Gustav Anton Freiherr von Seckendorff, alias Patrik Peale: A Biographical Note

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Within the context of his time, the early nineteenth century, Gustav Anton von Seckendorff is a remarkable figure. A Freiherr who under an alien pseudonym made a stage career; the only author (among far too many) of a handbook on declamation and mime who actually had a performing career; and the only male performer of what at the time was known as attitudes, or living statues. Three times a somewhat mysterious break in his career sent him into another direction. The first made him an actor, the second a professor, and the third an obscure librarian who died, at 48 years of age, on another continent.

References to Seckendorff’s ideas on declamation have become more frequent in recent scholarship. But his biography has never been adequately dealt with, the known facts are few, and the information in reference works is often inaccurate. No doubt extensive archive research would reveal many more details than I am presenting here, a collection of data from accessible secondary sources and digitally available period journalism. Even from this limited material a much fuller picture emerges.

Nobility and the Whip (1775-1807)

The Seckendorff family line can be traced back to the thirteenth century, and consequently there are quite a few Seckendorffs who have carved their names in history. Most familiar to music historians is the courtier and composer Karl Siegmund von Seckendorff, who during his Weimar years (1775-1784) collaborated with Goethe. Karl Siegmund was a member of the Aberdar branch of the family, and therefore only very remotely related to Gustav Anton, an offspring of the Gudent line, which since 1677 had its residence in the town of Meuselwitz in Thuringia, some 35 km south of Leipzig. The castle was destroyed by bombing in 1945.

Gustav Anton was born at Meuselwitz on 20 November 1775. His father, Friedrich Carl (1727-1799), was a colonel (Oberst) in the service of the Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, and a widower when he married Charlotte Friederike Henriette von Tümpling-Sorna (1737-1794), of an old Thuringian family, the oldest of seventeen children and “a lady of high intellectual gifts”. Gustav Anton had six older brothers, including Adolf Christian (1767-1833), who had a military career and also became known as a writer, and two younger sisters.

Of the first three decades of Gustav Anton’s life little is known, except that it followed a pattern that was typical of his social background: a higher, practically oriented education, higher offices in the service of the state, with some Schriftstellerei on the side.

1 This is an extended footnote to my Concert Song and Concert Speech around 1800 (in preparation), which will include a brief discussion of Seckendorff’s theory of declamation. Published 2016, minor revision August 2017.
2 Tümpling (1864): 111.
In 1791 he enrolled at the Bergakademie (mining academy) in Freiberg,³ where he must have met the future naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt, six years his senior, who enrolled in the same year. In 1793 Seckendorff moved to Leipzig to study law and governance (Staatswissenschaften), and one year later to Wittenberg, were he graduated in 1795.⁴

These frequent changes might be a symptom of the restlessness that seems to have plagued his life. His mining background still was of use when he travelled to the United States in the next year (1796), on what has been called a bergmännische Reise.⁵ Its main purpose were studies of the local industry, commerce and politics in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the state which held the largest population of German immigrants. Whether this was a matter of private initiative or an assignment is unclear. He has also been said to have given lessons in music and declamation, but this may be conjecture. In the same year he married a native Philadelphian, Maria Elisabeth (Betty) Lechler (1782-1858), evidently of German descent. The fruit of this marriage have been ten sons and four daughters.

In June 1797 the Neue Teutsche Merkur publishes an article by Seckendorf (signed S...) with the title Filadelfia: Literatur und Vergnügungen der Nordamerikaner.⁶ It shows the author’s disappointment with social and economical life in the New World. He criticises the nation’s “mercantile egotism”:

The people in this country have more solid occupations than writing and reading books. Purchasing and revelling, all the pursuits of the North Americans hinge on those two objectives. The means by which they are achieved cause them little concern.

He also mentions as a somewhat disappointing experience a visit to the famous natural history museum of Charles Wilson Peale. It might have influenced his later choice of a stage name — though it is unclear how.

Two more seriously social-critical contributions were published in the same journal in 1800. In a letter dated October 1798, Ueber die Schicksale der nach N.A. auswandernden Teutschen, he discusses the cruel fate of the redemptioners, poor farmers and artisans who dream of freedom from feudal oppression — of a country “where no nobleman, bailiff or steward swings the whip” — but by borrowing passage fare unwittingly have signed themselves into slavery. A second letter (November 1799) describes, as a more personal and heart-rending example of the same abuse, the Schicksale eines teutschen Zimmermanns in Filadelfia, as recorded from the mouth of this carpenter. A third letter on the exploitation of black slaves was announced but has not appeared.

By the time these essays were printed Seckendorff had returned to Germany and entered state service in the Electorate of Saxony, progressing through the positions of Vicegeleits- und Landaccis-Commissar in Dresden (1799); Assessor bei der Landesökonomie- und Commerzien-Deputation; Amtsbaupruchm in Torgau (1804); and Kammerjunker (1806).⁷ In

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³ Tütken (2005): 908. Not Freiburg, as stated in some reference works.
⁴ ib. This is the only source that has made use of Seckendorff’s own curriculum vitae, handed in with his Ph.D. application of 1812 (unfortunately not reproduced in its entirety).
⁵ ib.
⁶ About its authorship, see Starnes (1994), 109 and Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie (1820), 934.
⁷ In 1801 his name was brought forward in discussions about the appointment of a Saxon chargé d’affaires in the US; see Deuling (2000): 202.
1807 he was appointed to the function of Kammerdirektor in the neighbouring duchy of Sachsen-Hildburghausen. This was of short duration: a difference of opinion with his minister regarding certain economic reforms (as the sources vaguely state) lead to his resignation after seven months. The conflict seems to have been a matter of principle for Seckendorff, who is quoted as having taken this step “forgetful of his worldly happiness”. It left him without the means to provide for his wife and (at the time) seven children. And this is the point where his career takes a more interesting turn.

