

WAGNER'S TRISTAN UND ISOLDE

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Passing the visions, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrade's hands,
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of
my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying, ever-altering
song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling,
flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet
again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses.

Walt Whitman.

PREFACE

The following pages contain little if anything that is new, or that would be likely to interest those who are already at home in Wagner's work. They are intended for those who are beginning the study of Wagner. In spite of many books, I know of no Wagner literature in English to which a beginner can turn who wishes to know what Wagner was aiming at, in what respect his works differ from those of the operatic composers who preceded him. Some sort of Introduction appears to me a necessary preliminary to the study of Wagner, not because his works are artificial or unnatural, but because our minds have become perverted by the highly artificial products of the Italian and French opera, so that a work of Wagner at first appears to us very much as *_Paradise Lost_* or a tragedy of Sophokles would appear to a person who had never read anything but light French novels. He must entirely change the attitude of his mind, and the change, although it be a return to nature and truth, is not easy to make.

Those who wish fully to understand Wagner's aims must read his own published works. I have not attempted to give his views in a condensed form, being convinced that any such attempt could only end in failure. Whenever it has been made, the result has been a caricature; you cannot separate a man's work from his personality. All that I could do was to endeavour to lay some of the problems involved, as I conceive

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them, before the reader in my own words.

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[Greek: Theohus d' ephame eleountas aemas sugchoreutas te kahi choraegohus aemin dedoke'nai to'n te Ap'olloa kahi Mousas kahi dhae kahi tri'ton ephamen, ei' memnaemetha, Dionuson.]

CHAPTER I

ON WAGNER CRITICISM

A new work on Wagner requires some justification. It might be urged that, since the *„Meister“* has been dead for some decades and the violence of party feeling may be assumed to have somewhat abated, we are now in a position to form a sober estimate of his work, to review his aims, and judge of his measure of success.

Such, however, is not my purpose in the following pages. I conceive that the endeavour to *„estimate“* an artist's work involves a misconception of the nature of art. We can estimate products of utility, things expressible in figures, the weight of evidence, a Bill for Parliament, a tradesman's profits. But a work of art is written for our pleasure, and all that we can attempt is to understand it. True, we must judge in a certain sense, we must weigh and estimate before we can arrive at understanding; but it is one thing to meditate in the privacy of one's own mind, quite another to publish these constructive processes as an end in themselves, to set up critical "laws" and expect that poets are going to conform to them.

Art, says Ruskin, is a language, a vehicle of thought, in itself nothing. Plato's teaching in the third book of his *„Republic“* is the same, and the idea of the secondary nature of art, of its value only as the expression of something else, of a human or moral purpose only fully expressible in the drama, is the nucleus of all Wagner's theoretical writing. In private conversation and in his letters he often spoke very emphatically. "I would joyfully sacrifice and destroy everything that I have produced if I could hope thereby to further freedom and justice."^[1]

[Footnote 1: The episode which gave rise to this remark is too long to relate in the text, but is highly characteristic and instructive for Wagner's attitude towards art. It will be found in the sixth volume of Glaser's biography, p. 309.]

Let us clearly keep in mind the distinction here involved between the two elements of every work of art: matter and form, substance and technique, [Greek: *onta*] and [Greek: *gignomena*], *Brahm* and *Mâyâ*, *Wille* und *Vorstellung*, the emotional and the intellectual life of man, or, untechnically, what he feels and his communication of those feelings

to others as a social being. With the first of these the critic has nothing to do; the matter is given; all he has to consider is whether it has found adequate expression—that is, to try to understand the language, that when he has mastered it he may help others to do so according to his ability. I do not say that the matter is one to which we are indifferent. On the contrary, it is far the more important of the two, since the thing expressed is prior to its expression. Only it is no concern of the critic, because we may fairly assume that if the technical expression is correct and intelligible the artist has already told us what he wishes to convey in the most perfect language of which that idea is susceptible, and that any attempt to put it into the lower and more prosy language of the critic would only weaken and distort the thought.

