

“Lass, Fürstin, lass noch einen Strahl” BWV 198

	Trauer-Ode	Ode of Mourning
	1. Teil	Part 1
<i>[Strophe 1]</i> <sup>1</sup>	1. Lass, Fürstin, <sup>2</sup> lass noch einen Strahl Aus Salems Sterngewölben schiessen; Und sieh, mit wieviel Tränengüssen <sup>3</sup> Umringen wir dein Ehrenmal. <sup>4</sup>	1. Let, Princess, let yet one more ray Shoot from Jerusalem’s <sup>5</sup> starry vault; <sup>6</sup> And see with how many gushes of tears We surround your monument. <sup>7</sup>
	2. Dein Sachsen, dein bestürztes Meissen, Erstarrt bei deiner Königsgruft; <sup>8</sup> Das Auge trânt, die Zunge ruft: Mein Schmerz kann unbeschreiblich heissen! <sup>9</sup>	2. Your Saxony, your distraught Meissen, <sup>10</sup> Is struck cold at your royal crypt; The eye sheds tears; the tongue calls out: “My sorrow can be called indescribable!”
<i>[Strophe 2]</i>	Hier klagt August, und Prinz und Land, <sup>11</sup> Der Adel ächzt, der Bürger trauert,	Here [King] August laments, and Prince <sup>12</sup> and land; The nobleman groans, the townsman mourns;

<sup>1</sup>This text is an ode in a series of nine 8-line strophes, often implying a setting in which the music composed for the first strophe would be repeated for each of the others. (That is the procedure Bach followed, for example, with the 12-strophe text of “Alles mit Gott und nichts ohn’ ihn,” BWV 1127.) In Bach’s musical setting, the text is instead reconfigured as a series of recitatives, solo and tutti arias, and one chorus, of varying lengths.

<sup>2</sup>This is Christiane Eberhardine, wife of August the Strong (Elector of Saxony, and King of Poland—see line 5 of movement 2) and honoree of this work. “Fürstin” (“Princess”) is short, here, for “Kurfürstin” (“Electress”); the designation “Queen” appears in movements 7 and 10. This is a title she disdained, and its presence here is probably directed to her husband.

<sup>3</sup>In a collection of odes published in 1728, this line reads “Und sieh, wie viel hier Tränen fliessen” (“And see how many tears flow here”).

<sup>4</sup>In the printed text booklets distributed at the performance in 1727, this line reads “Benetzen wir dein Ehrenmal!” (“We drench your monument”); in the 1728 book: “Und sieh dein hohes Ehrenmal!” (“And see your lofty monument!”).

<sup>5</sup>“Salem” is the locality where Melchizedek was king, according to Genesis 14:18. Salem is traditionally identified with Jerusalem, in part because of the parallelism between “Zion” and “Salem” in Psalm 76:2.

<sup>6</sup>“Jerusalem’s starry vault” is a poetic phrase for “heaven.”

<sup>7</sup>Those attending Christiane Eberhardine’s memorial service in the University Church in Leipzig did literally gather round her catafalque (a monument in the form of a stage or platform, erected in a church to receive in honor the coffin or effigy of a deceased personage). An engraved image of this structure appeared among the memorial publications produced in Leipzig.

<sup>8</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: “Erstaunt bei deiner Totengruft” (“taken aback at your burial crypt”).

<sup>9</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: “Mein Schmerz muss unaussprechlich heissen” (“My sorrow must be called unspeakable”).

<sup>10</sup>A Saxon town, used historically as an alternative name for Saxony as a whole.

<sup>11</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: “Hier klagt August, der Prinz, das Land” (“Here laments [King] August, [as well as] the Prince, [and] the land”).

<sup>12</sup>Also named August, the heir and successor Elector and King.

Wie hat dich nicht das Volk bedauert,  
Sobald es deinen Fall empfand!