An Army of Declaimers (1808-1811)

The arts and sciences, I observed, provide the broadest field of action (die allgemeinste Thätigkeit). — I had to start with art, in order to gain an income quickly and apply myself gradually more to the sciences, which had previously already filled my hours of leisure.

The abstract nouns — arts and sciences — can be interpreted as slightly euphemistic for (in modern terms) being a freelance performer, and a tenured professor. There also may be an element of bravado in this decision to throw himself into “the broadest field of action” and use art as a stepping stone to “the sciences” (Wissenschaften). The remark about his previous hobbies seems not entirely correct, to judge from the publications that had already appeared under his name. These include, besides an report on the manufacture of wool in Saxony (1802), what seems to be a novel (Julius von Frohenbayn, 1804), published under name Patrik Peale, a number of poems, and a historical tragedy in two parts, Otto III (1805). A curious feature of the latter is the inclusion of musical compositions, melodies “which have sprung from my heart and have been corrected by a musician”. The author seems later to have disowned these early literary efforts as an “aesthetic mistake”.

The road from art to science, as Seckendorff saw it ahead of him, ran through the domain of rhetoric or Beredsamkeit, and particularly, the art of delivery in speech and gesture, eloquentia corporis, “body language” or in German körperliche Beredsamkeit. As a traditional liberal art, rhetoric was in part a theoretical discipline, that is, Wissenschaft in a broad sense. But by 1800 the liberal arts were an antiquated concept, superseded by aesthetics and the Fine Arts on the one hand, and a diversifying domain of exact and less exact sciences on the other. What remained of rhetoric was primarily the art or skill of delivery, aestheticized as a performance art, associated less with oratory or persuasive speech, than with poetry or literature. Declamation of literary works on stage was a growing fashion. It was stimulated by a number of distinguished authors who themselves were excellent readers or declaimers, and who attached great importance to oral communication: Klopstock, Ramler, Goethe, Bürger, later Tieck. These authors frequently read their own works or those of others, but only in more or less private

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11 Seckendorff (1805f): 138. To the extent that one can judge from the digitization (as usual in Google Books, the foldouts have been scanned without unfolding them), these compositions are decidedly amateurish.
12 Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie (1820): 935.
settings. At the same time, a considerable number of reproductive artists made declamation into a public profession, touring the German speaking world with a repertoire of texts they could produce, just like wandering musicians offered concerts. As Seckendorff put it in his 1816 Vorlesungen: “an army of declaimers has sprung up, which through all seasons traverses the mountains and plains, wherever the German language is at home”.\(^{13}\)

Most of these declaimers were professional actors, such as Sophie Albrecht (1757-1840); Elise Bürger née Hahn (1769-1833), who had been briefly married to the poet and declaimer Gottfried August Bürger; Henriette Hendel-Schütz (1772-1849); Carl Friedrich Solbrig (1774-1838), and Sophie Schröder (1781-1868). The only real declamation specialist seems to have been Theodor Baron von Sydow (1773-1855). The latter is interesting because he became a professional declaimer in 1806, that is, around the same time as Seckendorff, at a similarly critical moment in his life, when his military career had ended with the defeat of the Prussian army in the battles of Jena and Auerstedt.\(^{14}\) He was of the same social rank, and in the eyes of many must have been similarly compromised by his choice of a stage career; even an academic career was highly unusual for the nobility. Though for Seckendorff the potential confusion with so many other Seckendorffs may have been a reason to adopt a stage name, family conflict seems the more likely and stronger explanation. It gains probability from a curious rectification he submitted after the Journal des Luxus und der Moden had stated that Peale was his wife’s family name.

This I must publicly contradict, because nature has given me such among my relatives as might exploit this error, in order to act viciously against me behind my back.\(^{15}\)

It is not clear how exactly Seckendorff managed to make the leap from the desk to the stage, but the fact that in the first years of his brief performing career he collaborated with Henriette Hendel, a highly experienced and acclaimed actress, suggests that there may initially have been a kind of apprenticeship. Hendel (née Schüler) had been born into a Wanderbühne family, acted on stage since childhood, and was trained in acting and music by Johann Jacob Engel (author of Ideen zu einer Mimik, 1785) and the composers Georg Anton Benda und Anton Schweitzer. By specializing in so-called ‘attitudes’, in German Stellungen, living statues or tableaux vivants, she followed the example of the famous Lady Emma Hamilton. Lady Emma, born Amy Lyon, had arrived at the top of the social ladder thanks to her husband Sir William Hamilton, an art collector and British ambassador in Naples. Having begun her career as a painter’s model, she now practised a kind of reverse modelling: imitating the poses depicted in classical artworks. Her example became more widely known through a series of engravings, and fuelled a fashion for similar performances.\(^{16}\) Hendel seems to have become acquainted with this publication in 1794, and developed her art during the following years, profiting from instruction by the archaeologist Karl August Böttiger. A similar collection has

\(^{13}\) Seckendorff (1816c), vol. 1: 14.
\(^{14}\) Weithase (1961), 546.
\(^{15}\) Berichtigende Erklärung des Herrn Patrik Peale, JLM 1810 (9), 592 (cf. 368).
\(^{16}\) Friedrich Rehberg, Drawings Faithfully Copied from Nature at Naples (1794).
been produced of Hendel’s attitudes.  