It does not seem to me that passions have abated very much, or judgments have become much more sober, since Wagner has left us. In England at least the ignorance and indifference which prevail among the ordinary public are still profound. In truth the seed which he sowed has fallen upon evil soil; his fate has been a cruel one. He, the most sincere and transparent of men, whose only wish was to be seen as he actually was, has perhaps more than any other great man been the victim of misrepresentation, alike from his senseless persecutors and from his equally senseless adulators. While he lived, every imaginable calumny, plausible and unplausible, was invented to besmirch his character and his art. Now it is, in Germany at least, no longer safe to revile him on the ground of his technical artistic style. The days are long past when the terms "charlatan," "amateur," "artistic anarchist" could be applied to him with impunity, and it is fully recognized by all who have any title to speak that Wagner, so far from being a revolutionary destroyer, was, like all true reformers—Luther, for example, or Jeremiah or Sokrates—an extreme conservative. Those who like Walt Whitman preach libertinism in the name of democracy do not want reform; they are satisfied with things as they are. Wagner battled, both in music and in literature, for *der reine Satz*—purity of diction as against the untidy licence which was then and still is fashionable among weak-kneed artists and a thoughtless public.[2]

[Footnote 2: It is perhaps still necessary to produce some warrant for these statements. The deep-rooted conservatism of Wagner's character is a prominent feature of all his literary work, and especially noticeable in his educational schemes, as, for example; the report on a proposed Munich school of music, with its text: "The business of a Conservatory is to conserve." On his musical diction the testimony of Prof. S. Jadassohn will probably be considered sufficient by most people. He writes: "Wagner's harmonies are clear and pure; they are never arbitrary, nor coarse nor brutal, but throughout conscientious and clean according to the strict rules of pure diction (*des reinen Satzes*). Consequently the sequences and combinations of the chords and the course of the modulation are easily followed by those who know

harmony. Similarly, his polyphonic style is easily intelligible to the trained contrapuntist"—and more to the same effect, Jadassohn is here only expressing what every competent musician knows. Before the first performance at Bayreuth in 1876 Wagner's last word to the artists was: „Deutlichkeit_—”clearness”—a word which sums up all his technical teaching throughout his life.]

Mr. Hadow has truly observed that we have not yet learned to treat genius frankly, and either starve it with censure or smother it with irrational excess of enthusiasm. If the malicious misrepresentations and persecutions which Wagner endured during his lifetime were the outcome of ignorance, assuredly the hysterical raving of our day is no less ignorant and contemptible. I hear it said that in England "Wagnerism" is an attitude, and can only reply that it is so in Germany too. Among the cosmopolitan audiences who crowd the theatres of Dresden and Munich on a Wagner night and greet his works with thundering applause, there is probably not one person in a hundred who really knows what he sees and hears. Not that these people are not perfectly sincere; something_ they have undoubtedly taken in; the marvellous euphony and balance of Wagner's orchestra under the conductors we now have, the exquisite grace of the melodic and harmonic structure, and the lyric beauty of so many scenes are apparent to all, and will always awaken the boundless enthusiasm of those who go only to be diverted. But these are only the ornaments of the drama; to understand the drama itself requires a serious effort on the part of the hearer which few are prepared to make, a moral sympathy with the composer and receptive understanding of his aims of which few are capable.

We in England seem content to remain in darkness. I am not, of course, referring to the many competent men who have given serious attention to the works of Wagner; I am speaking of the general public. The English people has plenty of poetry in its heart, but our attitude towards German literature and art is not creditable to us as a nation. We who possess the finest literature ever produced by any people, whose Chaucers and Shakespeares and Popes and Byrons are the models on which the poets of other nations endeavour to form their style, scarcely think their literature worthy of serious consideration. A German boy when he leaves school has generally a pretty close acquaintance with Shakespeare, and knows at least something of other English authors and poets. An English boy at the same stage of his education has perhaps heard of Goethe and Schiller, but has rarely read any of their works. At the Universities it is no better. I really believe that in England Gounod's „Faust_” is better known than Goethe's! It would be impossible that such travesties of „Faust_” as appear from time to time upon the English stage would be endured if our scholars and intellectuals were better informed. Towards ancient languages, except the two which are fashionable, we are just as indifferent. It was no less a person than Sir Richard Maine who asserted that, except the blind forces of nature, nothing exists in