How has the [common] people not bewailed you,  
As soon as it felt your demise!<sup>13</sup>

3. Verstummt, verstummt, ihr holden Saiten!  
Kein Ton vermag der Länder Not  
Bei ihrer teuren Mutter Tod,<sup>14</sup>  
O Schmerzenswort! recht anzudeuten.

3. Fall silent, fall silent, you pleasing strings;  
No [musical] sound can rightly tell  
Of the lands'<sup>15</sup> distress at the death—  
Oh sorrowful word!—of their precious mother.

[Strophe 3] 4. Der Glocken bebendes Getön  
Soll unsrer trüben Seelen Schrecken<sup>16</sup>  
Durch ihr geschwungnes Erze wecken<sup>17</sup>  
Und uns durch Mark und Adern gehn.  
O könnte nur dies bange Klingen,<sup>18</sup>  
Davon das Ohr uns täglich gellt,  
Der ganzen Europäerwelt  
Ein Zeugnis unsres Jammers bringen!

4. The quivering sound of the bells  
Shall excite our ashen souls' terror  
By their vibrating bronze  
And go through our marrow and veins.  
Oh, if only this fearful ringing  
That clangs daily in our ears  
Could bring to the whole European world  
A testimony of our misery!

[Strophe 4] 5. Wie starb die Heldin so vergnügt!  
Wie mutig hat ihr Geist gerungen,  
Da sie des Todes Arm bezwungen,<sup>19</sup>  
Noch eh er ihre Brust besiegt.

5. How so at peace the heroine died!<sup>20</sup>  
How bravely had her spirit wrestled,  
When death's arm had overpowered her,  
Before it had yet conquered her breast.<sup>21</sup>

[Strophe 5] 6. Ihr Leben liess die Kunst zu sterben  
In unverrückter Übung sehn;  
Unmöglich konnt es denn<sup>22</sup> geschehn,  
Sich vor dem Tode zu entfärben.  
Ach selig! wessen grosser Geist,  
Sich über die Natur erhebet,  
Vor Gruft und Särgen nicht erbebet,  
Wenn ihn sein Schöpfer scheiden heisst.

6. Her life exhibited the art of dying,  
In unwavering practice;  
It could not possibly happen, then,  
[For her] to grow pale in the face of death.  
Ah, blessed [is the one] whose great spirit  
Rises above [human] nature  
[And] does not tremble in the face of crypt and caskets,  
When its [the spirit's] creator calls it to depart.

<sup>13</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book, has a question mark here; Bach's score has an exclamation mark.

<sup>14</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "Um ihrer teuren Mutter Tod" ("About their precious mother's death").

<sup>15</sup>The "lands" are Saxony and Poland.

<sup>16</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "Soll der betrübten Seelen Schrecken ... entdecken" ("Shall bare the troubled souls' terror").

<sup>17</sup>Text booklet: "Durch ihr geschlagnes Erz entdecken" ("Bare [the souls' terror] by their struck-against bronze"); 1728 book: "Durch ihr geschwungnes Erz entdecken" ("Bare [the souls' terror] by their vibrating bronze").

<sup>18</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "O könnte nur ihr banges Klingen" ("Oh if only their fearful tolling").

<sup>19</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "Bis sie des Todes Arm bezwungen" ("Until death's arm overpowered her").

<sup>20</sup>The word "vergnügt" here does not mean "merry" or "cheerful." In older German, the sense of "vergnügt" is "at peace."

<sup>21</sup>The sense here appears to be that death took her life without having ever conquered her spirit.

<sup>22</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "dann." Both "dann" and "denn," depending on their contexts, meant either "at that time" or "for/because."

7. An dir, du Fürbild<sup>23</sup> grosser Frauen,<sup>24</sup>  
An dir, erhabne Königin,  
An dir, du Glaubenspflegerin,  
War dieser Grossmut Bild zu schauen.

