, it is clear that Dvořák was in the midst of hugely difficult times when he composed the *Biblical Songs*.

## Nationalism, Religion and 'Folk' Music in Bohemia

Any study of music with a religious dimension in the nineteenth century inevitably leads to a consideration of nationalism, because of the important role played by the Protestant Reformation in the formation of German cultural identity. In nineteenth-century German music, for example, use of the Lutheran Bible was often connected with nationalist sentiment, as exemplified in

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<sup>42</sup> Adrian Hastings, ed., *A World History of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1999), p.428.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.435.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.436.

Brahms's *Triumphlied* and *German Requiem*.<sup>46</sup> Works such as Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* also show the connection between religion and nationalism – in this case, the use of the Lutheran chorale as a signifier of German identity. However, nationalism and religion were interconnected in subtly different ways in Dvořák's native Bohemia. Since I am investigating songs with biblical texts by a religious composer who is often discussed under a 'nationalist' heading,<sup>47</sup> some examination of this relationship is clearly necessary.

Early in the fifteenth century in the Bohemian lands an event occurred that is hugely significant in the history of the Czech people – the Hussite Rebellion. In brief, the Hussite Rebellion, which pre-dates Luther's Reformation by about a century, involved a group of Czechs from all political estates and social levels who advocated preaching in the vernacular, and who were dissatisfied with some of the church's practices, such as the sale of indulgences.<sup>48</sup> The leader of this reform movement, Jan Hus, was executed in 1415, and in 1419 the movement embarked on a revolutionary phase. The followers of Hus, known as the 'Hussites', were officially at war with the rest of Western Christendom until an agreement was reached at the ecumenical Council of Basel in 1431.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p.2.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Plantinga, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe*.

<sup>48</sup> Hugh LeCaine Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), pp.41-43.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

Unsurprisingly, Luther's Reformation subsequently took hold rather strongly in Bohemia, giving the kingdom a principally Protestant outlook.<sup>50</sup>

However, in 1526, Ferdinand I was installed as the first Habsburg ruler of the Bohemian crownlands, (marking the beginning of foreign domination which lasted into the twentieth century). Although Ferdinand I supported Catholicism in keeping with the traditions of his family, it was not until the early seventeenth century that the situation became particularly bleak for the Hussites. At the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620 (two years into the Thirty Years' War), the Czech nobility were defeated by the House of Habsburg, and as a consequence Bohemia became a virtual province of the Empire.<sup>51</sup> The German language began its ascent to a place of privilege in Bohemia, so that by the eighteenth century it had become the language of administration, education, and culture.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, through an effective process of Counter-Reformation, Catholicism reigned supreme in Bohemia once more.

It is partly this sense of the oppression of Czech customs and culture that gave rise to the fervent nationalism of nineteenth-century Bohemia, when the Czech people began to demand the rights of self-administration, and the equality of Czech with the German language. While it is tempting to seek some sort of association between nationalism and a revival of Protestantism in connection with the earlier Hussite Rebellion, there is no clear evidence to support this. In

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<sup>50</sup> John Clapham et al., 'Czech Republic', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001). vol.6, p.808.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown*, p.114.

fact, the western part of the area then known as Cisleithania, (the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy formed in 1867) was still made up of an overwhelming majority of Roman Catholics (95-99%).<sup>53</sup> Rather, it was the Czech language that was a more potent force for the creation of nationalist sentiment. John Tyrrell provides a neat summary of the situation in his book, *Czech Opera*. He contrasts the nationalism of the earlier Hussites with the nationalism of the nineteenth century:

Doctrinal differences, much more than their distinctive language, had set the Czech Hussites apart from their adversaries, and in the fifteenth century religious and national fervour had gone hand in hand. But in the next surge of national awareness, the Czech National Revival of the nineteenth century, the predominant if nominal religion of the Czechs – Catholicism – was also that of their adversaries. Denominational differences could not be the national rallying force that they assumed for the Czechs' neighbours, the fervently Catholic Poles. Religion consequently played little part in the Czech National Revival and religious reference was not as important a feature of Czech opera as it was in Italian and French nineteenth-century opera.<sup>54</sup>

However, Tyrrell does point out that a number of Czech operas were inspired by the story of the Hussites, and Dvořák himself composed a *Hussite Overture* in 1883.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the revival of the Czech language that was so important to the rise of nationalist sentiment was closely connected to the Protestant Bible of Kralice (1579-94), which represented a 'codification of the [Czech] language comparable to that achieved in English by the King James Bible.'<sup>56</sup> (Of course, a similar relationship existed between Luther's Bible and standardisation of the

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<sup>53</sup> Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, eds., *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.286.

<sup>54</sup> John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.144.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.



German language.) The role of the Bible of Kralice was such that it contributed to the survival of the Czech language during the period of German domination through covert readings in village schools.<sup>57</sup> It was from this Bible that Dvořák chose his texts for the *Biblical Songs*.

A further connection can be drawn between religion and Czech Nationalism. Interestingly, according to Hugh Agnew, in the first part of the nineteenth century the most active patriots in smaller towns and villages were the parish priests.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the singing of hymns in the Czech language, as well as the inclusion of folk music elements, was tolerated to a greater extent by the Catholic Church in Bohemia than it was in other parts of Catholic Europe.<sup>59</sup> Tyrrell describes the role of the Czech kantor:

These country musicians were responsible for the music that was performed in the church, but they also provided music for dancing in the taverns, while on the other hand their services were called for by the lesser nobility of the area. Their church music – a large number of kantors composed – reflected their wide range of musical activities, and not least their contact with folk culture.<sup>60</sup>

It is highly likely that Dvořák himself was influenced by this free exchange between church music and folk music, and also by the sense of patriotism within the Catholic Church in Bohemia. The composer himself spoke of nationalism in religious terms, once writing the following to Simrock: 'I just wanted to tell you

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>58</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown*, p.114.

<sup>59</sup> Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, pp.213-14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.214

that an artist too has a fatherland in which he must also have a firm faith and which he must love.’<sup>61</sup>

## ‘Folk’ Music in America

It is not only Bohemian folk music that may have influenced Dvořák’s *Biblical Songs*. During his three years in America, Dvořák became friends with Harry T. Burleigh, a young African American singer and composer who was studying at the National Conservatory on a scholarship. On hearing Burleigh sing, Dvořák apparently invited the young man into his home, and asked him to perform the plantation songs that he had learned from his relatives.<sup>62</sup> Burleigh later wrote that while in America, Dvořák ‘literally saturated himself with Negro song...I sang our Negro songs for him very often, and before he wrote his own themes, he filled himself with the spirit of the old Spirituals.’<sup>63</sup> In *New Worlds of Dvořák*, Beckerman proposes that these ‘spirituals’, which ‘went far beyond biblical description into an exalted world of religious spirit’, may have been the original ‘biblical songs’ for Dvořák.<sup>64</sup> Such statements raise questions about the extent to which Dvořák was influenced by the music he heard in America –

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<sup>61</sup> Dvořák to Simrock, quoted in Klaus Döge, ‘Dvořák, Antonín’, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol.7, p.781.

<sup>62</sup> Jean E. Snyder, ‘A Great and Noble School of Music: Dvořák, Harry T. Burleigh, and the African American Spiritual’, in *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, ed. John C. Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), p.130.

<sup>63</sup> From Harry T. Burleigh, ‘The Negro and His Song’, in *Music on the Air*, ed. Hazel Gertrude Kinsella (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), p.188, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>64</sup> Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.136-37.

questions which have been debated ever since the composition of the 'New World' symphony.

During his stay in America, much of the media attention that Dvořák received was directed at the idea of nationalism in music. Indeed, as we saw earlier, one of the key reasons he was brought to America was because of his reputation as a 'cultural nationalist' (see p.49). One journalist wrote the following on the eve of the first performance of the 'New World' Symphony: 'He [Dvořák] has made a serious study of the national music of this continent as exemplified in the native melodies of the negro and Indian races. What the effect of this study has been the New York public will have the opportunity of hearing this afternoon.'<sup>65</sup> Thus followed lengthy quotes from Dvořák about the spirit of 'Negro' and 'Indian' music, which he had apparently attempted to recreate in his symphony. The idea that Dvořák made a 'serious' study of the music he heard in America has since come under attack from scholars.<sup>66</sup> However, subsequent discussions of Dvořák's American compositions have often focussed to a large extent on exactly what constitutes this 'spirit.' Beckerman offers a rather facetious summary of this research, while hinting at the difficulties inherent in trying to locate a particular national style in music:

No one has yet been able to articulate what, precisely, is American about Dvořák's works...The discussion usually begins with allusions to pentatonicism, which, it is grudgingly acknowledged, could well have evolved in Bohemia, and continues with mysterious and inscrutable Indians, Scotch snaps,

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<sup>65</sup> From an article in the New York Herald, 15 December 1893, reproduced in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, p.362.

<sup>66</sup> See for example, John Clapham, 'Dvořák and the American Indian', in *Dvořák in America: 1892-1895*, ed. John Tibbetts (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1993), pp.113-22.

and references to Black singers who may or may not sound like cors anglais.<sup>67</sup>

The *Biblical Songs* were written by a Czech composer working in America, apparently under the influence of African American and American Indian music. However, as David Beveridge hints, certain ‘American’ characteristics that have been described in the compositions that Dvořák wrote while in America are not unlike various ‘Bohemian’ characteristics that have been identified in his other music.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Richard Taruskin points out that the music of a number of nations makes use of pentatonicism.<sup>69</sup>

In Dahlhaus’s opinion, ‘regardless of the milieu being depicted, exoticism and folklorism almost invariably make do with the same technical devices.’<sup>70</sup> Dvořák’s own comments about American music in the *New York Herald* only serve to enhance this point: ‘I found that the music of the two races [African American and American Indian] bore a remarkable similarity to the music of Scotland. In both there is a peculiar scale, caused by the absence of the fourth and seventh, or leading tone.’<sup>71</sup> Dvořák is, of course, referring to the pentatonic scale here.

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<sup>67</sup> Michael Beckerman, ‘Dvořák’s Pentatonic Landscape: The Suite in A Major’, in *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries*, ed. David R. Beveridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.250.

<sup>68</sup> David Beveridge, ‘Sophisticated Primitivism: The Significance of Pentatonicism in Dvořák’s American Quartet’, *Current Musicology* 23 (1977), pp.25-36.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music: Volume 3 - the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.765.

<sup>70</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, p.306.

<sup>71</sup> From an article in the *New York Herald*, 15 December 1893, reproduced in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895*, pp.362-63.

Another term that has been used to describe Dvořák's American works is 'pastoral.'<sup>72</sup> Beckerman locates Dvořák's 'Americanness' not so much in potential evocations of African American and American Indian music, but rather in the new landscape that the composer encountered in America:

There must be something that animated this language, that caused a series of tendencies, already present in Dvořák's work in Bohemia, to become magnified. I would like to focus on one factor that is still with us and that is something Dvořák noticed: the landscape.<sup>73</sup>

Beckerman's particular focus in this article is Dvořák's Suite in A major. In fact, Dvořák interrupted his composition of this work in order to write the *Biblical Songs*, which might suggest that he made use of similar 'pastoral' characteristics in the songs. As we shall see, we can certainly locate moments of tonal and motivic stasis in the songs, which relate to those characteristics observed by Beckerman in the Suite in A major.<sup>74</sup> However, this phenomenon of what Dahlhaus refers to as 'musical landscape painting' is closely linked to the techniques used to represent exoticism and folklorism.<sup>75</sup> Thus, we cannot ascertain whether Dvořák was representing specific American or Czech music in his *Biblical Songs*, nor if he was trying to represent the idea of landscape. Thus, it is not my objective to attempt to distinguish between the influence of the African American spiritual, American Indian music, Bohemian folksong, and depictions of the pastoral in the *Biblical Songs*. The important issue, as

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<sup>72</sup> See for example, Beckerman, 'Dvořák's Pentatonic Landscape: The Suite in A Major', pp.250-51.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.251.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp.249-50.

<sup>75</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, p.306.

Dahlhaus states, is the extent to which compositional devices differ from the 'European norm.'<sup>76</sup> Of course, what Dahlhaus refers to as a 'European norm' is really an 'Austro-German norm.' The various characteristics used by Dvořák – be they pentatonicism, tonal and motivic stasis, pedal points and the like – define a style which contravenes the German tonal idiom. As we shall see in the following chapters, and understanding of Dvořák's use of such devices is crucial to unlocking the meaning of the *Biblical Songs*.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

## Part Two: The Songs

### 3 Song by Song Analysis

In her article in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, Susan Youens makes the observation that when the historical context surrounding lieder is considered, the discussion tends to focus solely on the music and the composer – little regard is paid to the poet and the text.<sup>1</sup> In her own studies of the songs of Schubert and Wolf, she has done much to remedy this situation, demonstrating how the study of lieder is greatly enriched when both aspects of song composition are considered.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Biblical Songs*, however, we are dealing with the unusual case of biblical settings. Therefore, some of the questions that we would ask of literature that was contemporary with the composer become redundant – in the case of the Psalms, in most instances we do not even know who authored the texts, and even where a particular author is suggested, there is still much disagreement amongst scholars. However, there is a great deal to be gained from a close examination of the texts themselves. In Dvořák's own lifetime, the proportion of the population who read the Bible and attended church regularly was much higher than today, so his audiences would have been much more likely to recognise the psalm texts used in the *Biblical Songs* and, furthermore, the sections that the composer included or omitted. If we are to gain an appreciation

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Youens, 'Schubert and His Poets: Issues and Conundrums', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.99.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles*; Youens, *Hugo Wolf and His Mörike Songs*; Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's Winterreise* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).



for the subtleties of Dvořák's settings, a close analysis of the texts as well as the music is clearly necessary.

For his *Biblical Songs*, Dvořák made use of psalms from all but one of the five books found in the Psalms. Table 3.1 demonstrates the wide distribution of his selection:

Book I	Book II	Book III	Book IV	Book V
<b>23, 25</b>	<b>55, 61, 63</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>96, 97, 98</b>	<b>119, 121, 137, 144, 145</b>

**Table 3.1 – Psalms used in the *Biblical Songs* in the order they appear in the Bible**

In a number of cases Dvořák chose particular verses or parts of verses for his purposes, or combined verses from two different psalms within one song to create his own unique poems. These factors suggest the composer's intimate knowledge of the Psalms, and also imply a very personal reading of these texts. It is the implications of Dvořák's careful selection of psalm verses, and the relationship between these texts and the music he composed that I now wish to explore in my discussion of the *Biblical Songs*.

## Song One

(Psalm 97:2-6)

*Clouds and darkness are round about Him, justice and judgement are the foundation of His throne. Fire precedes Him, and burns up His enemies round about. His lightning-flashes light up the corners of the world; seeing it, the earth is horrified. The mountains melt away like wax before the face of the Lord, ruler of all the earth. And all nations see His glory.*

Right from the first song of Dvořák's op.99, expectations implied by the label *Biblical Songs* are challenged. Like Brahms's *Four Serious Songs*, though this song's text is taken directly from the Bible, it does not seem appropriate for a church setting, nor does it bear the simplicity and piety that one might expect of a devotional song to be played and sung in a domestic context. As is the case in a number of the *Biblical Songs*, the verses of the psalm that Dvořák omitted are as revealing as the ones he included. Here, Dvořák does not depict a 'safe' God, but one whom the earth looks on with horror.

