

"Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen" BWV 13

1. Meine Seufzer, meine Tränen
Können nicht zu zählen sein.
Wenn sich täglich Wehmut findet,
Und der Jammer¹ nicht verschwindet,
Ach! so muss uns diese Pein
Schon² den Weg zum Tode bahnen.³

1. My sighs, my tears
Cannot be counted.⁴
When melancholy is met daily,
And misery does not go away,
Ah, then for us this pain must
Already pave the way to death.

2. Mein liebster Gott lässt mich
Annoch vergebens rufen,
Und mir in meinem Weinen
Noch keinen Trost erscheinen.
Die Stunde lässt sich
Zwar wohl von ferne sehen,
Allein ich muss doch noch vergebens flehen.

2. My dearest God lets me
Cry out [to him] as yet⁵ to no avail,
And in my weeping
Lets no consolation appear to me yet.
The hour [of God's action]⁶ can,
To be sure, be seen from afar;⁷
But nevertheless I must yet implore [God] to no avail.

**3. Der Gott, der mir hat versprochen
Seinen Beistand jederzeit,
Der lässt sich vergebens suchen
Jetzt in meiner Traurigkeit.
Ach! Will er denn für und für
Grausam zürnen über mir,
Kann und will er sich der Armen
Itzt nicht wie vorhin erbarmen?⁸**

**3. The God who has promised me
His aid at all times,
He lets himself be sought to no avail
Now in my sorrow.
Ah, will he then forever
Be cruelly angry with me?
Can and will he not have mercy
On the wretched,⁹ now as before?**

¹In m. 42, Bach's own score and performing part (whose text underlay is in Bach's handwriting for this movement) reads "Schmerz noch" ("agony yet") rather than "Jammer."

²In m. 46, Bach's own score and performing part reads "nur" ("only") rather than "schon."

³An eighteenth-century print of the libretto gives the (regional) alternate spelling "bähnen," presumably to effect a better rhyme with "Tränen" (i.e., in the aria's symmetrical rhyme scheme abcba). Bach's own score and performing part sometimes read "bahnen" and sometimes "bähnen."

⁴That is, cannot be reckoned by humans. God can and will, however, count the tears; see fn. 11, below.

⁵"Annoch" here is an old-fashioned synonym for "immer noch" ("as yet").

⁶The notion that the "hour [of God's action]" has not "yet" arrived is expressed often in the Gospel of John, including in the portion chanted at the liturgical occasion for which this cantata was designed. In John 2:4, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, Jesus says "Meine Stunde ist noch nicht kommen" ("My hour is not yet come").

⁷That is, one can and should take consolation in God's promises (see also line 1 of movement 3), even if all evidence seems to suggest that their fulfilment is unlikely or remote. "Sich vertrösten" here is simply an archaic synonym for "sich trösten" ("to console someone"). The language of this line derives from Hebrews 11:13, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Diese alle sind gestorben im Glauben, und haben die Verheissung nicht empfangen, sondern sie von ferne gesehen, und sich der vertröset" ("All these [messiah-expecting figures of ancient Israel] have died in the faith and have not received the [fulfilment of] the promise [of the coming of God's messiah]; rather, [they had] seen it [the fulfilment] from afar, and were consoled by [the promise of] it").

⁸A stanza of "Zion klagt mit Angst und Schmerzen."

⁹"Die Armen" could refer to people in material need or spiritual need, or both. There might be a slight stress here on the material need, given that the language of this line is partly derived from Proverbs 19:17, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of

4. Mein Kummer nimmet zu,
 Und raubt mir alle Ruh.
 Mein Jammerkrug ist ganz
 Mit Tränen angefüllet,
 Und diese Not wird nicht gestillet,
 So mich ganz unempfindlich macht.
 Der Sorgen Kummernacht
 Drückt mein beklemmtes Herz darnieder,
 Drum sing ich lauter Jammerlieder.
 Doch, Seele, nein,
 Sei nur getrost in deiner Pein:
 Gott kann den Wermutsaft
 Gar leicht in Freudenwein verkehren,
 Und dir alsdenn¹⁰ viel tausend Lust gewähren.