7. In you, you model of great women;  
In you, sublime Queen;  
In you, you preserver of faith;<sup>25</sup>  
Was to look upon the image of this bravery.<sup>26</sup>

2. Teil

Part 2

[Strophe 6]

8. Der Ewigkeit saphirnes Haus  
Zieht, Fürstin, deine heitern Blicke<sup>27</sup>  
Von unsrer Niedrigkeit zurücke<sup>28</sup>  
Und tilgt der Erden Denkbild<sup>29</sup> aus.  
Ein starker Glanz von hundert Sonnen,<sup>30</sup>  
Der unsern Tag zur Mitternacht<sup>31</sup>  
Und unsre Sonne finster macht,  
Hat dein verklärtes Haupt umspinnen.<sup>32</sup>

8. Eternity's sapphiric house<sup>33</sup>  
Draws, Princess, your serene glances  
Away from our lowliness  
And obliterates the rememorative image of earth.<sup>34</sup>  
A powerful splendor of a hundred suns,  
That makes our day into midnight  
And our sun dark,  
Has braided around your transfigured head.

<sup>23</sup>An alternative spelling of "Vorbild."

<sup>24</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "An dir, du Muster grosser Frauen" ("In you, you paradigm of great women"). "Muster" and "Fürbild" are essentially synonyms, apart from a special theological use of the latter as a kind of spiritual foreshadowing (which does not seem to apply here). See also line 2 of movement 9.

<sup>25</sup>Queen Christiane Eberhardine was much-admired by her Saxon subjects for remaining staunchly Lutheran after her husband's conversion to Roman Catholicism to become king of Poland. On account of her piety, she was called "die Betsäule Sachsens" ("the prayer column of Saxony") both by Lutherans (in honor) and Roman Catholics (in derision).

<sup>26</sup>"Grossmut" has a wide range of meanings, including "magnanimity" and "lordliness" or "dignity." Here, however, it seems to refer to how valiantly the queen had cultivated her Lutheranism in the face of her husband's Roman Catholicism; likewise, she was said in lines 2–4 of movement 5, above, to have "bravely" ("mutig") fought against the power of death.

<sup>27</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "Zieht deiner heitern Augen Blicke" ("Draws the serene glances of your eyes").

<sup>28</sup>Text booklet, and 1728 book: "Von der verschmähten Welt zurücke" ("Away from the despised world").

<sup>29</sup>Some modern editions of the cantata here give the improbable reading "Und tilgt der Erden Dreckbild aus" ("And blots out the feculent/filthy image of earth"). The original text booklet and 1728 book of odes both give "Denckbild" ("rememorative image"). And Bach's composing score, though difficult to decipher, would seem much more likely to indicate "Denckbild" than "Dreckbild."

<sup>30</sup>Text booklet: "Ein starker Glanz, gleich hundert Sonnen" ("An intense splendor, like a hundred suns"); 1728 book: "Dein heller Glanz, gleicht hundert Sonnen" ("Your brilliant splendor, like a hundred suns").

<sup>31</sup>1728 book: "Ein Licht das unsern Tag zur Nacht . . . macht" ("A light that makes our day into night").

<sup>32</sup>1728 book: "Hat dein verklärtes Haupt gewonnen" ("Has burgeoned your transfigured head").

<sup>33</sup>This is a poetic reference to the eternal city of Jerusalem (the place where the New Testament says Christians will dwell, resurrected, after the End Time), some of whose wall foundations, according to Revelation 21:19, will be emblazoned with sapphire.

<sup>34</sup>The word "Denkbild" is defined in some historical dictionaries as "monument," or "symbol," or "emblem"; but none of these really makes sense here. "Rememorative image" perhaps best captures the sense (that is, to read "Denkbild" as a shorter form of "Gedenkbild," which in turn is read as a synonym for "Gedächtnisbild" ["memory image"]). The conceit