Based on its textual content, Psalm 97 can be divided into two equal sections; the first comprising verses 1-6, and the second verses 7-12. In this first section, verse 1 boldly states that 'the Lord reigneth', and the words of verses 2-6 demonstrate the massive power that he has over creation.<sup>3</sup> The psalmist uses natural imagery to illustrate aspects of God's character, and to show the relationship he has with his created world, where he is clearly in control. These words depict a terrifying God who is removed from human affairs. Verses 7-12, however, have a very different emphasis. They speak of God's relationship with

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<sup>3</sup> When quoting words from the *Biblical Songs* in English I have used the translation found in Timothy Cheek, *Singing in Czech: A Guide to Czech Lyric Diction and Vocal Repertoire* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2001), pp.173-94. However, when quoting from other sections of the Psalms not used in the *Biblical Songs*, and therefore not included in Cheek's translation, I have used the King James Version of the Bible.

his people, affirming that he is not a distant God, but one who ‘preserveth the souls of his saints’ (verse 10). When these two sections are viewed consecutively, the implication is that the all-powerful God who has control over the earth from earlier in the psalm is in fact the very same God who cares for the people of Israel.

However, in choosing only verses from the *first* section of Psalm 97, Dvořák effectively changes the overall meaning of the psalm. References to God’s terrifying power are included, but his close relationship with humankind is not. Furthermore, Dvořák also omitted the very first verse of the psalm, which says ‘The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.’ The position of this verse means that it plays a significant role in setting the tone of the psalm, and therefore impacts on the way in which we understand verses 2-6. By excluding verses 1 and 7-12, the vision of God evoked by Dvořák for the opening of the *Biblical Songs* is that of massive, distant, and scary being, an image which is powerfully depicted in his musical setting.

The opening of the *Biblical Songs* is strongly suggestive of recitative. The melody is far from lyrical, but rather is characterised by a speech-like rhythm, and large leaps to the various notes of the half-diminished seventh chord which underpin it (Example 3.1). The alternation between accompaniment and singer is also suggestive of a recitative idiom. In bars 3, 10 and 17, the pianist drops down to a held chord in preparation for the singer’s entry, providing very little movement during vocal phrases. This use of a recitative-like texture

immediately encourages us to view the singer as a narrative persona, very different to what we would expect of sacred songs in a domestic environment. Dvořák's setting causes the singer to appear deeply emotionally engaged with these words, as evidenced in the opening bars. In the very first phrase, although the protagonist begins authoritatively with the support of a chord from the accompaniment in bar 4, by bar 7 he or she has been reduced to a low, unaccompanied whisper, as if fearful of this mysterious God. If the singer represents such a dramatic persona, one might therefore ask *who* this persona is. Given Dvořák's significant alterations to the text of Psalm 97, we can no longer say that this is the psalmist's voice. Rather, it is perhaps Dvořák himself who has become the narrator here, confronting us directly with his own vision of a terrifying God. Furthermore, it is likely that audiences would have been very familiar with the psalms, and therefore aware of changes made by Dvořák, thus reading this personal element into his settings.

1 Andantino

*f* *p*

O-blak a mrá - ko-ta jest vŭ - kol Ně - ho,

*f* *fz*

Example 3.1 – Song one, bb.1-7

Dvořák's use of tonal instability is another significant feature of his setting of Psalm 97:2-6. In the opening nine bars of the song, the prevalence of a highly unstable half-diminished seventh chord on the notes C#-E-G-B is suggestive of the fearful and unpredictable God depicted in the text. Here, God is described as being surrounded by cloud and darkness – words which evoke the mystery of his

being, and suggest that he cannot be comprehended by human beings. This image clearly relates to Dvořák's use of tonality: just as the tonic is obscured and difficult to comprehend, so too is God.

Dvořák also conveys his vision of a powerful, fearsome God through his creation of a musical thunderstorm. In the opening bars, a loud, descending rhythmic motif is heard in conjunction with the aforementioned diminished seventh chord. This motif occurs throughout the song, apparently functioning as a representation of a lightning strike – for this reason I will henceforth refer to it as the 'lightning' motif. The opening of the song itself supports such an interpretation. The first 'strike' occurs in bars 1-2, falling to a hush on the diminished seventh chord in bar 3 (Example 3.1). Once the lightning strike has ceased, the singer enters, but is reduced to a whisper. After one beat which is completely absent of sound, the 'lightning' motif suddenly returns, *forte*, still accompanied by the half-diminished seventh chord. This time, however, the motif descends to the dominant seventh of G major (bar 10). Here, the narrator affirms that despite the mysterious nature of God's character, 'justice and judgement are the foundation of his throne.' However, the rather fearful word 'soud' [judgement] is given prominence with an accent, and the strident chord  $^{\circ}\text{vii}^7/\text{G minor}$ . This harmony subverts the listener's expectations of a G major chord following  $\text{V}^7/\text{G major}$  in bars 10-11. As in the singer's opening line, the dynamic level in the voice decreases throughout the phrase, and the accompaniment ceases completely. This time, however, there is no rest before the next sounding of the 'lightning' motif, which interrupts the vocal part on the final word of the phrase, and is both louder and higher than earlier (b.15-16).

The shortening in the length of time between strikes, and the increase in dynamic and register are suggestive of an approaching storm.

Although the harmony of bars 15-16 completes a weak dominant-tonic progression with a chord of G major in second inversion, suggesting that the music may be heading towards tonal stability, we soon realise that this move is fleeting. In bar 17 the music returns to a half-diminished seventh chord, this time F#-A-C-E. Here, the words make explicit what has been represented in the music already: the mention of fire and lightning in the text of verses 3 and 4 is strongly suggestive of a thunderstorm.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, with a cadence into Bb major at bar 24, and the indication *poco più mosso*, it seems that the storm is now in full flight (Example 3.2). The text here is explicit: 'His lightning-flashes light up the corners of the world.' Use of the 'lightning' motif becomes incessant through bars 25-27, where it is now heard in the left hand of the accompaniment. The repetition of the motif heightens the tension, and suggests that the storm is directly over the listener. The tremolo texture here is again suggestive of recitative.

26 *f*

Za - svě - cu - jit' se po o-krš-ku svě-ta blý - ská - ní Je- ho;

*fz*

Example 3.2 – Song one, bb.26-29

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), p.146.

Once more, Dvořák does not stay with one key for long; at bar 30 the tonality edges up a semitone to the key of B major, while the dynamic increases to *fortissimo* by bar 33. The ‘lightning’ motif is repeated three times in the new key. Using the same pattern, Dvořák sets up the expectation that the key will rise another semitone to C major in bar 34, however, the accompaniment arrives on an A minor chord instead. The words at this point are those of verse 5, which contains a striking metaphor for God’s power: even the mountains cannot stand up to his might but rather ‘melt like wax’ before him. Here, the tempo slows and the accompaniment drops out completely, while the voice itself ‘melts’ away in a descending scale – a moment which is made all the more effective because of the tonal and rhythmic tension that has been building through bars 24-33. It is interesting that the protagonist participates in this melting effect, identifying with the victims of God’s wrath, rather than simply proclaiming these events from an impartial narrative distance. Again, this suggests the protagonist’s emotional engagement with the text he or she is singing.

The pace of the accompaniment is much gentler when it re-enters at bar 36, and the ‘lightning’ motif has ceased, suggesting that the storm is over. However, the tonality remains unclear until bar 40. Here, we have chord I of G major (albeit in second inversion) on the word ‘slávu’ [glory]. After so many bars of chromatic harmonies, the effect of this tonic chord, combined with the vocal high point on D, is like a shard of light breaking through the storm, drawing particular attention to the ‘glory’ of God that brings clarity and stability. Dvořák omitted the first half of verse 6 which reads ‘the heavens declare his righteousness’ – perhaps to avoid repeated reference to God’s righteousness, which was already

mentioned in verse 2. Alternatively, it may have been that Dvořák did not want to place too much emphasis on the comfort offered by God in this song, instead preferring to dwell on uncertainty. The final words of the song contain the affirmation that ‘all the peoples see his glory’, a phrase which is completed by the only clear V-I cadence in the tonic key of the entire song (bb. 43-44), and it seems as though stability and certainty have finally been established. However, this moment is undermined in bars 45-46 with a sudden, final repetition of the ‘lightning’ motif in the form that we originally heard it in bars 1-2. This is one last lightning strike before the storm recedes, before dissonance gives way to the supposed tonic in the final bars. However, after so much tonal uncertainty, the use of this G major chord is unconvincing, particularly given the fact that it is not preceded by chord V, but rather by the half-diminished seventh. Thus, the listener is left with a feeling of unresolved tension.

The vision presented by Dvořák in this opening song is not of an intimate, personal God, as we might expect of a nineteenth-century ‘biblical’ song, but rather a God who inspires awe and even terror in those he created. It is particularly interesting that the composer evokes this vision of God with a musical representation of a thunderstorm, because we know that such events were a cause of great fear to Dvořák (see p.54). Furthermore, the specific verses he chose to include show that this is exactly the way the composer wanted God to be presented in this song. The equation of God with a thunderstorm, and the omission of particular verses lend a possible autobiographical dimension to the song that adds to the sense that Dvořák is the persona behind the words and music.



## Song Two

(Psalm 119: 114, 115, 117, 120)

*You are my refuge and my shield, for Your word I wait. Step aside from me, ignoble ones, so that I might guard the commandments of my God. Help me, that I would be saved and belong to Your laws unceasingly. My body is horrified with fear before You, for I am tremendously afraid of Your judgements.*

Psalm 119, the longest in the Book of Psalms, has at times been singled out for its tedious repetition and monotony.<sup>5</sup> As Walter Brueggeman notes, it is in fact a carefully conceived acrostic poem, in which each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet is allotted eight lines of text.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the repetitiveness and strict acrostic nature of the psalm are, in fact, a reflection of its didactic content, which Brueggeman calls the ‘a-b-c’s’ of Torah obedience.<sup>7</sup> Although the acrostic structure of the psalm is not preserved in the Czech translation, its didactic intent is still evident – it is a psalm of instruction in living by the Torah, containing a clear distinction between those who abide by its laws, and those who do not.

For song two, Dvořák chose his verses from the section of Psalm 119 in which every line begins with the letter *Samekh*. Consistent with the psalm’s overall theme, this section contrasts those who want to uphold the decrees of God (in this case, the psalmist), and those who disregard them. Exactly half of the verses in this section speak of those who reject God while the other half focus on the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.39; J. Clinton McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p.1166.

<sup>6</sup> Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, p.39.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.40.

relationship between God and the psalmist. However, Dvořák's particular selection of verses severely reduces the impact of this dichotomy. Although he included verse 115 in his song, which does mention evildoers, he omitted the other three verses which contain reference to the 'wicked' (Table 3.2). Thus, the primary focus of Dvořák's text is the relationship between the psalmist, or perhaps the composer himself, and God.

Verses containing reference to those who reject God	Verses focussing on the relationship between God and the psalmist
<b>113</b>	
	<i>114</i>
<i>115</i>	
	<b>116</b>
	<i>117</i>
<b>118</b>	
<b>119</b>	
	<i>120</i>

\* Italics indicate verses set by Dvořák

**Table 3.2 – Distribution of verses containing reference to those who reject God, and verses focussing on the relationship between God and the psalmist.**

Dvořák's choice of words for song two also emphasises the importance of abiding by God's decrees. For example, verse 115 speaks of guarding ('keeping' in the KJV) God's commandments, and verse 117 speaks of belonging to God's laws 'unceasingly.' References to God, gods, or other religious images were frequent in lieder in the nineteenth century. However, lieder that showed such a specific commitment to the God of the Bible would usually have had their place in the home or church – not on the concert stage. The fact that Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* were performed in a very public context perhaps sets them apart from other sacred lieder of the period.

The opening of song two could be seen as an extension of the narrative of song one. Here, for the first time in the *Biblical Songs* so far, Dvořák establishes tonal stability – significantly, in G major, the key that we desired at the end of previous song. Thus, the idea of Dvořák as narrative persona established in song one is carried through into the second. However, in contrast to the words of song one, where God is portrayed as a massive, awe-inspiring and fearsome force, the opening lines of song two emphasise God's role as helper and protector: 'You are my refuge and my shield, for Your word I wait.' This is a confident affirmation of God's relationship to the author, which is one of intimacy and dependency; the use of an easily identifiable key, basic chords and lyrical vocal phrase reflects the stability of the relationship described. Dvořák also establishes this notion of stability through his use of modified strophic form – again creating a contrast with the opening song, which is through-composed. The separation of the roles of voice and accompaniment that was the norm in song one is also dispensed with. Here, the accompaniment is much more closely bound to the vocal line, enhancing the words and providing short, connecting passages between phrases. The fact that the voice has the primary role here, as well as the fact that the singer is addressing God directly, encourages us to hear this song as the solitary prayer of the protagonist.

An event which occurs at bar 7 furthers the primacy of the voice and the subordinate role of the accompaniment in this song. Here, the texture of the music changes suddenly with the words 'step aside from me, ignoble ones, so that I might guard the commandments of my God' (Example 3.3). The left hand of the piano part, which up to this point has played in a high register no lower

than G, drops down a tenth to E and begins to play fast sextuplets in a low rumble, while the harmony emphasises the relative minor (E minor). It is interesting to note that this grim change is not initiated by the accompaniment. In fact, leading up to this bar the accompaniment plays a descending pentatonic scale (b.6), which only serves to emphasise the sudden, dark turn when the voice re-enters at bar 7. The fact that this change in tone coincides with the singer's entry suggests that he or she is reacting to a fear that is generated from within, in this case initiated by the 'ignoble ones', as opposed to a reaction to an external circumstance or environment. The words which accompany this same music in the second verse confirm this idea of an internal fear: 'My body is horrified with fear before You.' Here, the low rumbling in the piano brings to mind a case of nerves and trembling limbs. This notion of a deep sense of fear without external cause is clearly reminiscent of what we know of Dvořák's personal anxiety, felt particularly keenly in America at the time he wrote these songs (see pp.52-56).

4

o - če - ká - vám.

*mf*

7

*p* *poco accel.*

Od - stup - tež o - de mne, ne - šle - chet-ní - ci,

*pp*

6 6 6 6

Example 3.3 – Song two, bb.4-8

Although the music of the first and second verses is closely related, their conclusions are very different (Examples 3.4 and 3.5). At the end of the first verse, after the brief E minor interlude of bars 9-10, the music returns to the tonic with a strong G major cadence in bars 11-12. The second time however, the music does not move back to the major as in did in the first verse, but stays firmly in E minor for the phrase ‘for I am tremendously afraid of your judgements’ (bb.22-25):

Example 3.4 – Song two, bb.10-12

Example 3.5 – Song two, bb.23-26

It is the minor, then, that has the final say in this song, turning stability and comfort back to the uncertainty and fear of the opening song. Interestingly, Dvořák adds the word ‘náramně’ onto the final line, one of the few instances where he altered the biblical text in these songs, so that instead of ‘nebo soudů Tvých bojím se’ [for I am afraid of Your judgements], it becomes ‘nebo soudů Tvých bojím se *náramně*’ [for I am *tremendously* afraid of Your judgements]. This added word is emphasised with a melisma and a pause. Furthermore, it is sung at the moment where the music returned to the major in the previous verse

– since we are expecting the same thing to happen here as happened in the first verse, the change is particularly unsettling. The melody that accompanies the word ‘náramně’ is then ominously repeated in the accompaniment (b.25), before the left hand of the piano drops to a very low register to play a chromatic trill marked *perdendosi*, in what forms a doubtful conclusion.