In this cultivation of isolated poses and gestures in early nineteenth-century mime we may again recognize a rhetorical origin: as an application of the codified elements of body language it has grown out of rhetorical gesture or *actio*. It could be offered as an artistic entertainment, but also (as it was particularly by Seckendorff) as a ‘science’ or pseudoscience. Seckendorff’s mimic or ‘mimoplastic’ representations of human mental states continue the tradition that had produced such works as Lavater’s studies of physiognomy and Engel’s theory of theatrical gesture. When Seckendorff laid out his plan to progress through art to science, it seems most likely that this is what he had in mind.

For Henriette Hendel practising attitudes was a way to return to the stage in 1808, after a brief retirement and the early death of her third husband (Hendel). As a stage associate Seckendorff was later succeeded by her fourth husband, the ill-fated historian Friedrich Karl Julius Schütz, who after his marriage seems to have plunged into a complete loss of self-esteem, became a gambling addict, divorced his wife, and died destitute. A pattern seems to emerge in the careers of these three people — a pattern with a strong social-economic factor. When Seckendorff turned towards declamation and attitudes it was a way out of his crisis, an artistic path towards an academic career. Hendel presented her attitudes to the public after August Wilhelm Iffland, director of the Berlin *Nationaltheater*, had refused to allow her a come-back; and for the ex-professor Schütz it was a much-needed occupation after the French ruler of Westphalia, Jérôme Bonaparte, had closed the university of Halle in 1813. “Out of love for his wife the philosophy professor became a stage actor, but his art did not rise above the mediocre”, according to Hendel’s anonymous biographer.

Joint *deklamatorische Akademien* by Hendel and Peale were announced in the *Wiener Zeitung* in February and March, 1809, in the Kleine Redoutensaal in Vienna. For one of these events we have the eye witness report of Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who had made Seckendorff’s acquaintance in Vienna shortly before. Seckendorff is said to be “accompanying Mme Hendel” and “practising the art of declamation with great energy”.

A fine, agreeable man, rich in insight and feeling. The few words we could exchange in such company about declamation have stimulated my curiosity of hearing him declaim, and exchange more ideas about the art. With his ideas on declamation, expounded at length in his 1816 *Vorlesungen*, Seckendorff belongs to a school of rhetoricians and musicians who believe that the difference between speaking and singing is one of degree, rather than principle. In song the pitch contours and rhythms of speech simply become more distinct, the intervals larger. For Seckendorff, any form of declamation is a “concert on the musical scale of speech”

20 Reichardt (1810), vol. 1: 336-337; vol. 2: 8-9 (review).
(Konzert auf der Sprechtonleiter), and he tried to prove that by declaiming poetry to his own piano accompaniment. Reichardt’s appraisal of this speech-concert is somewhat ambivalent, but clearly dismissive of its ‘singsong’ quality.  

Two more Hendel-Peale recitals at least took place in Vienna that season; on 31 March 1809 Reichardt mentions a matinee with both attitudes and declamation. After that Hendel and Peale went their own ways. In the summer of that year Seckendorff extends his activities to theatrical acting, taking the part of Marinelli in Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti* in performances in Carlsruhe, apparently to the public’s satisfaction — or at least, to judge from the review, appealing to the more snobistic members of the audience. Guest roles and mime are reported from Bamberg early in 1810, with little success for his Marinelli, “except for the passionate scenes”. His acting was considered mannered, with exaggerated facial expressions, and a monotonous declamation “that not infrequently degenerated into veritable preaching”. More successful he was with his mime. We learn the titles of some of the items: *The Transfiguration* (after Raphael), *Death of Hector*, *Death of Macbeth*, *Regulus Parting from the Romans*, and *The Madness of Orastes*. Most of these will probably have been modelled after a specific painting, but generally they must have reflected the pictorial canon. For the more complex tableaux he recruited the assistance of his wife and children (or borrowed children from another theatrical family). It is hard to imagine how Seckendorff could have tackled the *Transfiguration*, a huge work with some twenty-five figures, including Christ, Moses and Elijah floating high above the earth. But as we learn from a later review, this must have been a staging of Christ’s resurrection and ascension, which borrowed only a few elements from Raphael’s painting.

Mime (by Herr und Madame Peale) and lectures are reported in that year (1810) from Aschaffenburg and Frankfurt, where Seckendorff again plays the role of Marinelli. In August the town of Göttingen honours the university-wrecker Jérôme Bonaparte (pre-emptively, no doubt) with an “allegorical representation”, a tableau vivant that glorifies his kingship, designed by “the well-known declamer and mime artist, Mr. Patrik Peale”.