<i>[Strophe 7]</i>	<p>9. Was Wunder ists? Du bist es wert,      Du Fürbild<sup>35</sup> aller Königinnen!      Du musstest allen Schmuck gewinnen,      Der deine Scheitel jetzt verklärt.      Nun trägst du vor des Lammes Throne<sup>36</sup>      Anstatt des Purpurs Eitelkeit<sup>37</sup>      Ein perlenreines Unschuldskleid<sup>38</sup>      Und spottest der verlassnen Krone.</p>	<p>9. What wonder is it? You are worthy of it,      You model of all queens!      You were meant to acquire all the ornament      That now transfigures the crest of your head.      Before the throne of the lamb [Jesus],<sup>39</sup> you now wear,      Instead of the vanity of purple,<sup>40</sup>      A robe of innocence, pure like pearls,      And mock the deserted [royal] crown.</p>
<i>[Strophe 8]</i>	<p>So weit der volle Weichselstrand,      Der Niester und die Warthe fliesset,      So weit sich Elb und Muld ergiesset,      Erhebt dich beides Stadt und Land.      Dein Torgau geht im Trauerkleide,      Dein Pretzsch wird kraftlos, starr und matt;      Denn da es dich verloren hat,      Verliert es seiner Augen Weide.</p>	<p>As far as the entire Vistula's shore,      [And] the Dniester and the Warta<sup>41</sup> runs;      As far as Elbe and Mulde<sup>42</sup> gushes,      Both town and countryside extol you.      Your Torgau goes about in mourning robe,      Your Pretzsch<sup>43</sup> grows weak, numb, and faint;      For in having lost you,      It loses the feast for its eyes.</p>
<i>[Strophe 9]</i>	<p>10. Doch, Königin! du stirbst nicht,      Man weiss, was man an dir besessen;      Die Nachwelt wird dich nicht vergessen,      Bis dieser Weltbau einst zerbricht.      Ihr Dichter, schreibt! wir wollens lesen:      Sie ist der Tugend Eigentum,      Der Untertanen Lust und Ruhm,      Der Königinnen Preis gewesen.</p>	<p>10. But, Queen, you do not die;      One knows what one possessed in you;      Posterity will not forget you      Until this earthly edifice one day shatters.<sup>44</sup>      You poets, write—we want to read it:      “She was virtue's own,      The delight and glory of her subjects,      The praised of all queens.”</p>

appears to be that “eternity’s sapphiric house” is so magnificently emblazoned that the sight of the earth can no longer function as a reminder of its temporality.

<sup>35</sup>See fn. 24, above.

<sup>36</sup>1728 book: “Nun stehst du vor des Lammesthrone” (“Now you stand before the throne of the lamb”).

<sup>37</sup>1728 book: “Verschmähst des Purpurs Eitelkeit” (“Despise the vanity of purple”).

<sup>38</sup>1728 book: “Vor deiner Unschuld Perlenkleid” (“in the face of your pearly robe of innocence”).

<sup>39</sup>Revelation 7:9 speaks of a crowd, at the end of time, standing “before the throne [of God], and before the Lamb” in “white [i.e., pure] robes.” Revelation 22:3 speaks of “the throne of God and of the lamb;” Jesus is first identified as “the lamb of God” in John 1:29.

<sup>40</sup>In the Bible, purple clothing was associated with royalty, but without implication of vanity. Otherwise, however, wearing purple could be considered vain: for example, the “rich man” in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) is described as someone who was clothed in purple and who feasted sumptuously every day.

<sup>41</sup>“Die Weichsel,” “der Niester,” and “die Warthe” are rivers that ran through (eighteenth-century) Poland, the realm where Christiane Eberhardine was queen.

<sup>42</sup>“Die Mulde” (not to be confused with “die Moldau”—“Vltava,” in Czech) and “die Elbe” are rivers that ran through Saxony, the realm where Christiane Eberhardine was electress.

<sup>43</sup>Torgau and Pretzsch are castle towns in Saxony where Christiane Eberhardine lived in winter and summer, respectively. She never went to Poland with her husband.

<sup>44</sup>That is, according to 2 Peter 3:10-12, when Jesus comes back to earth and it is destroyed.

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