Why did Dvořák feel he needed to add another word to the psalm verse here? Perhaps he needed extra syllables in the final line; adding ‘náramně’ brings the line up to eleven syllables to match the previous line, and therefore creates musical balance. It is also possible that he added the word for dramatic effect. We could also infer a personal motivation: perhaps at times Dvořák really did feel *tremendously* afraid of God’s judgements. As we saw in chapter two, fear was a very real threat to Dvořák’s mental health around the time that he wrote op.99, and this comes through strongly in these opening songs. Given that he experienced somewhat irrational fears in other areas of his life, it is not implausible that he struggled with a similar situation in terms of his faith. Thus, although this song begins with the notion of an intimate, caring God, it is in fact still permeated by the fear of God alluded to in song one.

## Song Three

(Psalm 55:1-2, 4, 5[abridged], 6-8)<sup>8</sup>

*Hear, oh God! Hear my prayer, and do not hide Yourself before my appeal. Watch and hear me; for I lament in my wailings, and I grieve. My heart is downcast within me, and fears of death have come upon me, and terror has overtaken me. And I said, 'Oh, were I to have wings like a dove! I would fly away and take rest. Ah, far away I would carry myself, I would dwell in the desert. I would hurry to escape from the violent wind and the gales.'*

As McCann notes, there have been a number of interpretations of the circumstances surrounding Psalm 55: 'it has been suggested that the psalm articulates the experience of exile, either of an individual or of the people, who find themselves in a strange and hostile city.'<sup>9</sup> The words of verses 6-8 reveal a strong urge to flee from a place of 'violent wind and gales' to a place of rest, and the psalmist wants to be 'far away' from his or her present location. This is analogous to Dvořák's situation at the time he composed the *Biblical Songs*; he 'almost started to hate America', and struggled in the 'rush of the big city', which he perhaps saw as a place of metaphorical wind and gales after his holiday in the quiet countryside town of Spillville (see p.59). As we shall see, in this song Dvořák creates a musical vision of escape. However, it is telling that this place of rest is surrounded by 'fears of death' on one side and stormy weather on the other.<sup>10</sup>

The psalm opens with a series of petitions to God to hear the prayers of the author, and in verse 3 we learn of the reason for these laments. The author is

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<sup>8</sup> In the Bible of Kralice these verses are labelled as 2-3 and 5-9.

<sup>9</sup> McCann, 'The Book of Psalms', p.898.

<sup>10</sup> Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.159.

distraught ‘at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger.’<sup>11</sup> In verses 4-5 we are told of the fear that has overcome the author as a consequence of this situation. The more well-known section of the psalm begins at verse 6, telling of the psalmist’s desire for the wings of a dove in order to flee these undesirable circumstances. The remainder of the psalm, not set by Dvořák (vv. 9-23), describes the ‘destructive forces’ present in the city, and the betrayal of the psalmist by a close friend. However, it closes with the hopeful affirmation, ‘I will trust in thee.’ The psalmist’s circumstances are therefore placed in the light of God’s providence.

The verses that Dvořák chose from this psalm go no further than verse eight. As a consequence, the reference to betrayal by a friend is removed, as is any reference to ‘the wicked’ that are prowling the city. Furthermore, in cutting out the psalm’s ending, Dvořák omitted its closing affirmation of trust in God, and, therefore, its ultimately hopeful message. Significantly, the only verse that Dvořák omitted from verses 1-8 is verse 3, in which the reason for the author’s lamenting is stated.<sup>12</sup> Again, this verse is a reference to the wicked, who in this case are a threat to the psalmist. Thus, Dvořák eliminated the author’s circumstances from his song, enabling the words to more easily reflect his own circumstances – there is no evidence that Dvořák was troubled by enemies in America. Alternatively, it may have been Dvořák’s intention to give his song a

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 55:3 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Dvořák also omitted the first half of verse 5, which in the KJV reads ‘Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me.’ This contains a very similar sentiment to that already expressed by Dvořák in his inclusion of verse 4 and the second half of verse 5. Thus, its omission is likely to have been because of musical reasons, or to avoid excessive repetition.



more universal application, so that it would reflect the thoughts of all who are afraid, not just those who are oppressed by enemies. What is left is essentially a cry to God, with language that in verses 4-5 ‘suggests precisely the opposite of deliverance’, followed by an expression of the desire to flee from the present plight.<sup>13</sup> There is no affirmation of trust in God as found in the original poem. Instead, this is delayed until the following song.

Andante

Bb: bvii<sup>6</sup> It<sup>6</sup> I                      bvii<sup>6</sup> It<sup>6</sup> I                      I<sup>6</sup>  
 [Eb: iv It<sup>6</sup> V                      iv It<sup>6</sup> V]

**Example 3.6 – Song three, bb.1-5**

As in song one, song three opens with tonal instability. Here, the presence of an Italian 6<sup>th</sup> chord in the first bar implies the chord progression iv-It<sup>6</sup>-V within Eb minor (Example 3.6). The same progression is then repeated down the octave in bars 3-4, setting up the expectation of an Eb minor tonic chord in bar 5. However, Eb is not the tonic, but the subdominant of the key of the song, which bars 5-9 clearly show is Bb. This opening twist is appropriate to the notions of lament and struggle in the words of the song, and is also a foreshadowing of further tonal shifts to come. Following this initial twist, the music in bars 5-21 is very much focussed on the tonic chord of Bb major, only shifting at cadence points. This incessant quaver repetition of the same chord seems to reflect the fervency of the protagonist’s petition ‘Hear, oh God! Hear my prayer, and do not hide Yourself before my appeal.’ However, although stability of key is

<sup>13</sup> McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, p.898.

established here, the irregular spacing of the quavers in the left hand of the piano reveals an underlying uneasiness (bb.6-8).

At bar 22, the uneasiness which has only been hinted at in the music so far begins to be realised more fully. In the bars that follow, the continual modulation to different tonal regions reflects the great distress of the protagonist at this point. Tension is also increased through the rising patterns of falling perfect fifths found in bars 22-24 and 32-34. This tension culminates, significantly, with the word ‘hrůza’ [terror] at bar 37. This word is sung on a top E, which is the highest note of the song, and is the seventh of chord  $^{+III}7$  in D minor at this point (Example 3.7). This dissonance is emphasised with an accent and a dynamic of *fortissimo*. Furthermore, this E is a tritone away from the tonic of Bb, another factor which adds to the notion that the protagonist is far from a secure footing. Dvořák further characterises this phrase, ‘terror has overtaken me’, by increasing the overall speed with an *accelerando* at bar 34, and the rhythmic rate at bar 36. In the previous song Dvořák emphasised words which describe fear – it is telling that in this song he emphasises this emotion yet again.

35

*ff*

smr - ti při - šli na mne, a hrů - za při - kva - ťi - la mne.

*ff*

*fz*

Example 3.7 – Song three, bb.35-38

At bar 42, however, the song changes completely, as the music heads unexpectedly back to the tonic of Bb for the words ‘Oh, were I to have wings like a dove! I would fly away and take rest.’ Dvořák characterises this place of rest, far away from the wind and gales, with a total musical contrast:

41 Un poco più mosso

Ó, bych měl křídla - ja - ko ho - lu - bi - ce!

*pp*

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ ℳℳ

**Example 3.8 – Song three, bb.42-45**

Moving away from the chromaticisms that have permeated the song so far, here the composer reverts to very simple harmonies, centring predominantly on a tonic pedal. This creates a strong and sudden sense of stasis and calm, an atmosphere that is enhanced by the repeated triplet motif in the right hand of the accompaniment. The suggestion of birdsong here is particularly convincing given that Dvořák gave this line to a flute when he orchestrated the first five songs. Furthermore, there is a significant change in the texture in this section, which up to this point has been dominated by thick repeated chords. Here, apart from the occasional chord, the texture changes to a single line in each hand of the piano, and the register of the accompaniment becomes very high, creating a sense of lightness and air which alludes to the idea of flight presented in the text. However, it is significant that the protagonist predominantly remains grounded on an F in a lower register than the birds, as if unable to join them. The fact that

Dvořák characterises the idea of rest and peace through the use of such static musical elements is also important, and I will return to this in chapter four.

However, this idyllic retreat into simple harmonies and static melodies is not to last. At bar 48, another pentatonic descent brings the accompaniment back ‘down to earth’, and into the bass clef region, suggesting that this fantasy is over. The music cadences into Bb minor at bar 54, and a low chromatic trill (which contrasts with the high register trill we have just heard in bar 41), is heard in the piano’s left hand. In fact, this is the beginning of another storm, as the words ‘I would hurry to escape from the violent wind and the gales’ make clear. The chromatic trill continues through bars 55-56, while the intensity builds with ascending chords in the accompaniment and a crescendo through to the word ‘prudkému’ [violent] in bar 57. After a slight hesitation, the ‘gale’ hits with full force in bar 58, with a rapid descending chromatic scale in the accompaniment, a dynamic of *fortissimo*, and accents in both the piano and vocal parts. The force of this storm is particularly violent after the serene, static section, which ends only nine bars earlier. Following it, the low trill resumes (b.59) then gradually subsides, coming to a halt on Bb in the final bar. This ending is very similar to that of the second song; once more, a major key has been converted into ominous minor.

Thus, we can see that this peaceful episode, a vision of rest and repose, is positioned between lamenting and fear on one side, and a storm on the other, giving the impression that this longing for peace is elusive and unattainable. God provides no comfort in this song as he does in the complete version of

Psalm 55, but rather is the target of the protagonist's complaints. In spite of his or her cries, the protagonist receives no consolation, and is left to face the gales, seemingly, alone. Yet again, the connections we can make to Dvořák's own life, his feelings of dire homesickness, and troubled state while living in New York, suggest that he had a very personal connection to this text.

## Song Four

(Psalm 23:1-4)

*The Lord is my shepherd, I will lack nothing. In green pastures He watches over me, to still waters He leads me. He refreshes my soul; He leads me along paths of justice for the sake of His name. Though it would befall me to walk through the valley of the shadow of death: I will fear no evil, for You are with me; and Your rod and Your staff, certainly they comfort me.*

Psalm 23 is probably the most well known in the Book of Psalms. It is a declaration of confidence in God, describing ‘a life lived in trustful receptivity of God’s gifts.’<sup>14</sup> Dvořák did not alter much of this psalm’s format, simply using the first four verses as they appear in the Bible of Kralice. Yet again, however, he chose to omit a reference to enemies; verse 5, which he did not set, reads ‘Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.’

Andante

*mp quasi recit.*

Hos-po-din jest můj pa-stýř, ne-bu-du-mi - ti ne - do-stat - ku.

*fp recit.*

*pp lunga corona*

*lunga corona fp*

lunga corona

### Example 3.9 – Song four, bb.1-6

This song raises some interesting issues in terms of narrative perspective. In the first three songs, there is evidence that Dvořák himself is the narrator, giving us his versions of the psalms as a reflection of his personal difficulties. In the fourth song, however, there is a second possibility for the identity of this narrative persona. In the opening bars (Example 3.9), the quality of the vocal line is clearly chant-like: it is unaccompanied, based around a single note (F#),

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, p.156.

marked with the indication *quasi recit.*, and the words are assigned speech-like rhythms. Given that the chanting of psalms was a standard part of Catholic ritual, it is highly likely that Dvořák was creating a representation of a religious idiom here. Thus, there are two possibilities for the identity of the narrator. On the one hand, this vocal line could represent the chanting of a priest-like figure. The song could, therefore, represent a situation in which Dvořák is comforted by the words he hears, such as a church service. On the other hand, Dvořák could be adopting this idiom for himself, receiving comfort by participating in a communal tradition of psalm recitation. Whichever way we look at it, the idea of ritual is certainly invoked here.

An clear theme in this psalm is that of God's leadership, and it is this element in particular that Dvořák singled out for his musical setting; the protagonist, be it Dvořák or a priest, is consistently 'shepherded' by the accompaniment. The song opens with a single F# in the piano. This note dies out before the protagonist responds on the same note, unaccompanied, with the phrase 'The Lord is my shepherd'. The word 'můj' [my] is emphasised because of its length, and the fact that it deviates from what would otherwise be a phrase sung entirely on F#. The attention given to this word highlights the level of personal interaction between God and the protagonist. Following this phrase, the accompaniment sounds another F#, an octave higher, to which the protagonist again responds. This time the singer's answer does not begin on F#. Instead, the line finds its way to this note before settling on it at the end of the phrase. Thus, the F# is set up as a note by which the singer is led, forming a musical call and response which is analogous to the relationship between a shepherd and his/her

sheep, or to God and his followers. Given the context, the F# is like a shepherd's horn-call, which is confirmed by the fact that, in his orchestration, Dvořák gave the F#s in bars 1 and 3 to the horn.

The accompaniment's role as 'shepherd' continues in bars 5-7, and, in fact, throughout the song. At the end of bar 5 another F# is sounded, but this time before it dies out it is joined by the singer and the other 'voices' of the accompaniment. The F# is displaced from the beginning of bars 6 and 7, entering one beat before the voice in both cases, again giving the impression the singer is being led by this note. This also occurs in bars 14-15, and bars 27-28. At these same points, Dvořák frequently uses anapaestic meter in the vocal line: ♪ ♪ ♪. This adds to the sense of leading-following; while the drive in the vocal line is towards the third beat, the piano emphasises the first beat of the bar, constantly leading the singer forwards.

Another significant aspect of this song is Dvořák's creation of a sense of tranquillity and stasis, similar to the central section of song three. Simple harmonies are used throughout – there are no tonal surprises as in the previous three songs. The only key change of note is a brief move to the relative minor in bars 21-24. The accompaniment is sparse, giving prominence to the vocal line, and contributing to the relaxed atmosphere. Melodic devices are also used to convey stasis. The following static motif, found in the piano, grows out of each of the three main cadence points in the song:





**Example 3.10 – Song four, b.11**

The aforementioned horn-call also contributes to a sense of stasis, right through to the song's conclusion. Here, in the final chord, Dvořák emphasises this note, the dominant, with repeated accents until it comes to rest with the other notes of the tonic chord.

Given Dvořák's context, he may well have had personal reasons for selecting Psalm 23. A popular reading of this psalm is that it conveys a sense of 'peace and tranquillity.'<sup>15</sup> As McCann observes, although the psalm does have this function, 'its primary intent is to say that God keeps the psalmist alive. For a sheep, to be able to "lie down in green pastures" means to have food; to be led "beside still waters" means to have something to drink; to be led "in right paths" means that danger is avoided and proper shelter is attained.'<sup>16</sup> Dvořák may have read Psalm 23 in terms of its popular meaning; however, it is also possible that he saw the deeper meaning in the text, the notion that 'God gives me life.' Whatever the case, both readings would have been a great source of comfort to him in his situation.