4. My grief deepens
 And robs me of all rest;
 My jar¹¹ of misery is completely
 Filled with tears,
 And this distress that renders me
 Completely insensible is not stilled.
 The grievous night of worries
 Weighs down my constricted heart;
 Thus I sing nothing but songs of misery.
 Nevertheless, soul, no;
 Just be consoled in your pain:
 God can turn the sap of wormwood/sorrow¹²
 Most easily into wine of joy,
 And thereafter grant you many-thousandfold delight.¹³

5. Ächzen und erbärmlich Weinen
 Hilft der Sorgen Krankheit nicht;
 Aber wer gen Himmel siehet
 Und sich da um Trost bemühet,
 Dem kann leicht ein Freudenlicht
 In der Trauerbrust erscheinen.

5. Moaning and pitiable weeping
 Does not help worry's sickness;
 But whoever looks [up] into heaven¹⁴
 And seeks after consolation there,
 To him a light of joy can easily
 Appear in his sorrowful breast.

**6. So sei nun, Seele, deine
 Und traue dem alleine,
 Der dich erschaffen hat;
 Es gehe, wie es gehe,**

**6. So be now, soul, yours,¹⁶
 And trust only in the one
 Who has created you.
 Let things be, as they may;¹⁷**

Bach's day, "Wer sich des Armen erbarmt, der leihet dem HERRN" ("Whoever has mercy on the poor one is lending to the LORD"). But it is the spiritual that is emphasized throughout this cantata libretto.

¹⁰"Alsdenn" is an older spelling of "alsdann" ("thereupon"), a synonym for "sodann" ("thereafter").

¹¹This "Krug" of tears is presumably related to the "Sack" of tears in Psalm 56:9, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "fasse meine Tränen in deinen Sack; ohne Zweifel, du zählst sie" ("[God,] take my tears into your flask; without a doubt, you count them"). "Sack" is an archaic synonym for "Weinschlauch" ("wineskin"; or, "flask"). Subsequent Luther Bibles amend "Sack" here to "Krug" ("jar").

¹²"Wermutsaft" should be understood as a word play: the literal meaning of "Wermut" is "wormwood," and its figurative meaning is "sorrow." The jar of misery of line 3 is filled with the tears that are the sap of wormwood/sorrow.

¹³"Tausendlust" (or "Tausendslust," or "tausend Lust") is older German for "tausendfache Lust" ("thousandfold delight," or "very great delight").

¹⁴The language of this line—looking "into" heaven—is derived from Acts 7:55-56, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Als er aber voll heiliges Geistes war, sahe er auf gen Himmel, und sahe die Herrlichkeit Gottes, und Jesum stehen zur Rechten Gottes" ("But as he [Stephen] was filled with the holy Spirit, he looked up into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right [hand] of God").

¹⁶The meaning of this line is unclear. Eighteenth-century commentary on this hymn explains and paraphrases it as "do not let your even temper be disturbed." Some printed versions attempted to make sense of it by changing the last word to "seine," yielding "So be now, soul, his [God's]."

¹⁷Literally, "Let it go, how it may go." This was one of several renderings in German of the classical phrase "quocunque res cadent." A more straightforward version was "es geht wie es mag" ("it will go as it may"). There is an apparently related sentiment in Ecclesiastes 3:19, "Denn es geht dem Menschen wie dem Vieh" ("For it goes with the person as with cattle"); i.e., both await the same fate (namely, death).

**Dein Vater in der Höhe,
Der weiss zu allen Sachen Rat.**¹⁵

Georg Christian Lehms¹⁸

**Your father on high,
He knows counsel in all matters.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV13> for an annotated translation

¹⁵A stanza of “In allen meinen Taten.”

¹⁸The 1711 printed cycle of cantatas by Lehms lacks the concluding chorale.