An important milestone in his career must have been his performances in Hamburg, in December of that year. Hamburg is the city where Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had done his groundbreaking work as dramaturge, and where the actor and director Friedrich Ludwig Schröder had pioneered Shakespeare, *Sturm und Drang* drama, and established a new, naturalistic acting style. Here Seckendorff again interprets the role of

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23 Reichardt (1810), Vol. 2, 82.
24 ZEW 1809 (190): 519 — Wenn nicht die Anwesenheit des geistvollen Gr. B. und seiner gebildeten Gattin, deren täglichen Umgang er genießt, ihn bestimmten, Carlsruhe zu wählen, so ist es in der That unbegreiflich, wie er [Peale] auf einer Bühne verweilen kann, wo die Kunst das Große nie gestalten wird. [...] Er gab unlängst den Marinelli, und der gebildete Theit des Publikums war allgemein mit Leistung dieser Rolle zufrieden. Es eröffnet in der That eine heitere Aussicht für die deutsche dramatische Kunst, wenn Männer von höherer Bildung sie auszüählen, statt sich entschließen, mit endlich unsere Bühne von Menschen gereinigt werde, die durch Mangel an Cultur und Sittlichkeit allein dazu beitragen, eine Kunst herabzuwürdigen, die warlich keiner ihre Schwestern nachzustehen verdient.
25 MGS 1810 (16): 64.
26 ZEW 1810 (87): 695
27 JLM 1810 (6): 368.
28 JLM 1810 (9): 587-588; see also Tütken (2005): 909-910.
Marinelli, as well as those of Nathan (in Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*), Don Carlos (Schiller), and Pygmalion (probably in the Benda-Gotter melodrama after Rousseau). He is said to have been appreciated as an actor and conversation partner by Schröder, then retired, though “they could not agree upon the principles of declamation”.29 Another source calls him “more theoretically than practically trained”.30

In Hamburg he also gave his by then usual programme of lectures and mimic performances. The exalted tone in which one correspondent describes the event might be exactly what Seckendorff, always tending towards the lofty, had hoped to provoke:

> We warmly thank him for having transported us, through his beautiful and omnifariously excellent artistic exhibitions [...] under the beautiful Grecian sky, under the high ideals of art, and to have prepared for us there many a pure delight.31

Notably, the same author complains a few lines lower (and not relating to Seckendorff) about “declarations multiplied *ad nauseam*”. A less enthusiastic critique by Friedrich Gottlieb Zimmermann, editor of the *Dramaturgische Blätter für Hamburg*, provoked a reaction from Seckendorff, initiating a journalistic debate “which he would have been wiser to avoid”.32

> Surprisingly, the same Zimmermann has later called Seckendorff “the best Marinelli we have seen in many years”.33 Seckendorff seems to have been attached to this role and the play, for which he wrote a sequel.34 His achievement in this role, that of an unscrupulous plotter, has been particularly controversial. The renowned dramatist, actor and stage director August Klingemann has called his acting in general “utterly misguided”, and his Marinelli in particular too theoretical, incoherent and artificial: a “manikin”, put together from various ideas.35 A rather similar but much more malicious judgement we find in a later journalistic exchange. In 1816, when he had retired from the stage, Seckendorff published a review in the *Zentanz für die elegante Welt* (signed *v. S.*) of Klingemann’s production in Brunswick of a *Schauerdrama* by Zacharias Werner, *Der vierzehnteste Februar*.36 Though the realism of the play and its production does not appeal to him (the act of murder for instance should have been hidden from the spectators), his judgement is rather mild, and in the closing paragraph he calls the actor Karl Friedrich Leo’s acting “masterful” in details. But by calling Leo a member of the ‘old school’ (meaning the naturalist school of Leo’s mentor Friedrich Ludwig Schröder), Seckendorff had reaped the scorn of this notoriously irascible actor, who one month later takes an unprovoked revenge in the same journal. He finds it incomprehensible that the murder should have been concealed, an idea that “belongs to that dark area of the modern theatrical method, which admittedly produces incomprehen-

30 Lebrün (1841): 290.
31 MGS 1811 (80): 320.
32 Lebrün (1841): 290. The debate took place in the *Nordische Mizzellen*; the journal Minerva (1811 vol. 1: 349) refers to these titles: *Keine Antikritik, aber Erläuterungen von Patrik Peale; Noch ein Wort zu Herrn Patrik Peales Erläuterungen, von Herrn Dr. Zimmermann*.
33 Zimmermann (1840): 91.
34 Seckendorff (1815). According to Klingemann (1828: 77) performed once in Bremen, “mit übelm Erfolge”.
35 Klingemann (1828): 75, 76.
36 ZEW 1815 (90): 720.
sible effects, such as making the whole audience laugh where it should weep”. He then describes a performance he purportedly witnessed in which “a great modern idealist idealized Marinelli”, with the very same effect. Though he does not mention Seckendorff-Peale by name, many readers must have recognized the target of his jibe.