<sup>15</sup> McCann, 'The Book of Psalms', p.767.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Of the verses chosen by Dvořák, verse 4 is perhaps the most poignant when we think of his circumstances, and it is also given emphasis in his musical setting. Mourning the deaths of a close friend and father, and suffering from anxiety and depression, he was walking through his own private ‘valley of the shadow of death’ when he wrote these songs. However, in this verse, which McCann sees as the theological heart of Psalm 23, the psalmist speaks of the provision of guidance and comfort amidst such dark times.<sup>17</sup> Dvořák uses a descending line in the voice and the accompaniment to describe the ‘valley of the shadow of death’, cadencing to the relative minor at the end of this phrase (bb.21-22). The following bars (bb.23-24) contain the affirmation ‘I will fear no evil.’ Here, the roles of shepherd and sheep are momentarily reversed; the voice steps out ahead of the piano, suggesting a surge in confidence on the part of the protagonist. The music emerges from the minor, back to B major, which makes the words ‘for You are with me’ particularly poignant. Here, the word ‘Ty’ [You], is given special prominence, as it is the highest note in the song.

Song four, therefore, stands in contrast to the first three *Biblical Songs*. Although it hints at crisis with the reference to the valley of the shadow of death in bars 19-22, the overwhelming atmosphere is one of tranquillity and trust in God, where the protagonist allows himself/herself to be guided by the hand of the shepherd. It is particularly interesting that this sense of trust and guidance is expressed, at least initially, through reference to church ritual or tradition – perhaps suggesting that it is within this context that Dvořák was able to experience God’s comfort.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.768.

## Song Five

(Psalm 144:9 [abridged], Psalm 145:2, 3, 5, 6)

*God! God! I will sing a new song to You on the lute, and I will sing psalms joyfully to You. On each day I will bless You, and praise Your name forever and ever. The Lord is surely great and worthy of all praise, and His greatness cannot be comprehended. About Your glory and beauty and honour, and about Your wondrous works, I will speak. And the power of Your terrible deeds they will proclaim them all, and I will tell of Your dignity.*

Song five is the first of the *Biblical Songs* in which Dvořák combines verses from two different psalms, thereby forming a new poetic creation. The emphasis of Dvořák's poem centres on the re-telling and proclaiming of what God has done. He undoubtedly singled out the ninth verse of Psalm 144 because it contains an explicit reference to singing and playing an instrument – such a reference further encourages us to hear a composer persona in the singing narrator.<sup>18</sup>

The music of song five reflects the celebratory theme found in the words, which creates a very different atmosphere when compared with songs one to four. The triumphant theme which opens the song, and recurs as a refrain throughout, sounds 'other' – Jacobson states that it 'suggests the influence of both the Negro spiritual and American hymnody.'<sup>19</sup> However, in light of comments by Beveridge, Taruskin and Dahlhaus (see pp.63-64) I suggest that the song could just as easily show the influence of Czech idioms. This 'otherness' is reflected in the juxtaposition of phrases in different keys which creates large scale plagal movement at a background level throughout the song, tonal movement which

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<sup>18</sup> Dvořák omitted the words 'na desíti strunách' from this verse, which refer to 'ten strings', and therefore contain no particular ideological significance.

<sup>19</sup> Jacobson, 'The "Biblical Songs", Opus 99', p.264.

could show the influence of church music or folksong: bars 1-2 are in Db major, while bars 3-4 are in the tonic of Ab major. The song is also very repetitive, containing four verses with nearly identical vocal melodies, and a bridge passage (bb. 33-40). Furthermore, the music within each verse is very repetitive, and large portions of the melody are pentatonic. This suggests some kind of ‘folk’ idiom, be it Czech or American.

5 *in tempo*  
*mezza voce*

Bo - že! Bo - že! Pi - seň no-vou zpi - va - ti bu - du To - bě na lout - ně

*in tempo*  
*p*

**Example 3.11 – Song five, bb.5-8**

Although the song is basically strophic, with nearly identical melodies in each verse, Dvořák varies the successive accompaniments. Those for verses one to three, however, are still relatively similar. In the first verse (bb. 5-10), the chord progressions are very basic, and the accompaniment has a simple four-beat rhythm (Example 3.11). In the second verse (bb. 15-20), the chord progressions are almost exactly the same as the first verse, but Dvořák adds more rhythmic movement to the accompaniment. In verse three (bb. 25-30), the intensity builds as the accompaniment is taken up the octave. The strophic form is then broken by a short bridge passage, which draws particular attention to the phrase ‘and about Your wondrous works, I will speak.’ On the word ‘předivných’ [wondrous] the music cadences into the distantly related key of E major (b. 38). This tonal shift is accompanied by a decrescendo and a *ritardando*, contributing to the singer’s sense of hushed awe at the ‘wondrous works’ of God.

40 *in tempo* [mezza voce] bu-du. A moc pře-hroz-ných skut-ků Tvých vši-chni

43 *cresc.* roz-hla-šo-va-ti bu-dou; i

**Example 3.12 – Song five, bb.40-44**

This is followed by a very surprising passage in the song, beginning in bar 41 with verse four (Example 3.12). Until this point in the song, the voice and piano have been tightly fused; the piano has had the primary function of providing harmonic support and doubling the vocal line. However, in contrast to the basic tonal movement of the first three verses, the tonality here is highly chromatic. Jacobson points out the fact that within six bars, eighteen different chromatic/enharmonic pitches are used.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the rhythmic pace is significantly altered – in the other verses the crotchet dominates as the basic rhythmic unit, as in the vocal line, but here the accompaniment changes to repeated quaver triplets. Of particular significance is the fact that the vocal line remains exactly the same as it was in the previous three verses. The radically different accompaniment, however, causes us to hear this vocal line in a very different light.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

This sudden change in the harmony and rhythm of the accompaniment can be interpreted in different ways. The words at this point read ‘and the power of Your terrible deeds, they will proclaim them all.’ We might therefore view the event as a case of word painting, in accordance with the ‘terrible deeds’ of the text. In Schubert’s ‘Die Allmacht’ and ‘Erlkönig’, Youens relates the repeated triplet chords to evocations of power, ‘the one a force to create and exalt, the other to kill.’<sup>21</sup> It is possible that Dvořák was using a similar device to represent the power of God’s ‘terrible deeds’ here.

However, this reading fails to take into account the fact that it is only the accompaniment that changes – the vocal line seems to remain stoically indifferent to what is occurring around it. It is as if a separation has occurred between the vocal and piano lines, calling into question the relationship and roles of accompaniment and narrator. This separation is all the more intriguing because of the contrast between the simple, pentatonic melody, and the highly complex chromatic chords which underpin it. Perhaps Dvořák intended the accompaniment to undermine the words at this point. In this case the chromatic triplets could signify the unspoken uncertainties of the singer which are hidden beneath the surface of the unchanging melody – a fear of God’s ‘terrible deeds’, for example. If this is the case, these bars could potentially undermine the largely positive sentiment of the song, where God is praised and uplifted by the singer. One notes that a further separation is created between the narrator and the accompaniment at this point because of the fact that the text speaks of what

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<sup>21</sup> Youens, *Schubert's Late Lieder: Beyond the Song Cycles*, p.192. See also p.23, above.

*others* will do. Either side of this chromatic passage the singer uses the pronoun ‘I’, whereas in this phrase the pronoun is ‘they.’ However, this does not affect the above reading – the chromatic triplets could still represent the underlying fear of the narrative persona as he or she recalls such ‘terrible deeds.’

This unusual moment is short-lived, however, as chromaticism gives way to A minor in bar 44, which in turn modulates back to the tonic for the song’s triumphant conclusion, suggesting that any doubt in the mind of the narrator has been conquered. On the other hand, perhaps this is another forced conclusion, as in song one, where doubt is pushed aside just before the end of the song. I will return to such questions in the following chapter.

## Song Six

(Psalm 61:1, 3, 4, Psalm 63:1, 4 [abridged], 5[abridged])

*Hear, oh God, my cry, heed my prayers! For You were often my refuge and a solid tower before the face of the enemy. I will dwell in Your temple forever, I save myself in the refuge of Your wings. God! You are my God of strength, from early in the morning I look for You, for You my soul thirsts, for You my body longs, in a land thirsty and parched, in which there is no water. And so that I would thank You and with joyous singing of my lips, my mouth would praise You.*

As in song five, song six includes verses from two different psalms. Here, in spite of dire present circumstances, the past (Psalm 61:3) and the future (Psalm 61:4) are invoked as reminders of God's providence in the psalmist's life. The song opens with the first verse of Psalm 61, which contains a type of appeal used frequently throughout the Psalms, entreating God to hear the prayers of the psalmist.<sup>22</sup> In song six, Dvořák characterises this entreaty not as a desperate complaint, as he did in song three, but rather as a gentle request. The song opens in D major with a high register accompaniment and a soft dynamic – not unlike the opening of song two. Furthermore, as in song two, prominence is given to the vocal line; there is no introduction, and the function of the accompaniment is to provide harmonic support for the voice.

For some reason, Dvořák chose to omit verse two in this song, moving straight from verse 1 to verse 3. However, it is likely that this decision was made simply to avoid repetition, or because of formal constraints.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, in verse 3,

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<sup>22</sup> McCann, 'The Book of Psalms', p.919.

<sup>23</sup> There are two possible reasons for his omission of verse two, which reads: 'From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.' Firstly, it is significantly longer than verses one, three and four, and thus could have disrupted the particular musical form that Dvořák was creating. Secondly, most of verse two is an extension of the entreaty of verse 1. Whereas in verse 1 the psalmist asks God to 'hear my



which recalls the previous saving actions of God in the psalmist's life, Dvořák chose to retain the reference to enemies. Like the 'ignoble ones' mentioned in song two, the 'face of the enemy' is singled out by Dvořák through word painting. Here, he uses a diminished seventh chord (Example 3.13, b.8) which is very striking in the context of the basic, diatonic chords of the opening bars. Once again, fear seems to be rearing its head. Furthermore, the mention of the 'face of the enemy' is the catalyst for a cadence into F# minor (b.9) and an outbreak of sighing gestures in bars 9-10 (Example 3.13). As I stated earlier, there is no evidence to suggest that Dvořák had such enemies – perhaps the 'enemy' here is a reference to his internal fears.

8

*f* *p*

před tvá - ři ne - při - te - le. Bu - dut' by - dle - ti

*fz* *dim.* *pp*

Example 3.13 – Song six, bb.8-12

Following this shift to F# minor and the sighing gestures of bars 9-10, five accented F#s are heard in the right hand of the accompaniment, in a higher register. These F#s could not be more prominent – they are devoid of any other accompaniment from either the piano or singer, and each is marked with a *tenuto* symbol (Example 3.13). The fact that these notes lead back to D major tonality in bar 12 suggests that they are also acting as a beacon to the

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cry', here the psalmist describes the action of calling out to God, using language that emphasises the desperation of the petition. In any case, the leap from verses one to three still makes perfect narrative sense.

protagonist, lifting him or her back to the comfort of the tonic. Indeed, in bar 12 the singer ceases lamenting with a confident proclamation about the future, ‘I will dwell in Your temple forever, I save myself in the refuge of Your wings’ (bb. 12-16), and the musical texture of the opening bars is restored.

The song continues by jumping to verse 1 of Psalm 63, a shift that Dvořák articulates with a change in texture. At the conclusion of the Psalm 61 section, another pentatonic motif begins, first descending, then ascending to the beginning of Psalm 63. Here, with the words ‘God! You are my God of strength’, the idea of the power is again evoked through a lush texture of thick, repeated chords. However, this texture begins to change somewhat as the protagonist introduces desert imagery, describing his or her response to this barren wasteland. In these verses, the issue is not one of a physical need for drink. Rather, the protagonist describes his or her soul ‘thirsting’ for God. Furthermore, it is not for food that the protagonist’s body is longing – rather his or her body is longing after God. In this text, the fact that the psalmist replaces food and drink, clearly things that are necessary for our survival, with God, illustrates the thesis of this psalm: that the psalmist’s life is dependant on God.<sup>24</sup>

Dvořák uses a number of musical techniques to depict the desert imagery of this verse. As the text begins to speak of the thirsting of the psalmist’s soul, the music tends towards the relative minor. Furthermore, the strong, repeated chords of bars 19-23 begin to break down into sighing motifs similar to those found in bars 9-10. Following this, the text describing the thirsty and parched land is

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<sup>24</sup> McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, p.927.

characterised by a chromatic vocal line and harmonies. Once more however, it is the repeated, unaccompanied F#s that return in bar 32 which call the singer back into the tonic key, and to the more positive sentiments of praise and singing. This confirms that these repeated F#s do have a guiding role in song six. Given that Dvořák used a similar technique in song four to show God's leadership, and that he uses the very same note here, we can safely assume that once again this note is being used to depict God's guiding hand. In this way, Dvořák uses the music to show dependency on God – when times are tough, God, as represented by the F#s, leads one back to comfort and a positive outlook.

The desert imagery used in this psalm would no doubt have had a personal significance for Dvořák, given his circumstances – it is likely that he identified with the psalmist's feeling of isolation. Furthermore, the notion of being in a place far from home, away from those things which give you sustenance is clearly applicable to Dvořák's situation. However, unlike songs one to three, which also dealt with anguish and struggle, *this* song finishes with an impassioned declaration that the singer will praise God – it is significant that the climax of the song occurs in bar 37 on the word 'chválila' [praise], and that it concludes in a *major* key. Thus, though the words of this song do express anguish, the singer finishes with great hope in spite of his or her circumstances.

Given Otakar Dvořák's comments that in his second year in New York Dvořák 'almost started to hate America' (see p.55), we could quite easily infer that for Dvořák, the 'land thirsty and parched' mentioned in this song was, in fact, America. These texts suggest that the psalmist is experiencing a sense of

spiritual drought in his or her present surroundings. Can the same be said of Dvořák's experience? It is not as if there was a lack of churches in New York, and we know that Dvořák went to church regularly, as Jeanette Thurber recalled.<sup>25</sup> However, in chapter two I discussed the fact that Catholics were very much the outsiders of Christianity in America – it was Protestantism, not Catholicism that shaped the direction of the nation. Although the Roman Catholic population was growing steadily with the influx of European immigrants, the dominant culture remained Protestant. Arriving in this climate having grown up in an overwhelmingly Catholic country may well have been a cause of spiritual isolation and unrest for Dvořák, and therefore have furthered his feelings of homesickness.

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<sup>25</sup> Jeanette Thurber, 'Dvořák as I Knew Him', *The Etude*, November 1919, reprinted in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895* pp.380-82.