the world which is not Greek in its origin! Truly more things are dreamed of in our philosophy than are in heaven and earth! When great scholars make such statements as this it is scarcely surprising that ordinary people should care little for the origins of their own language. The parents of modern English are not Greek but Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian or Icelandic. Both these languages have a literature of the very highest rank, but are little studied in this country. The eighth-century English lyrics are amongst the finest in the language. As for Scandinavian, not every one in England is aware that the Icelanders are, and have been for a thousand years, the most literary people in the world;[3] that in one important branch of literature, that of story-telling, they are absolutely without a rival, except in the Old Testament. From these Scandinavian sources we have received the heritage which has grown into our magnificent language and literature, but we trouble our heads little about them and leave them to foreigners to study. Ignorance may perhaps be excusable; what is wholly inexcusable is the habit of some Englishmen of criticising and censuring the work of foreigners which they dislike because they cannot understand it. There is a certain section of the English people who seem to think that it shows patriotism and a becoming national pride to belittle the work of other nations and speak of it in an insolent tone of contempt. They habitually misrepresent the achievements of foreigners in order to make them appear ridiculous. Over twenty years ago a writer in one of our high-class magazines informed an astonished world that "the Wagner-bubble has burst!" and the preposterous nonsense has been repeated again and again in one form or another ever since. Quite recently we read in one of our leading English dailies the following sentences: "... Among many of the best-known critics there is a general consensus of opinion that with the completion of Strauss' important work [*Elektra*], Wagnerism will diminish in popularity.... For years and years vain attempts have been made to get away from Richard Wagner. Creative musicians have long felt that Wagner's great and never-to-be-forgotten art no longer suited modern times"! One feels inclined to ask whether the writer looks upon musical composers as racehorses to be pitted against each other, or as religious creeds which must destroy their rivals in order to live.

[Footnote 3: Feeling some doubt as to whether this statement were not an exaggeration, I have submitted it before publication to my friend Mr. Eirikr Magnússon of Cambridge, whose profound knowledge of European literature, ancient and modern, needs no attestation from me. He replies that, except for the two centuries succeeding the Black Death in 1402-4, the statement in the text is quite correct. With that reservation therefore I allow it to stand.]

There is another and a graver charge to be brought against some writers whose works are popularly read in England, to which it will be my duty to return. I have said enough here to show the state of Wagner criticism in this country. Abroad it is little better. Wagner is

indeed fashionable. His works are regularly performed in every capital in Europe, and he has probably saved the existence of the costly *Hoftheater* in Germany. But success, in the sense in which he understood it, he has not yet achieved. It is very questionable whether his influence has on the whole been for good, either upon musicians and dramatists, or upon the public. It is not his fault. Nothing would show more convincingly the utter inability of the modern public to appreciate the highest and best in art than the literature which has gathered round the great name of Wagner. In all the vast mass how much is there which was worth the writing, or can be read with any profit by reasonable people? I think that, putting aside purely technical works on music, stage-management, etc., the number of really good books could be counted on the fingers. The rest is feeble rhapsody on the one hand, malicious misrepresentation on the other. Of works of first-rate importance, works that really add anything solid to our knowledge, I only know one: Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie*. Of others the best are mostly in French. Lichtenberger's *R. Wagner* is admirable so far as it goes, but treats the subject exclusively from the literary standpoint. The small treatise of our marvellous countryman, Mr. H. S. Chamberlain, *Le drame wagnérien*^[4] (Paris, 1894), is thoughtful and suggestive, and quite worthy of close attention, as are also the works of Kufferath, Golther, etc. There may be a few more, mostly of small compass, but not many. Glasenapp's great biography, a work of astounding industry, and invaluable to the student, can scarcely be included among the good books because of its terrible literary style and its fulsome sentimentality. The magnificent work begun by the Hon. Mrs. Burrell, of which there is a copy in the British Museum, would have been a monumental biography had she lived to complete it, but it stops when Wagner is about twenty. Of the rest, the less said the better. Of works against Wagner I know of none that are even worth reading, except Hanslick, to whom I shall have occasion to return. It is much to be regretted that none of Wagner's opponents have ever stated their case fairly and soberly. There is much to be said, but assuredly it has not been said by men of the stamp of Nordau, who cites disgusting accounts from French medical journals in order to show his abhorrence of what he considers Wagner's immorality! Tolstoi is a writer of wide authority among his followers, and might be expected to feel some responsibility for his utterances; yet he thought it right to publish his verdict to the world after having witnessed *one* very inferior performance of a *portion* of Siegfried! He is often appealed to as if he were an authority by the opponents of Wagner, but his utterances have no more weight than the thoughtless expressions of a Ruskin or a William Morris, which their biographers have thought fit to drag from the privacy of private letters or conversation and publish as their deliberate judgments. From Nietzsche at least something better might have been expected, but I can find little in his anti-Wagnerian writings except coarse vituperation and low scandal. There is no anti-Wagnerian literature worthy of the name. There are plenty of highly musical and artistic natures who honestly

dislike his art, and I am so far able to sympathize with them as to believe that an inestimable benefit would be conferred upon all of us if they would publish their objections in sober and reasoned form. But they do not; or if they do speak, they descend to the slums.