In the spring of 1811 the travelling artist performs in Marburg. Here again he finds that kind of exalted, effusive response that seems to echo his own lofty ‘idealism’ (though its affectation by far exceeds Seckendorff’s):

His representations magically bring to life the liveliest life, the higher human being among human beings, as a creator of forms whose clear meaning his mind articulated and prefigured simply, truly and warmly. My bosom billowed high in rapture as he and his wife presented the image of Fantasy aspiring to the highest, Zeus.

The programme further included: Pygmalion, Cato’s Death, The Dying Christ, again The Transfiguration, and a series of Passions or mental states (Anger, Jealousy, Hypocrisy, etc.); with as intermezzo, a declamation of Schiller’s ballad Der Taucher.

After that, there are more extensive reports from Copenhagen. His first mime series, on 18 April, includes Neptune, Ruler of Storms; Neptune as Shore God; Niobe (with Betty); Blind Night Carrying the Child of Morning (with a Seckendorff offspring); Madonna in the Manner of the Old German School (Betty); Brutus Before Murdering Caesar; The Madness of Orestes; and as pantomime, that is, with action: St. Paul on the Road to Ephesus and Joseph and Mary During the Flight into Egypt (“The Holy Family suffers from thirst in the desert, until they finally find a source”). As we learn from a later review, this little drama includes a tableau after a painting by Parmigianino.

Appearances at court must have worked in his favour, but despite this, the reception was mixed. The poet Adam Oehlenschläger conceived a strong antipathy towards Seckendorff and calls him in his memoirs “a cranky, boring person”. It is said that Friederike Brun, a wealthy writer and salon hostess, “flatly refused to allow him to appear in her home”. It may not be irrelevant that her daughter Ida Brun was at the time a famous performer of attitudes à la Emma Hamilton, and frequently performed in her mother’s salon — though it is hard to say in what way exactly this affected Seckendorff’s reputation.

Returning from Denmark, in the summer of 1811 Seckendorff passes through the town of Eutin in Eastern Schleswig-Holstein, for the purpose of visiting the painter Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein and obtaining his advice and endorsement. Seckendorff (signing Patrik Peale) reports in the Zeitung für die elegante Welt about this visit

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38 Signed Elise Sommer geb. Brandenburg. ZEW 1811 (65): 599 [recte 519].

39 Österreichischer Beobachter 1811 (117): 483 (announcement); MGS 1811 (169): 676 (mentioned); MGS 1811 (196): 784; MGS 1811 (197): 787-788 (review); Holmström (1967): 260 (n. 113).

40 MGS 1811 (197): 787-788.

41 Oehlenschläger (1850): 52.

42 Holmström (1967): 207.

and comments on the cheerfulness of the “old man” (Greis) — just 60 at the time. Best known nowadays for his portrait of Goethe in an Italian landscape, Tischbein had been under the personal influence of the Swiss pastor Johann Kaspar Lavater, who had attempted to revive the scientific (or pseudoscientific) study of human facial expression, or physiognomy. In Naples Tischbein had moved in the circle of Sir William and Lady Emma Hamilton. He supervised the production of engravings after the images on the ancient Greek vases in Sir William’s collection, and depicted Lady Emma’s physiognomy in numerous paintings — even several times in one: his *Madness of Orestes* reproduces Lady Emma’s features in the figures of the coldly obsessed Orestes, of his loving sister Iphigenia, and of two Furies. As Tischbein states, “For all these faces she had often shown me the expression of each person’s state of mind, and I only had to follow her example”. To a modern observer these figures may look rather wooden and stereotype; in the classicizing ‘ideal’ manner (emphatically embraced by Seckendorff) expression is generalized, subjected to what is considered the rule of beauty.

Tischbein counted as a specialist in depicting facial and corporeal expression, or *körperliche Beredsamkeit*. For Seckendorff’s 1816 *Vorlesungen* Tischbein has provided the design of two plates. The first of these (Plate II) shows the postures and physiognomy belonging to a headache and a toothache, the second (Plate V, ill. 1) “various kinds of thinking”, inquisitive, speculative, poetic, comparative, and anticipating. Another plate bears the name of Friedrich Barthel, a painter resident in Brunswick, who may be responsible for the unsigned designs as well. They were engraved by Ernst Ludwig Riepenhausen, who was associated with the university of Göttingen. All the male figures in these images are rather similar, and since it may be assumed that Seckendorff posed for them — the plate signed by Barthel is marked as drawn after life — they are the closest thing we have to a portrait.

In August and September Seckendorff stays in Brunswick. Carl Friedrich Pockels, a theologian and pedagogue, thinks his mimic representations are “truly excellent”. The programme distinguishes *Statuen* (or *Gruppen*), *Pantomimen* and declamation. In the first category, the reviewer mentions (besides some of the aforementioned) *Jupiter and Juno* and *The Child Murderer* (“filled all the spectators with horror and deep melancholy”). Two *Pantomimen* were less well received (*Macbeth, Belisarius’ Homecoming and Death*); but *Christ Praying on the Mount of Olives* was “the valiant artist’s masterpiece”. The series of ‘passions’ (ill. 2) met with disapproval: “there is something repugnant in this attempt to amuse the audience by mimicking immoral passions”. The second evening offered the following new items: *Oedipus and Jocasta; A Father Protecting His Child from the Attack by a Wild Animal* (statues); and *Abraham’s Sacrifice* (pantomime). As for Seckendorff’s declamations with piano accompaniment, Pockels remarks that the attempt “to amalgamate prosaic speech with melody” was unconvincing, and he also complains (like many others) about the declaimer’s Saxon accent.