## Song Seven

(Psalm 137:1-5)

*At the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept, while remembering Zion. On the willows of that land we hung our harps, and when they who made us captive asked us there, about the words of a little song, saying: 'Sing to us some songs of Zion', we answered: 'How could we sing songs of the Lord in a land of foreigners? If I forget you, oh, Jerusalem, oh, oh, may my right hand also forget its art!'*

Psalm 137 is an expression of the extreme anguish and anger experienced by members of the exiled Israelite community following the sacking of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. Following the destruction of their city, members of the community were uprooted from their homeland and relocated to Babylon, a land which was completely different to that which they had known.<sup>26</sup> However, this exile was not only geographic; the Israelites were also removed from the temple, which was their spiritual home. It seems likely that Dvořák related to this psalm because it expressed some of his own troubles during his stay in America. As the Israelites desperately longed for Jerusalem, Dvořák was extremely homesick for Bohemia, the country of his birth. Unlike the Israelite community, however, Dvořák moved to America as the result of his own choice, not by force. Nor had he had experienced the destruction of his homeland. However, with the terminal illness and subsequent death of his father, Dvořák could have related to the expression of tearful remembrance and longing found in Psalm 137, and perhaps felt that in a sense, part of his homeland had now been lost.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> McCann, 'The Book of Psalms', p.1227.

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 137 also contains the idea of singing in a foreign land. Dvořák himself was, in a sense, having to sing in a foreign land. However, it does not appear that he had particular problems composing in America.

The song opens mournfully in C minor, appropriate to the weeping described in verse 1 (Example 3.14). The texture and rhythms of the accompaniment seem to represent an instrument other than the piano – perhaps the harps mentioned in bar 18. (Indeed, at the moment when the text states ‘On the willows of that land we hung our harps’ (bb. 15-19), this particular texture ceases, suggesting that in the opening section Dvořák intended to give the impression of harp playing.)

Andante

*p*

Při řekách ba-by-lon-ských

**Example 3.14 – Song seven, bb.1-4**

When the protagonist speaks of ‘remembering Zion’ (bb. 10-12), however, the key changes to the relative major (Eb), suggesting the joy that accompanies the remembrance of the Israelite’s homeland and, perhaps, Dvořák’s Bohemia. The notion of remembrance is a central theme in this psalm.<sup>28</sup> As evidenced in this first verse, although the remembrance of Zion by the community is painful, it is essential if they are to retain their identity as a people, and furthermore, their hope.<sup>29</sup> Dvořák may have had a similar feeling about the necessity of staying true to his own cultural identity while in a foreign land. He certainly jumped at the chance to be amongst Czech language and culture whilst in America, as is evident in a letter written to his friend Dr. Emil Kozanek, dated April 1893. In it, he writes of his upcoming summer in Spillville, where, he enthuses, ‘the teacher

<sup>28</sup> McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, p.1227.

<sup>29</sup> Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, pp.75-76.

and the parish priest and everything is Czech and so I shall be among my own folks and I am looking forward to it very much.’<sup>30</sup>

After the shift in texture which accompanies the hanging up of harps in bars 15-19, the tension builds as the protagonist speaks of being taunted by the captors. The accompaniment becomes increasingly agitated – the repeated chords are punctuated by an irregularly occurring descending sixth in the right hand of the accompaniment, first heard as Eb-G in bar 20, then changing to D-F in bars 21-22. This effect is combined with an *accelerando*, followed by a *crescendo*. The situation of the exiles is made even worse when the captors ask them to ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ McCann observes that the implication of this question was in fact to ask, ‘Where is your God?’<sup>31</sup> The condescension and confidence of the captors as they say these words is emphasised with straight-forward, diatonic harmonies and a dynamic of *forte*, which contrasts to the predominantly *piano* voice of the captives. Furthermore, this section, albeit brief, is the most lyrical section of the song.

In the overall design of Psalm 137, the effect of verses 4-6 (the first two of which are used in Dvořák’s song) is to say that although Jerusalem has been destroyed, the same thing cannot be done to memories – under no circumstances may Jerusalem be forgotten.<sup>32</sup> This sentiment forms the climax of Dvořák’s song, with the phrase ‘If I forget you, oh, Jerusalem, oh, oh, may my

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<sup>30</sup> Dvořák in a letter to Dr. Emil Kozanek, dated 12 April 1893, in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895*, p.394.

<sup>31</sup> McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, p.1227.

<sup>32</sup> Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, p.75.

right hand also forget its art!’ (verse 5). The word ‘Jeruzaleme’ is given the greatest emphasis here – Dvořák uses a half-diminished seventh chord of F, Ab, Cb, Eb, played *forte*, against an accented Bb in the voice to emphasise this word (b.49). The result is an intense clash which characterises the extreme anguish of the protagonist. This harmonic climax is followed by the melodic and dynamic high points in bar 50 on the outcry ‘Ó!’ Here, the singer is left hanging as the accompaniment drops out, a device which adds to the distress of the moment. When the singer re-enters for the final phrase, however, the line is more staid and controlled, and the song concludes peacefully in Eb major. As in bars 11-12, it is the remembrance of home which prompts this move to Eb.

Looking at song seven overall, one notices that it has a very awkward sense of flow, due to its multitude of pauses, speed changes and key changes. In bar 24, for example, although the song has been building in intensity in the preceding bars, it comes to a complete halt on the word ‘zajali’ [captured]. When the music begins again in bar 25, it has completely lost this momentum. This is awkward because the sense of the words carries across this gap, and there appears to be no immediate textual justification for such a disjunction. Changes of key, texture, tempo and dynamic accompany the mocking words of the captors in bars 29-34, but again, the music is just settling down when another change occurs for the short two-bar phrase of bars 35-36. At this point these changes could be explained because of the different characters in the narrative, but further incidences of this stop-start motion occur at bars 37, 44 and 51 – the music does not settle on any single idea for long.



This disconnection of various phrases does, in fact, have a wider textual justification. The first fourteen bars actually flow very well, until the moment where the harps are hung up on the willows. From this point on, the music is characterised by the disjunctions I have described. However, the fact that the protagonist cannot settle on any one theme fits very well with the statement ‘How could we sing the songs of the Lord in a land of foreigners?’ It is as if Dvořák is resisting a conventional song format here to illustrate these words; the exiles cannot sing a song in the midst of their current situation, and this is emphasised all the more by the fact that the captors’ music is the most lyrical.

I have not yet mentioned the remaining three verses of the Psalm 137, which were omitted by Dvořák. In these the psalmist expresses his or her fierce anger, calling for vengeance on the Babylonians. Verse 9 contains one of the most chilling statements in the Psalms, ‘Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.’ Dvořák himself had no such cause for violent vengeance. Rather, *his* song focuses only on the anguish of the homesick, a sentiment which was certainly his own.

## Song Eight

(Psalm 25: 16-18, 20)

*Look toward me and have mercy on me; for I am desolate and distressed. The worries of my heart multiply themselves, from my anxieties bring me out, from my anxieties bring me out. Have mercy on me! See my affliction and my misery, and forgive all my sins. Protect my soul and deliver me, let me not be put to shame, for in You I hope, for in You I hope!*

Psalm 25 is a prayer for help in the form of another acrostic poem.<sup>33</sup> Most of the psalm is an affirmation of who God is, and how he relates to his covenant people, but towards the latter part of the psalm, the psalmist begins to focus on his/her current state of affliction. Dvořák singled out these anguish-filled verses for song eight, which is further evidence of a personal connection to the texts. The verses that he chose contain words such as ‘opuštěný’ [desolate], ‘úskostí’ [anxieties], and ‘bídu’ [misery]. They are inwardly focussed – here, the protagonist asks for God’s intervention in his desperate situation. Interestingly, bars 21-22 contain the only instance in the whole of the *Biblical Songs* where Dvořák added a whole extra line of his own to the text, ‘Sumiluj se nade mnou!’ [Have mercy on me!], the effect of which is to further emphasise the protagonist’s distress. Once more there is a conspicuous omission here; of the verses selected by Dvořák, verse 19, which speaks of enemies, is left out of what would otherwise be a chain of verses from 16-20.

The four-note descending figure heard in the introduction, Ab-Gb-Fb-Eb, is of particular importance to the eighth of the *Biblical Songs*. As in the hurdy-gurdy of *Winterreise*’s final song, the continuous use of this unresolved, descending

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<sup>33</sup> McCann, ‘The Book of Psalms’, p.777.

motif enhances the notion that the protagonist is ‘stuck’, and in this case, estranged from God. In the first two bars, the motif is harmonised by the progression °ii-V, which makes for a rather tentative song opening (Example 3.15). However, when the protagonist enters with the same four-note motif in bar three, it is not harmonised, but is sung in unison with the piano, reflecting the desolation described in the text. This short motif reappears over and over again throughout the song.

Andante

*p*

Po-pa-třiž na mne a smi-luj se na-de mnou;

*fz*

*p*

*pp*

**Example 3.15 – Song eight, bb.1-4**

Repetition is also evident on a larger scale in song eight. The song is basically strophic; Dvořák allocated one psalm verse to the first two sections, and two verses to the slightly longer third section of the song. Dvořák makes use of changes in the strophic form to convey increasing stress and intensity. Each of the three sections follows a similar basic pattern. First, the protagonist sings the four-note motif twice in consecutive bars, at a low dynamic. Following these statements of the motif, the protagonist breaks into some kind of loud outcry. In these outcries the singer manages to temporarily break away from the constraints of the repeated motif. However, as the song progresses, these moments grow in intensity, culminating in the words ‘forgive all my sins,

protect my soul and deliver me', which are punctuated with diminished seventh, dominant seventh, and Neapolitan sixth chords (bb.25-29).

Dvořák's variations of the four-note motif also reflect an increasing intensity over the course of the song. After statements of the motif's original form in the song's first section (Example 3.15), in bar 12 the words 'rozmnožují se' [multiply themselves] are emphasised when accents and increased rhythmic movement are applied to the motif – the notes of the motif are literally multiplied. At the beginning of the third section, however, these notes are multiplied even further, and the register of the motif moves wildly up and down, suggesting that the 'worries of my heart' mentioned in bars 10-11 are continuing to increase (Example 3.16).

**Example 3.16 – Song eight, bb.23-24**

In light of the anguished-filled text, and the increase in musical tension that occurs through successive verses, the conclusion of song eight is particularly striking. In bar 33, the four-note motif is finally resolved – not by Ab minor, but Ab *major*. As if to confirm this new major tonality, this chord is repeated in varying inversions in the accompaniment, in the ascending and descending flourish of bars 33-34:

31

za- han ben; ne- bot' v Te-be dou - - - fäm,

*pp* *f*

*ppp* *f*

3

Ed.

**Example 3.17 – Song eight, bb.31-34**

This flourish of tonic major harmony is particularly affecting after so many bars of dissonant harmony, or no harmony whatsoever, thus representing something of an ‘and there was light’ moment. Unlike the protagonist in *Winterreise*, although the singer has been ‘stuck’ with this unresolved, repeated motif throughout the song, a happy conclusion has been achieved, and he or she can now move on from distressed lamenting. Furthermore, this sudden change has a significant impact on the way in which we hear the concluding words of the protagonist, ‘for in You I hope!’ Here, hope in God is the key by which the protagonist is released from anxiety and worry. The plagal cadence which closes the song reinforces the idea that it is God who provides consolation, and has the power to release the protagonist from struggles (in song five plagal movement was also used in conjunction with a text conveying great faith in God). However, a further implication of this plagal cadence is that there is no dominant-tonic cadence to confirm the new tonic of Ab major. Perhaps we could hear this chord as V/Db – an option which the opening of song nine leaves open.

## Song Nine

(Psalm 121:1-4)

*I lift up my eyes toward the mountains, from where help would come to me. My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He does not allow your foot to slip, for your guardian does not slumber. Ah, He does not slumber, indeed He does not sleep, He who protects Israel.*

In songs six, seven and eight, the narrative concentrated primarily on the protagonist's distressing plight. The words chosen were *inwardly* focused, as the protagonist expressed his or her feelings of anguish and distress. In song nine, however, this lamenting is abandoned, and the focus turns instead to God. Dvořák chose the comparatively short and concise Psalm 121 for the ninth song. Here, as in the words of Psalm 23 in song four, the author uses the metaphor of a journey to assert the strength of God's protection over him or herself.<sup>34</sup> While Dvořák could well have been drawn to this psalm because of his love of nature, he would also have taken comfort in the psalm's confident affirmation of God's provision. Verse 2, for example, contains the powerful pronouncement that the one who made the heavens and the earth is in fact also the one who is the psalmist's helper. McCann points out the significance of this statement in which 'the Lord is identified both very personally...and cosmically.'<sup>35</sup> Also of great encouragement to the psalmist, and no doubt to Dvořák, is the notion that God does not sleep. These affirmations are striking in the context of songs six, seven and eight, where it often seemed that God was absent from the psalmist's circumstances.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.1180.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Andante con moto      *mezza voce*

Po-zdvi-hu-ji o-či svých k ho-rám,

*fp*      *mp*      *fz*

**Example 3.18 – Song nine, bb.1-8**

If the words of songs four and nine share strong similarities, so too do their opening bars. In the earlier song, Dvořák created a call and response between piano and singer, which was analogous to the shepherd/sheep imagery in the words of the psalm. In song nine, which also has an outdoor setting, he uses another call and response technique. Here, the call is not just a single held note, but a pair of semiquavers, played in major thirds by the pianist (Example 3.18). The words at this point describe the protagonist lifting his or her eye towards the mountains, which is the place God's help comes from. Thus, we can infer that these calls from the piano are representative of God's 'call' from the mountains. The idea of an outdoor landscape is further invoked when Dvořák applies an echo to these calls; in bars 10-12, 20-22, 43-44, this short motif is repeated with diminishing dynamic levels, and a descending register.

Unlike many of the previous *Biblical Songs*, the words of song nine portray great confidence in God's provision. Dvořák's music reflects this, as can be seen in his setting of the first two verses. After the song's opening call from the piano, the first half of verse one, 'I lift up my eyes toward the mountains', is left hanging on the third of the scale in bar 5, lacking any sense of harmonic direction, and therefore yearning for completion. However, the second half of the verse is also set in this fashion, hanging expectantly on the mediant. It is

verse two which provides completion with the corresponding line, ‘My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.’ After the recitative-like quality of the opening phrases, God’s help is confidently affirmed here with a lyrical vocal line, now accompanied by a series of F major chords in the piano. Furthermore, this phrase provides the tonal resolution to the earlier phrases by providing a V-I cadence (the first in the song), and also by bringing the melody down to the tonic (bb.19-20).