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44 Seckendorff (1811a).
45 Hamilton and Tischbein: *Collection of Engravings from Ancient Vases of Greek Workmanship* (Naples, 1791).
46 Painted in 1788. See http://www.bildindex.de/obj00071149.html# home
47 Tischbein (1861): 105.

The same events were witnessed by August Klingemann. In an extensive critique Klingemann unfavourably compares Seckendorff’s attitudes or tableaux with those of Hendel, who (like Lady Hamilton) visibly transformed one pose into another. 49 Seckendorff’s more elaborate and static presentations required changes behind a closed curtain, and gave the impression of a Scheintod which is “as repulsive as the Scheinleben in wax figures”. 50 Even Klingemann however praises the allegorical Night, the Mount of Olives, and Abraham’s Sacrifice. The Transfiguration, here described as resurrection and ascension, “contained in details much of pictorial value, and particularly the end very effectively copied the main figure of Raphael’s Transfiguration”. But the artist’s mounting a footstool in order to suggest his ascent was too crude, “even insulting to the idea”, and the Passions were merely caricature. Seckendorff’s speech-song at the piano he dismisses as a “hermaphrodite genus”, as he would do later in his Kunst und Natur (1828).

A much less sensitive critique was written by the essayist Georg Ludwig Peter Sievers, who with extraordinary complacency and pedantry promises to speak a final, “serious, severe” word about what he keeps calling Peale’s “(so-called) mimic representations”. Rejecting the art of statuary mime a priori, he still thinks Hendel is vastly superior.

That Mr. Peale is not inspired by unfettered genius, is clear even in his introductions […]; these are so mannered, timid and strained, that he even falters in his periods, and gets confused in the pronunciation of names. 51

As he had already done in Hamburg, Seckendorff responds to his critics with “clarifications”, addressing Pockels and Klingemann (Sievers is not mentioned). He realizes that as an artist he should not argue with his critics, but “the artist in me only serves scientific purposes”. He protests against Klingemann’s image of Scheintod, calling it “living stasis” instead (lebendiger Stillstand), and argues for the presence of “higher musical laws” in speech. 52 Klingemann, insulted in turn, responds at length, accusing him (not without justification) of being blindly in love with his own system, and lacking modesty in dealing with his critics. 53

Academe (1812-1823)

In December 1811 Seckendorff lectures in Göttingen, and attempts to obtain a license to offer university courses under his stage name. 54 This is refused, but early in the next year he is allowed to to apply for promotion with special dispensations. The title of

50 Klingemann (see n. 49): 1482.
52 Seckendorff (1811b).
Magister allows him to offer courses as Privatdozent. As a ‘proof of erudition’ he submits a treatise on the Roman toga. University lectures on Beredsamkeit and Die Mythologie der Alten, aus ihren Kunstwerken erläutert are announced for the autumn by Freiherr Magister von Seckendorff; the title Dr. first appears in the same year on the title page of his Kritik der Kunst. Like several of his other books, this is meant to be a complement to his lectures. Lack of scholarly references is raised to a principle: “It is characteristic of the authors of antiquity that each of them created from within himself (daß jeder aus sich selbst schöpfte), even though he may have developed through others. This is my ambition [...]”. It is more likely that lack of time, of a fixed abode, and pressure for money played a major part in that unscholarly practice.

A small volume that appeared in Berlin in the same year (Aphorismen) shows that his ambitions extended into the domain of metaphysics. But academic activities seem not to have been sufficient to fill his purse and schedule. In the winter of 1812-1813 he performs and lectures in Berlin, and a little later in Cassel. The impression he made on a conservative establishment appears from a letter by the author Therese Huber, replying to her friend Therese Forster in Berlin, who has shared her impressions of Seckendorff’s performances:

Oh how your Mr. Sekendorf disgusts me! but since it has amused me too, do not fail to tell me the latest news and don’t be afraid of a touch of malice. Besides, his lack of good sense deserves the ferule, that a married man quits his job, his vocation, and goes on teaching declamation in times when diligence in the service of the state, order among the different ranks is so necessary! and then that eagerness to become a stage actor (histrion), to promote the stage actors in our circumstances! That those contemptible follies take place in the capital — so much the worse! but the idle throng that hangs around there explains it, but that the so-called nation hastens to embrace such an individual and his exploits, that the authors of a so-called nation counts those declamations and all the farces around them among the means of its resurrection — that is revolting.

He then turns southward, visiting Bavaria and Switzerland. Lectures and mime in St. Gallen in 1813 are met with “unanimous acclaim”. All these travels apparently hardly hamper his writing flow: in 1814 appear his Vorlesungen über die bildende Kunst des Alterthums und der neueren Zeit, and in the same year Beyträge zur Philosophie des Herzens, a sentimental work in the form of a fictitious correspondence, which must have been aimed at a popular market but seems not to have created much of a stir.