24

*pp* *3* *pp*

Ne - do-pu- stit', a - by se po-hnou - ti mē-la no - ha tvá,

**Example 3.19 – Song nine, bb.24-30**

At bar 24 however, the music changes somewhat surprisingly to the tonic minor (Example 3.19). What follows is a section of chromatic harmonies which accompany the words of verse 3: ‘He does not allow your foot to slip, for your guardian does not slumber.’ One implication of the use of unstable tonality here could be that Dvořák is undermining the sense of the words, reflecting doubt in the mind of his protagonist. However, at this point, these chromatic harmonies also give the impression that the protagonist is moving through a treacherous landscape where God ‘does not allow your foot to slip.’ Amidst this uncertain landscape, Jacobson points out that the carefully controlled, stepwise ascent of the bass which accompanies these very words in bars 26-29, is suggestive of God’s guiding hand. The vocal line reveals a corresponding descent which is



undertaken by the protagonist from bars 25-29. This line concludes with a carefully controlled chromatic descent through the notes Gb-F-E – here the E is raised from the Eb we are expecting, further suggesting that God is guiding the steps of the protagonist.<sup>36</sup> Dvořák also uses word-painting to depict the idea that God does not slumber. At this start of this phrase in bar 30, we move from the key of F minor, which has been the tonality of the previous six bars, through the following progression: V7/Gb – Gb – V7/Ab – Ab. This unsettled harmony perhaps conveys the idea of an ever-moving God. Furthermore, as Jacobson points out, at bar 35 the regular, static quaver movement of the accompaniment is replaced by ‘restless’ semiquavers, further reflecting this idea that God does not sleep.<sup>37</sup>

Significantly, although Dvořák moves into a minor key for the central section of this song, perhaps conveying an element of uncertainty on the protagonist’s part, he moves back to a major key for the song’s concluding statements, which are taken from verse 4 of the psalm. The words of this verse form a pair with verse 3, and are in fact repetition of the previous verse’s idea that God does not slumber. Thus, verse 4 serves to back up that which was expressed in verse 3; where the prior verse said simply that ‘your guardian does not slumber’, verse 4 makes the point more strongly: ‘He does not slumber, indeed he does not sleep.’ Likewise, Dvořák’s music is much more emphatic the second time. Whereas verse 3 was accompanied by tonal instability, verse 4 is firmly rooted in Ab major, the key in which the song concludes. With this move, Dvořák pushes out the idea of doubt in the mind of his protagonist. However, we might ask why the

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<sup>36</sup> Jacobson, “The “Biblical Songs”, Opus 99”, p.265.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. pp.265-266.

song concludes in Ab major, rather than the F major of the song's opening. In prior cases where songs have begun and ended in different keys we have observed a change from major to minor (songs two and three) or from minor to major (songs seven and eight). Since there is no immediate textual justification for the move from one major key to another, I will leave this to be considered in chapter four.

## Song Ten

(Psalm 98:1a, 4b, 7, 8, Psalm 96:12a, 11b)

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wondrous things. Utter sound, sing joyfully, and sing psalms! Resound, sea, and that which is in it; the corners of the world and those which dwell in it. Rivers, clap your hands, also the mountains sing joyfully together with them! Rejoice, field, and everything which is in it; rejoice, earth, resound both the sea and whatever is in it!*

Jacobson has referred to song ten as the ‘least inventive design’ of the *Biblical Songs*.<sup>38</sup> Song ten is certainly not adventurous in terms of late nineteenth-century harmony and form. However, perhaps in this very simplicity lies a meaning of greater significance in the *Biblical Songs*. The introduction to song ten is a good starting point from which to examine some of the characteristics which could be deemed ‘uninventive.’ Here, we return to the stylistic devices of Dahlhaus’s folklorism-exoticism-pastoral paradigm – these opening bars contain a number of the characteristics which are suggestive of this musical type (Example 3.20).<sup>39</sup> Most obvious, perhaps, is the use of a repeated ostinato figure in the bass. This creates a tonic pedal throughout almost the entire introduction, and therefore, a sense of musical stasis. The right hand simply reinforces this tonic harmony with a short, repeated motivic fragment. Furthermore, the only place where this tonic harmony is broken reinforces a sense of the ‘folk.’ On the second beat of bar 7, chord V7 is replaced by a chord comprising the notes C-D-G-B – very like V7, except that the important third has been replaced by the supertonic. This creates a chord of a very different character, which weakens the tonic-dominant polarity of the song, and thus furthers the sense of ‘otherness.’

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.266.

<sup>39</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, p.306.

Allegro moderato

mf

6

rit.

rit.

p

Example 3.20 – Song ten bb.1-8

The remainder of the song mainly entrenches these characteristics. It is in modified strophic form, and highly repetitive. The eight-bar introduction is heard both at the beginning and end of the song, and also between verses and coda. It thus occurs a total of four times in nearly identical forms. Furthermore, if we have had hints of pentatonicism throughout the *Biblical Songs*, particularly in song five, in song ten the use of this scale form is overt. With the exception of passing Bbs in bars 59-60, the melody uses only the notes of the pentatonic scale F-G-A-C-D. Unlike song five, which was also repetitive and rather folk-like, this song does not contain any tonal twists to alert us to its late-nineteenth-century context.

The two main verses of this song (bb.9-23 and bb.31-47), although very similar, have slightly different endings, which allows for extra words in the second verse. The third section of text, which is much shorter than the previous two, is more like a coda. In fact, although the musical language of song ten is the simplest of the other *Biblical Songs*, Dvořák's choice and arrangement of texts

is, interestingly, the most complex. We have seen that Dvořák chose to combine the verses of two different psalms in other songs, singling out specific verses. However, until now, he always kept the verses in the order that they appeared in the psalms themselves. In song ten, Dvořák disrupts the biblical ordering, setting the words of Psalm 98 before that of Psalm 96, and setting words from Psalm 96:12 before that of Psalm 96:11. Furthermore, in three of the verses he chose for this song, he only used the words of half the verse. Thus, even though his musical design is simple here, Dvořák's textual choices show evidence of careful arrangement and organisation in this song.

Thus, it is in song ten that we can see the strongest example of Dvořák's creation of an entirely new psalm. Because he effectively chose verses from right across Psalm 98, and only two half-verses from Psalm 96, it is the verses themselves, rather than verses he left out, that are revealing. The first two that he included, verse one and the second half of verse four, both refer to singing. This draws further comparisons with song five, which also begins by speaking of singing to God. But whereas in song five the verb form used is translated 'I will sing', in song ten the imperative form 'sing' is used, imploring others to join in the praise of God.

Like the texts that Dvořák selected for song one, the remaining verses and half-verses that the composer chose for song ten were singled out because of their emphasis on natural imagery. In the opening song nature was used to show God's dominion and power over his creation. In song ten, however, different aspects of the created order are personified, and join in the worship of God: the

sea resounds, the rivers clap their hands, the mountains sing and the fields rejoice. This is very different to the earlier song which was primarily about power, and emphasised the mystery of God. The text of this song corresponds more closely to song five, offering words of ecstatic praise to God in celebration of his goodness.

This song is a joyful, dance-like celebration of God, which is not intended to challenge the listener. Dvořák's use of texts shows a careful consideration of the material he wished to include, and we can therefore assume that he took equal care over the music. He wrote this song of praise with deliberately static elements, evoking the style of folk music. As we shall see in the next chapter, this has implications for our understanding of the *Biblical Songs* as a cycle.

## 4 The *Biblical Songs* as a ‘Song Cycle’

So far, I have examined the *Biblical Songs* primarily as individual entities. I will now focus on the extent to which these songs constitute a cyclical or unified whole. This notion is, of course, closely bound up with the nineteenth-century idea of the ‘song cycle.’ However, because this genre was defined and realised in many different ways in the nineteenth century, it is difficult to know what Dvořák’s expectations of the genre were when he composed the *Biblical Songs*.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing in the English language literature on Dvořák outlining his views of the song cycle. We must therefore rely solely on the songs themselves to gain understanding of Dvořák’s intentions for the group. Here, I am particularly concerned with the potential for an overall narrative, since this has implications for the meaning of the cycle, and for the way in which we view Dvořák’s relationship to the songs.

Before turning to such issues, however, we need to examine some of the basic factors of the genesis of the songs which pertain to cyclicity. Firstly, the name of this collection of songs clearly suggests a group which is related by a common thread. Dvořák’s choice of texts also provides an element of unity, as the texts come not only from the Bible, as in Brahms’s *Four Serious Songs*, but from the very same book in the Bible. Moreover, Dvořák composed all ten songs over a short three-week period; he sketched the first two songs on the very same day, suggesting that he began composing with the idea of a group in mind.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Susan Youens, ‘Song Cycle’, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol.23, pp.716-19.

The *Biblical Songs* were published in a very different order to that in which Dvořák composed them, so at some point consideration was given to a new sequence. The first two songs to be sketched were, in fact, songs seven and nine, and the final song to be completed was song eight. As one would expect, the order in which the songs appear in the manuscript (7, 2, 9, 10, 1, 4, 6, 5, 3, 8) corresponds very closely to the dates on which Dvořák began sketching each song (Table 4.1), and it therefore seems that the manuscript version simply represents the order in which Dvořák composed the songs, rather than an earlier version of cyclical organisation.

5 March: Songs 7 and 9
7 March: Song 2
13 March: Songs 1, 6, 10
15 March: Song 4
21 March: Songs 3, 5, 8

**Table 4.1 – Dates on which Dvořák began sketching each of the *Biblical Songs***

We are therefore left with the first publication of the work as our only model for cyclicity. Unfortunately, the manuscript discloses no information regarding the new order in the first edition, published by Simrock, nor do we know definitively if Dvořák initiated or indeed sanctioned the new configuration.<sup>2</sup> However, one of Dvořák's letters to Simrock suggests that he had decided on the ordering before he even sent the songs to the publisher. In this letter, dated 20 April 1894, Dvořák updates Simrock on his recent compositions, saying 'dann habe ich zehn neue Lieder (zwei Hefte), aus der heiligen Schrift entnommen' [then I have ten new songs (two books), taken from the Holy

<sup>2</sup> See the editors' notes in Antonín Dvořák, *Biblické Písň, Op.99; Kritické Vydání Podle Skladatelova Rudopisu*, ed. Otakar Šourek (Praha: Editio Supraphon Praha, c1955), p.35.



Scriptures]. Significant here is the fact that he mentions two books, which suggests that he had already organised the songs into the published order, which comprised two books. Whatever the case, the notes to the complete works edition point out the preparation of the edition was ‘doubtlessly under his [Dvořák’s] direct supervision.’<sup>3</sup> Indeed, although they do not discuss the order of the songs, Dvořák’s letters to Simrock testify to his intimate involvement in the publication process, and also to his desire to get the edition exactly right.<sup>4</sup> We can therefore assume that Dvořák played a significant role in the reorganisation of the songs, and it is most likely that he himself initiated it. If this is the case, then a closer inspection of the potential for deeper levels of unity, and in particular, narrative progression in the *Biblical Songs* will no doubt be revealing.

## Narrative in the *Biblical Songs*

The first and last of the *Biblical Songs* form a striking contrast which is a useful point of departure for a discussion of narrative in the group. Dvořák immediately gives the impression of narrative by assigning a recitative-like vocal line to the protagonist in the opening of the first song. As we saw in the previous chapter, song one is devoid of any convincing tonal centre – the arrival on the ‘tonic’ for the song’s conclusion does not persuade the listener that the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter dated 5/7/1894, Dvořák writes to Simrock about problems that occur with the declamation when one adds different translations (in other languages) to the score of the *Biblical Songs*. He provides some musical examples of a German version that he thinks will work. On 19/7/1894, he writes on a similar issue, asking Simrock to separate the Czech line from the English and German lines in the score. On 28/12/1894 he includes a number of short musical examples in his letter – passages from the *Biblical Songs* that he wishes to change because the original melody had been interfered with in the translations into English and German.

song was in G major, but sounds rather more like forced closure. Furthermore, the song is through-composed, which contributes to a sense of unpredictability. Dvořák uses this sense of formal and tonal instability to convey the protagonist's description of a mysterious and terrifying God who 'burns up His enemies' and is surrounded by cloud and darkness.

For the last of the *Biblical Songs*, however, Dvořák uses a joyful text in which the protagonist portrays confidence in a God who has 'done wondrous things.' This contrasting sentiment is accompanied by music which is very static, often lacking any tonal movement whatsoever – a quality which is typical of folk stereotypes. The repetitive, modified strophic format of this song is also aligned with the communal expression of a folk idiom. This is very different to the opening song's recitative texture, a type of vocal declamation that can only be sung by the individual. The fact that Dvořák chose to frame his op.99 group with these two songs, which are representative of extremes within the cycle, is unlikely to be a coincidence. Already we can see the possibility of a narrative trajectory between opposites – from notions of uncertainty, complexity, and individuality to devotion, simplicity and communality.

An examination of the songs in between enhances this narrative framework, and therefore, the notion that the songs are the product of a single protagonist. Song two opens in G major, the chord on which the previous song ended, and thus provides a sense of resolution after the tonal instability of the opening song. Furthermore, this immediately sets up a link between the songs which suggests a continuous narrative and protagonist. In contrast to song one, song two opens

with both tonal and lyrical confidence, suggesting that the singer has perhaps conquered the doubt conveyed in the opening of the *Biblical Songs*. However, this confidence is thwarted by the change from G major to E minor, and an ominous slow trill in the final bars of the song. The fact that the minor key has the final say suggests that doubt has overtaken the singer at this point, which is confirmed by the closing words, 'for I am tremendously afraid of Your judgements.' Overall then, this song becomes one of fear, rather than one of trust.

Song three continues with the themes of fear and uncertainty introduced in the first and second songs. As in song two, the major key (Bb major) which dominates the opening phrases is overcome by a minor key (Bb minor) at the end of the song, as fear overtakes the protagonist. Both songs also end with the same low, chromatic trill – a motivic device which seems to represent a sense of doubt. Furthermore, song three uses the image of a storm to embody of this fear, a theme which permeated song one. The fact that songs one, two and three are connected by devices such as theme, key, and motif, encourages us to read them as the product of a single narrator. When observed as a group, we can see that these songs are in fact very challenging to the notion of faith in God.

Another important feature is 'hidden' in the middle of song three: the static, escapist episode of bars 42-48. Although short, this section is intriguing because of the contrast it creates with the music that precedes and follows it. Dvořák depicts the longing for escape described in the text by changing the character of the music to encompass tonal stasis, repetition, and diatonicism. These are, of

course, the very same characteristics that are associated with the protagonist's hopeful resolution in the final song, thereby furthering the association of positive sentiments and musical simplicity in the cycle overall.

The fourth song constitutes a break with the fear of songs one to three. Here the protagonist seems to be on a new path, which is reflected in the comforting words of Psalm 23: 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I will lack nothing.' After the uncertainty of the first three songs, the protagonist is now drawn into a new orientation and hope. Musically, this change is reflected in a move to B major, a key which is far removed from the Bb minor of the previous song's ending. Dvořák gives prominence to diatonic chords and static motifs, which reflects the serenity expressed in the text. Furthermore, this song is the first of three (the others are songs six and nine) which use some form of call and response device. Here, the F# in the piano part, which seems to represent God, constantly leads the protagonist forward.

Looking at text alone, the words of song five could be seen as the protagonist's response to the comfort offered by God in the previous song. However, although the music of this song shares some characteristics with song four, such as the predominance of simple harmonies and a clear sense of key, it has much more in common with the folk-like quality of song ten. If song ten exhibits the greatest extreme of tonal stability in the *Biblical Songs*, song five is next in line, and the two songs are similar in many ways. Both are very much centred on celebrating and praising God, as opposed to concentrating on the self, and in each song the protagonist speaks specifically of singing to God. Furthermore, both contain

simple, repetitive music which is intensely focussed on the tonic. However, the significant feature that distinguishes song five from song ten is the subversive, highly chromatic passage which occurs in the piano near the end of the song. This undermines the apparent confidence of the protagonist, and because of its proximity to the song's conclusion, thwarts the sense of joyful finality which would otherwise be present.

In song six the protagonist turns once again to expressions of distress – this time using metaphors which express homesickness. However, in contrast to the distress of songs one, two and three, song six has an overall sense of hope. It begins in D major, and although the music hints at the relative minor towards the end of the song, it moves firmly back to the tonic for the conclusion. The theme of homesickness continues in the text of song seven, as the protagonist speaks of Israel's exile in Babylon. In this song minor is converted to major – a reversal of the trend found in songs two and three. This is also the case in the following song, where Ab minor is converted to Ab major. Song eight perhaps contains the most desolate cry for help in the *Biblical Songs*, and it is therefore significant that the song ends in the tonic major, with a strong emphasis on the word 'doufám' [I hope]. Furthermore, although song eight begins in the key of Ab minor, a very remote key, the concluding key of Ab major refers back to the rejoicing of song five. Songs six, seven and eight can, therefore, be seen as counterparts to songs one, two and three. Although the protagonist expresses distress in all six songs, in the second half of the cycle this struggle is carried out with hopeful, convincing conclusions (Table 4.2).

FIRST HALF OF CYCLE			SECOND HALF OF CYCLE		
	Opening Key	Closing Key		Opening Key	Closing Key
<b>Song One</b>	Unclear	G major (?)	<b>Song Six</b>	D major	D major
<b>Song Two</b>	G major	E minor	<b>Song Seven</b>	C minor	Eb major
<b>Song Three</b>	Bb major	Bb minor	<b>Song Eight</b>	Ab minor	Ab major
<b>Song Four</b>	B major	B major	<b>Song Nine</b>	F major	Ab major
<b>Song Five</b>	Ab major	Ab major	<b>Song Ten</b>	F major	F major

**Table 4.2– Key relationships in the *Biblical Songs***

In the F major opening of song nine, the idea of call and response used in songs four and six is once more in evidence. Here, the call takes the form of major thirds in the piano, to which the protagonist responds, before confidently asserting that ‘my help is from the lord.’ Despite an episode of tonal instability in the central section of the song, the protagonist concludes triumphantly in Ab major – again referring back to the key of song five, and also the key in which the previous song concluded. Ab major, therefore, is one of the few recurring keys in the *Biblical Songs*, and is used by Dvořák to convey hopeful, positive sentiments.<sup>5</sup> Song ten moves back to the F major of this song’s opening, for an outbreak of folk-like rejoicing which concludes the cycle.

Looking at the overall progression from songs one through ten, it certainly seems that it was Dvořák’s intention to create a sense of narrative in the *Biblical Songs*. The songs are not randomly arranged, but rather are grouped together to show a journey from doubt and uncertainty to hope and celebration. It is, therefore, easy to perceive the group as the voice of a single protagonist. On a large scale this can be observed through a progression from doubt-ridden texts and minor song endings at the beginning of the cycle, through to hopeful texts and major song endings in the second half. Songs one through three all contain

<sup>5</sup> Jacobson, ‘The “Biblical Songs”, Opus 99’, pp.256-57.

minor endings, even though two and three are predominantly in major keys. We see this reversed in the second half of the cycle, where this time minor is transformed to major in songs seven and eight. Furthermore, the second half of the cycle is dominated by major keys generally. This use of keys reflects the words chosen by Dvořák. We have also seen that both halves of the *Biblical Songs* end hopefully (though the fifth song contains some unresolved doubt) so that if a person was to buy only the first of the two-book set, it would still contain a progression towards hope.

Thus, the sense of an organised narrative progression in the *Biblical Songs* makes a strong case for the work's classification as a song cycle, and for a single vocal narrator or protagonist. This leads us to a consideration of just who this character is. The evidence surrounding the Dvořák's composition of the songs certainly seems to suggest that he himself is the protagonist – the songs were a personal response to his own deep grief. In the previous chapter I alluded to a number of instances where we can see close connections between Dvořák's biography and the words he chose, such as references to storms and homesickness. Furthermore, the fact that he made his own arrangements of the texts, altering the meaning of some because of his omissions, and creating new poems by joining different psalms together, suggests that it is his own voice which speaks through the words and music. For example, we have observed how Dvořák conspicuously omitted reference to enemies or the 'wicked' in songs two, three, four, and eight. This is interesting given what we know about his agoraphobic and anxious tendencies – although fear is expressed in these songs, the cause of the fear is removed. This relates to the irrational fears that

were plaguing Dvořák around the time that he wrote the songs. Significantly, however, Dvořák arranged the songs which end fearfully at the beginning of the cycle, so that they could in no way have the final say.

### Folk stereotypes in the *Biblical Songs*

If Dvořák is located as the protagonist of these songs, further questions can be asked with regards to the overall meaning of the cycle. Of particular interest here are songs five and ten, songs which have been criticised by scholars. Of these songs, Clapham states somewhat condescendingly that Dvořák ‘even resorts to pentatonicism.’<sup>6</sup> However, pentatonicism permeates the cycle to a greater extent than this, as pentatonic scales are heard as short bridge passages twice in song two (bb. 6 and 19), in song three (b.48), and again in song six. Use of the scale can also be found in the opening of song nine. In this light, song ten, and to a lesser extent, song five, simply represent the culmination of the use of this scale.

From my own analysis of songs five and ten, it is clear that they contain more ‘folk-like’ elements than any other songs in the cycle – apart from the chromatic moment in song five, they are strophic, harmonically simple, often static, and strongly pentatonic. Scholarly criticism of these songs perhaps stems from the fact that in the context of the cycle, and of nineteenth-century repertoire more generally, these two songs do not sound particularly ‘progressive’. It is intriguing that the songs which have been the subject of greatest criticism by scholars were given prime positions in the cycle by Dvořák. Furthermore, as we

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<sup>6</sup> Clapham, *Dvořák*, p.131.



have seen, Dvořák uses static motifs in other instances to evoke a sense of peace: in particular, in the central section of song three. Indeed, the escape to tonal stasis evidenced song three is the very device that Dvořák uses to conclude the entire cycle.

Interestingly, the composition that Dvořák took a break from in order to write the *Biblical Songs*, the Suite in A major, has suffered related and much worse criticisms. In Beckerman's article on the Suite, he states that 'no mature work of Dvořák's has come in for a more frequent trashing than this one.'<sup>7</sup> Beckerman summarises the attitudes of a number of scholars, when he says that 'according to the critics, the piece exhibits no serious compositional touches', and that 'the other problem critics...have articulated is that the work seems to lack any sense of drama or scope, the often-voiced implication being that the master rested after his great labour with the 'New World' Symphony.'<sup>8</sup> However, Dvořák's own estimation of his Suite in A major was different. In a letter to Simrock dated 20 April 1894, he wrote that 'I have the Sonatina for violin and piano (easy to play), a Suite in A major for piano (of medium difficulty), then ten new Songs (two volumes) taken from the Bible, and I think that the Suite for Piano and the Songs are the best things I have written in these genres.'<sup>9</sup> The purpose of Beckerman's article is therefore to validate the neglected Suite, and to show that 'it was precisely the work he [Dvořák] wished to compose.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Beckerman, 'Dvořák's Pentatonic Landscape: The Suite in A Major', p.245.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp.245 & 247.

<sup>9</sup> From Kuny, ed., *Antonín Dvořák: Korespondence a Dokumenty*, pp.260-61, quoted in Beckerman, 'Dvořák's Pentatonic Landscape: The Suite in A Major', p.245.

<sup>10</sup> Beckerman, 'Dvořák's Pentatonic Landscape: The Suite in A Major', p.246.

The critical reception of the Suite in A major in some ways parallels the reception of songs five and ten in the *Biblical Songs*. The underlying thrust of the comments surrounding each of these works seems to be that they are somehow regressive, or less worthy of our attention. However, Dvořák's clearly placed these folk-like songs in prime positions for a reason. One might therefore ask what message is inherent in the ordering of the *Biblical Songs*. We have already noted a progression from uncertainty to confidence in the cycle, but Dvořák's use of differing song styles – those that seem more at home within a nineteenth-century context, and those that seem more like a type of folk-song – and his location of these particular styles, suggests a deeper level of design and meaning. Again, a contrast between songs one and ten is useful here. Song one embraces late nineteenth-century compositional techniques, is tonally unstable, and uses a vocal idiom which can only be sung by the individual. On the other hand, the folk-like aspects of song ten are suggestive of simplicity, tradition and communality.

Therefore, in the *Biblical Songs*, Dvořák's solution seems to be founded on communal expression, which suggests that this is where his own comfort lay. After the individualistic laments found earlier in the cycle, certainty and clarity are achieved in song ten in words which praise God, and music which embraces simplicity and tradition. Such ideas lead us back to questions about the representation of nationality in music, and to the thorny issue of the prevalence of the pentatonic scale in the cycle. If the prevalence of pentatonic scale is seen as an American device, then this leaves us with a problematic paradox. In my

analysis I have shown how the pentatonic scale punctuates the cycle, culminating in the fifth and especially tenth songs. Thus, if we view this device as being American, it would suggest that Dvořák was in fact finding consolation in an *American* community, rather than a Bohemian one.

However, this makes little sense in terms of Dvořák's biography – we have already seen that Dvořák longed for Bohemia while he was in America, and Jeanette Thurber remembered him as being 'intensely patriotic' (see p.54). Furthermore, even if Dvořák's American compositions 'seem to signal a quantum jump in his fondness for the device', we cannot conclude that he saw the scale as wholly American.<sup>11</sup> Even though he supposedly found evidence of the scale in African American and American Indian music, he referred to it as the 'Scotch' scale, and had made use of it in works much earlier in his career.<sup>12</sup> David Beveridge points out that he used the scale in his first string quartet, which was written as early as 1862.<sup>13</sup> If we cannot conclusively answer the question of whether Dvořák was alluding to a Czech or an American community, or, indeed a Scottish one, it is much safer to turn to biographical evidence. Given that the Czech community and church in Spillville were such a strong source of consolation to Dvořák during his time in the America, and that certain of the songs themselves suggest the protagonist's longing for their

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<sup>11</sup> Beveridge, 'Sophisticated Primitivism: The Significance of Pentatonicism in Dvořák's American Quartet', p.25.

<sup>12</sup> See the article in the New York Herald entitled 'Dvořák on his new work', dated 15 December 1893, reprinted in Tibbetts, ed., *Dvořák in America: 1892–1895* pp.362–64.

<sup>13</sup> Beveridge, 'Sophisticated Primitivism: The Significance of Pentatonicism in Dvořák's American Quartet', p.25.

homeland, it seems likely that the community and traditions that Dvořák is alluding to are those of the Czech people.

Otakar Hostinský, the preeminent nineteenth-century Czech aesthete, located nationality primarily in the use of language:

Psychological character (like the external features of the body) of course used to be much more defined and distinct among different nations, but even that has become generally eroded and has lost much of its meaning. Going on character and temperament alone it is impossible to distinguish a nationality with absolute certainty, especially in the places where there are most contacts. We have, however, one unmistakable, absolutely clear sign which is virtually a *symbol* and in many respects even the *basis of nationality* – namely the *mother tongue*.<sup>14</sup>

On this basis, the *Biblical Songs* clearly have a strong connection to Czech national identity. Although the songs were also published in German and English, they were originally composed in Czech, and Dvořák paid particular regard to the word stresses of his mother tongue – one should note that Dvořák was also a fluent German and English speaker, so his choice of Czech was deliberate. Furthermore, the lied genre is, of course, closely connected to German national identity, making Dvořák's use of the Czech language particularly significant. The composer's use of his native language and compositional techniques which go against the German norm is perhaps as much a statement about national identity as it is about faith.

Given the connections between the language, music and religion in Bohemia in the nineteenth century this is hardly surprising. In chapter two I identified two

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<sup>14</sup> Otakar Hostinský (1870), reprinted in Otakar Hostinský, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho boj o moderní českou hudbu* [Smetana and his struggle for modern Czech music] (Prague, 1901). 2<sup>nd</sup> edition ed. Bohuslav Hostinský (1941), pp.169-70, quoted in Tyrrell, *Czech Opera*, p.253.

connections between nationalism and religion in Bohemia; namely, the role of the Protestant Bible of Kralice in preserving the Czech language in the face of German domination, and Hapsburg toleration of Czech folk music as part of worship. These features of Czech society strongly suggest that the blending of nationalism and religion found in the *Biblical Songs* would have been deeply rooted into Dvořák's experience. The cycle, therefore, reflects both the intensely private and personal nature of Dvořák's situation, and the communality of shared faith and national identity.

## 5 The *Biblical Songs* and the *Four Serious Songs*

In chapter one I examined Schubert's 'Die Allmacht' and Wolf's 'Nun wandre, Maria' from his *Spanisches Liederbuch*, both of which might be termed nineteenth-century *geistliche Lieder*. Composed in 1825 and 1889 respectively, these songs could perhaps be seen as predecessors to Dvořák's *Biblical Songs*, although they do not use specifically biblical texts. However, I have also made reference to one of the more widely known song cycles, Brahms's *Four Serious Songs*, which were composed just two years after the *Biblical Songs*, and, unlike 'Die Allmacht' and the *Spanisches Liederbuch*, use biblical texts as their sole basis. In light of my examination of the *Biblical Songs*, a more thorough comparison of the two groups is now necessary.

As in the *Biblical Songs*, the *Four Serious Songs* were composed in response to grief and death. Furthermore, like Dvořák, Brahms did not use his selected biblical texts for conventional liturgical or devotional means. Rather, the texts were selected and arranged to express his personal views – it is easy to see Brahms himself as the narrator of the *Four Serious Songs*. In fact, Dvořák's unorthodox use of biblical texts in a setting for solo song with piano accompaniment may have influenced Brahms's decision to do the same with his song cycle.<sup>1</sup> However, although Brahms's cycle is regarded as a very important part of his output, and is often examined because of what it reveals about

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<sup>1</sup> David Beveridge, 'Dvořák and Brahms: A Chronicle, an Interpretation', in *Dvořák and His World*, ed. Michael Beckerman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.80.

Brahms's attitudes in his later years, the *Biblical Songs* have not been accorded anything like this status in studies of Dvořák's life. Thus, the more famous and much more widely discussed *Four Serious Songs* are useful for providing further insight into the frequently overlooked *Biblical Songs*.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the *Biblical Songs* and the *Four Serious Songs* were both deeply personal responses to grief impelled by the death of loved ones. However, the two composers had very different ideas about the contexts in which their respective song cycles might be performed. Although there is evidence to suggest that Brahms initially envisioned an orchestral setting for the *Four Serious Songs*, this idea was ultimately rejected in favour of the more private setting for voice and piano.<sup>2</sup> Max Kalbeck and Heinz von Beckerath both recount incidences where Brahms sang through the songs himself, in the company of close acquaintances.<sup>3</sup> However, he was not comfortable when two female friends walked in as he was playing through the songs with Kalbeck, quickly putting the scores away when they approached.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Brahms was reluctant to hear the *Four Serious Songs* performed publicly, stating that 'the concert hall is truly the last thing I was thinking of in this case.'<sup>5</sup> He also failed to attend the first public performance.