A more secure position finally came in 1814 with an appointment as Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetics at the University of Brunswick (Collegium Carolinum), re-
ently re-established after King Jérôme had converted it into a military academy. At this point, unfortunately, data become scarce. Yet there is little doubt that this appointment was not a fortunate one. The poet Hoffmann von Fallersleben (famous and notorious for his Deutschland über alles), who in 1814 was a high school student (Gymnasiast), remembers that some of the newly appointed professors did not have enough students, and were called upon to lecture to teenage boys.

The man possessed wide knowledge and had made quite a few fine observations, but for a teacher he was much too highly strung, restless and theatrical; he also could not get rid of his native Saxon accent [...]. We heard his lectures, peppered with all kinds of stories from his life, with amazement, and each of us had his own thoughts about them. Behind his back we imitated his manner of declaiming poems. But after all there was something to be learned from him: if one could ignore his exaggerations and peculiarities, it was often possible to get to the right interpretation of a poem, and in this way I owe him a definite advance in the declamation of poetry. We also wondered how such a man, who was much more of a literary adventurer and an actor, could be of great use to a higher educational institution. Even with schoolchildren he was unable to maintain the dignity of his new profession or the bearing of a sensible man. On the occasion of a quarrel between his son and one of our Primaner he became so furious that without inquiring whether his son-and-heir really was in the right he exclaimed: Mein Sohn ist ein Cavallier!

In 1816 Seckendorff publishes what has proved to be his main work, closest to his field of personal expertise, the Vorlesungen über Deklamation und Mimik. After that follow titles that reflect his teaching activities: a work on political philosophy (1817) and a thin volume on logic (1819). These may have been areas too remote from his personal interest. A contributor to the Gesellschafter of 1824 thinks that the obligation to teach subjects unsuited to his artistic disposition caused him to “lose his temper and satisfaction”, with the consequence that in the end he “failed to qualify for his position, as his position did not qualify for him”.

In this way his third career came to an end in 1821. Very little information has come up as to why he left Germany to exile himself in the country that in 1796 had seemed to him so repulsively materialistic. It is possible that he made an attempt to put this new career change in a missionary light. A report on two lectures on German literature he delivered in Hamburg strikes a tone of aggressive germanophilia — possibly reflecting Seckendorff’s own rhetoric. It praises him for painting a “higher world of Germanness”:

[...] German genius inhabits all the different parts of the world, collects rich treasures everywhere, piously scatters rich seeds for the care of emerging generations, is nowhere alien, not excluded from any territory.

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61 Kühlmann (2011): 717 refers to a letter by Seckendorff in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek which speaks of his hope of an appointment in Berlin or Jena.
63 MGS 1821 (159): 636.
It concludes with the announcement that Seckendorff has meanwhile embarked for America “with the laudable intention of disseminating German literature, in particular as a book seller”. That is nearly the last thing we know. It is said that the Brunswick government put two years salary and travelling-money at his disposal — no doubt as compensation for a forced resignation. A still extant catalogue of the holdings of the Pennsylvania University Library in Philadelphia, handwritten by Seckendorff in 1822, suggests that he spent his few remaining months on odd jobs. His own manuscripts he somehow lost in Pennsylvania. He died in the summer of 1823 in Alexandria, Louisiana, “in poverty and misery”.

Posthumous Reputation

The sparse references after his death suggest that Seckendorff’s performances and teaching did not have a lasting influence. This despite Klingemann’s picture of Seckendorff as “the most zealous herald” of a kind of artificially cultivated speech (Schönrednerei),

which as empty Klinklang started to sound from all the German stages. Individual young actors who trusted his guidance soon produced such soft and sweetly singing tones, that any listener who was used to a forceful, natural style of expression could not endure them, despite all their good intentions; while the souls of sentimentally inclined ladies (sentimental gestimmten Damenseelen) underwent a true tickle of delight.

For all his criticism, Klingemann does make a few appreciative remarks about his mime: some of Seckendorff’s characterizations were quite well done, and “his agile facial features very easily responded to diverse kinds of character and passions; his eye, even if unable to attain the ideal expression, was highly eloquent and intelligible [...].” In an earlier essay (1816) Klingemann speaks of the necessity for actors to study painting and sculpture, and mentions Hendel and Seckendorff as geniale Mimen who have profited from such studies. There he also recommends that actors (female actors in particular) should cultivate a more melodic way of speaking — calling it redender Gesang, rather than singende Rede, by which he understands a mechanical alternation of higher and lower.

We know from Klingemann that Seckendorff made his own practice of declaiming with piano accompaniment, adjusting the speech melody to the harmony, part of his teaching method. Of Seckendorff students, only two names have come to my notice. A Dem. Schneider, daughter of the composer Georg Abraham Schneider, performed her father’s monodrama Hero in 1817 in Cassel and “proved that she had well understood

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64 Tütke (2005): 915 and ref.
65 Seckendorff (1822).
66 Schmidt (1824): 851. The journal Merkur 1824 (85): 240 makes the announcement that the bookseller and printer Ritter has departed for America with a company of forty-five, planning to set up the first German book printing firm in Philadelphia. — Wenn’s ihm nur besser geht, als dem in Deutschland wohl bekannten und in so mancher Hinsicht achtsungwerthen Freiherrn von Seckendorf, bekannter unter seinem Schriftstellernamen Patrik Peale. Er starb im letzten Jahre in Amerika in Armuth und Elend.
67 Klingemann (1828): 75.
how to profit from the instruction by Freiherr von Seckendorff (Patrik Peale).”  
An other pupil, who has been heavily criticized for her heavy, sluggish declamation (blamed to her teacher), was — ironically — August Klingemann’s wife, the actress Elisabeth Anschütz.

‘Concert’ declamation was an easy and frequent target for satire, including Klingemann’s widely performed farce, Schill oder das Declamatorium in Krähwinkel (1812). A rather similar satirical story, Der wandernde Declamator, was published by the Swiss author David Heß in 1816 and has been occasionally reprinted (a Dutch translation has appeared anonymously in 1833). Here a wandering declaimer introduces himself to an ignorant village crowd as a pupil and intimate friend of “the famous Patrik Peale”, and explains that the art of declamation has reached such heights, that a master may transform even the newspaper into music. He finds himself opposite a knowledgeable curate, who thinks that the majority of declaimers consists of charlatans, “featherless parrots and bald monkeys”, who “always grind out the most famous and beautiful passages from the best poets, turning the fastest Pegasus into a cab horse. Schiller’s [Song of the] Bell and most of his works of genius I can read no longer [...].” After a riotous performance, the curate advises him to return to his earlier, “honest” profession; “professional declamation will neither here nor anywhere else have much of a future”.

It is Klingemann who despite his antipathy gives us the most vivid and plausible sketch of the man’s character. Working with him at least occasionally during a long period in which they were both Brunswick residents, he may have known him rather well. The picture that emerges from other sources — that of a man of many talents, but lacking the ability to unite them, and particularly, lacking well-balanced self-critique, is confirmed by Klingemann’s sketch.

Seckendorff was a man of excellent intellect, lively imagination and a fiery enthusiasm for the arts, but his pursuits were unstable and disconnected; and because they did not proceed from a deeply rooted inner consistence, his energy was directed now towards this, then towards another heterogeneous single thing.

He also ascribes to him “together with an amiable character, a suspicious hypochondria”, which might explain the conflicts and crises that seem to have shaped his life. Klingemann’s verdict is the likely source for certain negative characterizations that echo through the literature. Gossip rather than scholarship is Holmström’s dismissive portrayal of “the eccentric Baron von Seckendorff”, whose performances “seem to have

69 Wiener allgemeine Theaterzeitung 1817 (59). Considering the date, this cannot be G.A. Schneider’s daughter Maschinka (1815-1882), a well-known singer.
70 Hartmann (1905): 351; Mörschel-Wetzke (1956): 68
73 Klingemann (1828): 73-74.
been orgies of bad taste”, whose Vorlesungen contain no noteworthy new ideas, and with their “extremely pedantic character can hardly have succeeded in reaching a wide circle of readers”.\textsuperscript{75}

Unfortunately, his more original ideas are also the crankier. The attempt in the 1816 Vorlesungen to base a science of declamation upon acoustics shows an interesting ambition, but remains partly incomprehensible, partly grossly mistaken. His conviction that speed of vibration determines not pitch but loudness, that singing is necessarily louder than speaking (and therefore less capable of small pitch distinctions), and that words are separated by pauses, which may be imperceptible, but can be measured in exact proportions\textsuperscript{76} — these ideas must have seemed as absurd to his contemporaries as they are to us. The Vorlesungen seem to have received little attention in the press. Nor did the stage artist leave many traces after his death: about the only result in an online search for “Patrik Peale” between 1824 and 1860 is a reprint of the satirical story by David Heß, Der wandernde Deklamator.\textsuperscript{77}

All translations by the author.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{ill. 3. Allegory: Hope. The Genius of the Future lifts the Veil of Grief, pointing towards the sun. The arm of Hope is held back by the Genius of the Moment. The jealous Past turns away from the sunlight. \textit{Dreizehn Kupfer- und Musik-Beilagen}, Tab. XI (cf. Seckendorff 1816 vol. 2: 257-258).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{75} Holmström (1967): 207.
\textsuperscript{76} Seckendorff (1816) vol. 1: 36, 55-57, 129, 112. Despite Dupree (2012): 390-391, I have been unable to find a basis for Seckendorff’s ideas of in Chladnii’s \textit{Akustik} (Leipzig, 1802). There is some acknowledged inspiration however from Fichte (Seckendorff, Vorlesungen, Vol. 1, 23).
\textsuperscript{77} In Transsylvania, Beiblatt zum Siebenbürger Boten (1840). Not counting bibliographical references. For a scholarly reference to the 1816 Vorlesungen, see Hupfeld (1852), 180.
Bibliography (A): Publications by Gustav Anton von Seckendorff

The following list contains titles for which authorship could directly or indirectly be verified. Reference works sometimes attribute works by Christian Adolf to Gustav Anton; even the painted portrait of an American missionary has been wrongly attributed to him.78


    http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/codex/public/PageLevel/index.cfm?option=image&WorkID=792

Bibliography (B): References

Abbreviations

GGA  Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen
JLM  Journal des Luxus und der Moden (1810)
MGS  Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände
WLZ  Wiener allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung
ZEW  Zeitung für die elegante Welt