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<sup>2</sup> van Rij, *Brahms's Song Collections*, p.187.

<sup>3</sup> Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms Gesellschaft, 1912-21), p.433. See also Heinz von Beckerath, 'Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms: Brahms und seine Krefelder Freunde', reprinted in *Die Heimat* 29 (1958), p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, p.433.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.438.

We can only speculate as to Brahms's reasons for avoiding public recitals of the *Four Serious Songs*. However, his reluctance suggests a break-down in the distance between Brahms's personal and professional lives – separation that usually exists between these two aspects of song composition and promotion. In allowing the *Four Serious Songs* to be published, Brahms gave up his control of performance context, essentially allowing them to be performed in the concert hall. Thus, we cannot say that Brahms did not want them to be performed in this context at all, but we can speculate that he perhaps could not bear to hear songs about death, especially when he knew his own was near, in front of an audience who may have associated this with him.

Given the acutely troubling personal circumstances surrounding Dvořák's *Biblical Songs*, we might assume that, like Brahms, he wanted to keep these songs to himself, or perhaps confine them to a select group of close friends. After all, although Dvořák was not nearing death, as Brahms was, he was experiencing psychological trauma and doubt, which is evident in his songs. However, Dvořák seemingly had no qualms about the airing of the *Biblical Songs* in a very public arena. Although he initially conceived the *Biblical Songs* with piano accompaniment, in January 1895 he completed an orchestration of the first five *Biblical Songs*. A year later, on 4 January 1896, he conducted the first performance himself in Prague. He also held the baton at a high profile concert of the Philharmonic Society in London in March of that year, where the orchestrations of the first five songs were performed together with the premiere of his Cello Concerto (as we saw in the introduction). Clearly Dvořák was not worried about the public performance of these intensely personal songs – he was



even able to stand up and conduct them himself. Unlike Brahms, who knew he was dying, Dvořák was seemingly able to retain the distance between the professional and the personal, the composer and the private individual.

However, there is another factor which may have influenced Brahms and Dvořák's different responses to the performance of their songs. Brahms's attitude to the Bible, faith, and the church in general was very different to that of Dvořák. Although Brahms was well versed in the traditions of Lutheranism, in his later life he did not hold conventional Christian beliefs. One of the key differences between his attitudes and those of Dvořák lies in the fact that he regarded the Bible merely as an example of great literature, 'a work in which one finds one's own meanings and spiritual guidance rather than those of any orthodox religion.'<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, as Clara Simrock observed, he did not go to church services.<sup>7</sup> For Brahms, then, religion and spirituality were to be worked out on a private and individual basis. Dvořák, on the other hand, regularly attended worship services, where faith was discussed and lived out communally. Perhaps this difference could also explain why Brahms felt uncomfortable hearing his songs, which were essentially his own statement of 'faith', in public. For Dvořák, the public proclamation of faith was quite normal, and he therefore had no qualms about appearing with his songs on the concert stage.

With Brahms and Dvořák's very different attitudes to Christianity in mind, it comes as no surprise that although there are similarities between the *Biblical*

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<sup>6</sup> van Rij, *Brahms's Song Collections*, p.79.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Beller-McKenna, 'Brahms on Schopenhauer: The "Vier Ernste Gesänge", Op. 121, and Late Nineteenth-Century Pessimism', *Brahms studies 1* (1994), p174. See also Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit*, p.31.

*Songs* and the *Four Serious Songs*, Dvořák and Brahms ultimately had contrasting approaches to their settings of biblical texts – even a superficial encounter with the songs reveals significant differences. Brahms rather obstinately titled his songs ‘ernste’ [serious] as opposed to ‘biblische’ [biblical] or ‘geistliche’ [sacred], which could have been a reaction against Dvořák’s title, and also suggests his reluctance to acknowledge God directly. Furthermore, despite the fact that Brahms chose all his texts from the Bible, none of them actually mention God or Christ, neither are they addressed to a divine being. The fact that Brahms himself referred to these songs as ‘the most godless thing that has ever been composed’<sup>8</sup> contrasts sharply with Dvořák’s cycle, in which God is referred to at least once in every song. Indeed, most of the songs are prayers to God, or songs about his nature.

The fourth of Brahms’s *Four Serious Songs* has often been criticised for being some sort of contrived ‘tack-on’, and thus a forced attempt at optimism which is out of step with the pessimism of the preceding songs.<sup>9</sup> As Beller-McKenna states, ‘even those who embrace the fourth song tend to reject an ultimately optimistic message in the whole cycle.’<sup>10</sup> Rather, such critics locate the ‘crux’ of the cycle not at its end, but at some point in its middle.<sup>11</sup> The *Four Serious Songs* are therefore used as evidence that Brahms was a pessimist in later life. A similar, if not identical claim, could be made with regards to the *Biblical Songs*.

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<sup>8</sup> Beckerath, ‘Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms: Brahms und seine Krefelder Freunde’, p.11.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, A. Craig Bell, *Brahms - the Vocal Music* (Madison [N.J], London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Associated University Presses, 1996), p.159.

<sup>10</sup> Beller-McKenna, ‘Brahms on Schopenhauer: The “Vier Ernste Gesänge”, Op. 121, and Late Nineteenth-Century Pessimism’, p.171.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Songs five and ten do sound almost suspiciously joyful and simple after the twists, turns, and doubts that have gone before them, bringing to mind A. Craig Bell's comment about the final of the *Four Serious Songs*, that it is 'a desperate attempt at hopefulness.'<sup>12</sup> Given that the style of writing in these songs is so different to the other songs in the group, one might conclude that Dvořák's happy conclusion is forced and fails to convincingly resolve the troubles and doubts that expressed in the preceding songs. Could it be that amidst Dvořák's worries and anxieties, songs five and ten show his attempt to put on a brave face?

Beckerman certainly seems to imply such an interpretation. He locates the heart of the *Biblical Songs* at a mid-point in the cycle, singling out song three as a crucial moment 'made all the more revealing for being hidden in the middle of the cycle.'<sup>13</sup> He quite rightly states that although we tend to place greater emphasis on beginnings and endings in terms of a musical hierarchy, middles can be just revealing, or even more so.<sup>14</sup> In song three, Beckerman finds a reflection of Dvořák's mental state, a 'hidden world of childlike delight, of escape to perfect calm', poised between two points of tension; on the one side fear of death, and on the other side a fear of storms.<sup>15</sup> However, it is not only here that Beckerman's text suggests a pessimistic reading of the cycle. In his introduction to this short section, he makes the following statement:

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<sup>12</sup> Bell, *Brahms - the Vocal Music*, p.164.

<sup>13</sup> Beckerman, *New Worlds of Dvořák: Searching in America for the Composer's Inner Life*, p.159.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.158.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.159.

The chromatic harmonies used throughout the song cycle are musical metaphors for innerness, awe, and torment. Death hovers around the cycle, and not by coincidence does the first composed song, number seven in the set, begin as a wrenching funeral march.<sup>16</sup>

Although Beckerman mentions the ‘bouncy tune that closes the set’ in passing, his focus is very much on the torment and depression that he finds in the *Biblical Songs*.<sup>17</sup>

This reading of Dvořák’s op.99 is very similar to the way in which the *Four Serious Songs* have generally been interpreted – by disregarding those songs which convey a positive message, the cycles can be deemed pessimistic. However, although a number of scholars have tended to disregard the final of the *Four Serious Songs*, Beller-McKenna has shown that such an interpretation ‘misses the point.’<sup>18</sup> In fact, Beller-McKenna’s close examination of Brahms’s cycle reveals that these songs really contain a progression from doubt to hope. The Schopenhauerian pessimism exemplified in the first two songs is in fact refuted by the Romantic Idealism displayed in the final song, with the third song forming a bridge between these two views.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, while I agree with Beckerman’s notion that middles can be just as revealing as endings and beginnings, and also with the fact that the *Biblical Songs* show more complex psychological workings than are sometimes assumed of Dvořák, the fact that he

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Beller-McKenna, ‘Brahms on Schopenhauer: The “Vier Ernste Gesänge”, Op. 121, and Late Nineteenth-Century Pessimism’, p.171.

<sup>19</sup> See Ibid.

associates God with a storm in the opening song suggests something more than blind, child-like belief. However, I do not think that we can ignore the progression he arranged which marks a move towards joy and certainty of faith. Both halves of the cycle display clear musical and textual progressions towards the hope and rejoicing of songs five and ten. Thus, although these two songs may sound somewhat inappropriately joyful, the listener has to some extent been prepared for this by the preceding songs. One cannot deny that the cycle exhibits torment – indeed, my own analysis has shown the desperate uncertainty and anguish evident in the *Biblical Songs*. However, the fact that the cycle as a whole ultimately rejects this torment is equally revealing.

Thus, as I see it, there are two possibilities for an interpretation of the *Biblical Songs*. One listener might regard the progression from doubt to certainty as a reflection of Dvořák's own personal journey from grief and confusion to resolution, hope and faith, as he dealt with the mortality which surrounded him. However, another listener might regard this progression as a reflection of an ideal that Dvořák hoped for, but could not attain. According to this reading, Dvořák was putting on a mask to cover over his inner torments and grief, perhaps attempting to bury them, albeit unconvincingly, with rejoicing. Whichever way we might interpret the *Biblical Songs*, songs five and ten show Dvořák's attempt at finding resolution, be it real or imagined. We might, therefore, ask what this resolution looks like, and how it compares with the resolution found in Brahms's songs.

Although the *Four Serious Songs* and the *Biblical Songs* both conclude with hope, the two composers find their comfort in very different sources. Unlike the last of the *Biblical Songs*, Brahms's final song is the most structurally complex of all the *Four Serious Songs*, reflecting a rather ambiguous expression of comfort. It concludes with Paul's famous affirmation from *I Corinthians*: 'Nun aber bleibet Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe, diese drei; aber die Liebe ist die grösste unter ihnen' [and now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love]. In the context of the cycle, the meaning of this faith, hope and love is not made explicit. However, given Brahms's avoidance of religious matters in general, his view of the Bible, and the fact that he himself referred to these songs as 'godless',<sup>20</sup> it is likely that he was thinking of faith and hope in humanity, or perhaps even romantic love, rather than the love of God.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Dvořák displays a rather simple expression of comfort in his final song. By the word 'simple' I do not mean to imply that his resolution was naïve or amateur, but rather that his final song is rather more straightforward and uncomplicated when compared with the Brahms. God is a central focus throughout the *Biblical Songs*, including the tenth, where Dvořák chose a text which rejoices in God, seemingly *in spite of* all the torment that has gone before. It is noteworthy that Dvořák did not ignore these doubts and struggles, writing a group of songs which were all positive and cheerful; rather, he confronted doubt and was still able to find resolution. His music, as I have discussed in chapter four, suggests the importance of community and tradition, a resolution that

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Johannes Brahms, *Johannes Brahms Briefwechsel*, vol. XII, *Briefe an Fritz Simrock* (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1919; reprint, Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974), p.195.

<sup>21</sup> van Rij, *Brahms's Song Collections*, pp.82-83.

contrasts strongly with Brahms's very individual solution. The *Four Serious Songs* can be interpreted in a number of different ways – sacred or non-sacred. However, God, and perhaps more significantly, *faith* in God, are an inescapable part of Dvořák's *Biblical Songs*.

## Conclusion

Complications regarding ‘secular’ and ‘sacred’ categories in the nineteenth century also extend to the lied genre, as selected songs by Schubert, Wolf, Brahms, and of course, Dvořák clearly show. These lieder are all suggestive of an interaction between devotional songs written primarily for a domestic environment, and secular songs for public performance. Dvořák’s *Biblical Songs* present a fascinating example of the extent to which the concert hall could be transformed into a place of worship in the nineteenth century.

Let us now return to the anonymous *Times* reviewer and his observation that in the *Biblical Songs*, Dvořák set psalms in ‘anything but a conventional manner.’<sup>1</sup> As I have shown, the songs certainly cannot be aligned with the conventional settings of biblical texts which were used for devotion in the home; a number of them are too dramatic, too technically demanding, and furthermore, too ‘undevotional.’ However, Dvořák’s use of texts from the Bible, combined with the explicit sense of faith in God revealed in the cycle’s resolution was not the norm in lieder for concert performance either.

The *Biblical Songs* are also interesting because of what they reveal about Dvořák himself. They point to the extreme homesickness and anxieties from which he suffered in America, and also provide a window into the composer’s faith. While Dvořák’s careful arrangement of psalm verses is evidence of a high level of engagement with the scriptures, the songs also challenge the stereotype

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<sup>1</sup> Anon., ‘Two Orchestral Concerts’, p.11.



of the composer as a man of simple, child-like faith, who as Brahms said ‘by no means has time to get stuck on doubts.’<sup>2</sup> More recently, John Clapham has said that the *Biblical Songs* ‘must be recognised as a sincere and devout reaffirmation of the Czech composer’s unshakable faith in the divine wisdom and love of the Almighty.’<sup>3</sup> While it is true that the *Biblical Songs* assert Dvořák’s belief in God *overall*, some of the songs also reveal considerable doubt about God, which suggests that the composer’s reputation as a man of ‘unshakable faith’ is something of a myth. Although the cycle ends with a joyful expression of faith reflected by tonal certainty, this resolution is only attained by travelling through the struggles, both textual and tonal, of previous songs.

Dvořák’s use of ‘folk’ elements in the *Biblical Songs* is also revealing. While these moments of folk-like simplicity might at first seem out of place, and perhaps even a little artificial in the context of the cycle’s narrative, a closer reading shows that they are the products of an overall progression from uncertainty to certainty. Furthermore, knowledge of the connection between folk music and worship in the Bohemian lands shows that the association of such characteristics with devotion was a normal part of Dvořák’s musical milieu. In the *Biblical Songs*, Dvořák defines his sense of national identity by using elements of folk-song in a genre that originated in German culture. This was typical of his music generally – indeed, it was his reputation as a ‘cultural nationalist’ which brought him to America in the first place.<sup>4</sup> However, the

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<sup>2</sup> From an event dated 24 February 1896 in Richard Heuberger, *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms*, 2nd ed. (Tutzing, 1964), p.95, quoted in Beckerman, ed., *Dvořák and His World*, p.75.

<sup>3</sup> Clapham, *Dvořák*, p.130.

<sup>4</sup> Horowitz, ‘Dvořák and the New World: A Concentrated Moment’, p.94.

*Biblical Songs* add a vital third dimension into this mix – the composer's faith. Thus, we can observe a strong connection between the Dvořák's Christian belief and sense of national identity in the songs.

Although, as Dahlhaus states, the nineteenth-century bourgeois had a tendency to 'consign religion to a ghetto', Dvořák's *Biblical Songs* brought matters of Christian faith into a public, secular sphere, using a genre which had its genesis outside the church. They are, therefore, a very unusual and unique example of the use of the Bible in music in the nineteenth century, of significance not just to Dvořák personally, but also to our understanding of the complicated relationship between faith and music during this period. Thus, when the reviewer from *The Times* referred to the *Biblical Songs* as psalm settings in 'anything but a conventional manner' he was correct in more ways than one.

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