[Footnote 4: Not his *Richard Wagner*, which is a more popular work.]

Such has been the response of the public through its literature to the man who expressly did not wish to be worshipped, but only to be understood. Assuredly there is yet plenty of room for good work to be done! The purpose of the following pages is criticism, not as judging, but as selecting. In choosing certain characteristics to show them in a different perspective from an altered point of view the critic may hope to help others to a better understanding of the art. I have endeavoured to do this for English readers in respect of Wagner's dramatic works through one of the most characteristic and representative of them. The problem resolves itself into two. First there is the general technical one, so fully treated by Wagner himself in his theoretical writings, whether music is capable of being used as a means of dramatic expression; and secondly, how far the endeavour has been successful in the particular work selected for illustration. To treat these problems satisfactorily it will be necessary for me to go far beyond the limits of music and dramatic art, and to enter rather fully into questions of psychology and metaphysics, which I fear may discourage some readers, but which cannot be shirked by those who wish to form a judgment based upon a more solid foundation than their own personal taste. The mistake made by nearly all writers on Wagner hitherto has been to suppose that the mere assertion of an individual opinion has any value at all, however illustrious the person who holds it, however able his exposition. Of what use can be the assertion that a certain progression of chords is acceptable and pleasing to the healthy ear (even with the usual addition that all who do not think so are blockheads), when some other person equally competent asserts the contrary? Or how am I to persuade my readers that *Tristan und Isolde* is what I hold it to be, the loftiest paean of pure and holy love ever conceived by a poet, when others see in it only a "story of vulgar adultery," steeped in sensuality? The moral law is the same to all men, and differences of judgment upon moral acts are due to imperfect understanding. But I cannot hope to make my own position clear without descending to the foundations of all art, of all life, without asking: what is drama? what are its aims, and how does it express them? what is human life which it reflects? Wagner felt this very strongly, and soon realized that an ontological basis was required for his own theories; that to reform art he must reform human life. "Oh ye men," he exclaims passionately in a letter: "feel rightly, act as you feel! be free!—then we will have art."

We may learn the true principles of criticism from Wagner himself.

Truthfulness in literature is what correctness is in *Vortrag*. They are objectivity, the art of seeing things as they really are, clearness of vision, right understanding. The truthful representation of an artist as he really is does not preclude, but rather stimulates, enthusiasm, for we may believe that the true artist and the true work of art as he intended it are superior to the flattering creations of our own fancy.

Lessing observes that of ten objections raised by the critic, nine will probably have occurred to the author; that he himself will read a passage twenty times rather than believe that the writer contradicted himself. Some of our critics seem to proceed upon an opposite principle and to reject a thought at once if it does not seem to agree with what they themselves have thought, and they observe little restraint in expressing their authoritative judgment. One critic speaks of Wagner meditating on problems "which any clear-headed schoolboy could quickly have settled for him"; we are not surprised to find the same critic sneering at Kant and Plato! Such writers there will always be, but a nation which tolerates them cannot expect to maintain an honourable place in the intellectual commonwealth.

CHAPTER II

WAGNER AS MAN

The distinction so often made with a genius between the "man" and the "artist" has been justly ridiculed by Wagner himself. For the truest individuality of an artist is in his art, not when he leaves his own proper sphere and enters one that is foreign to him. Beethoven is the writer of symphonies and sonatas, not the suspicious friend and unmannerly plebeian. The *man* is the same in both relations, *i.e.* his character remains the same, only it manifests itself differently under changed conditions, and the difference lies not in him, but in the point of view from which we regard him. Let us bear this in mind in considering Wagner as he appeared away from his art.

A genius has been aptly likened to an astronomical telescope, which is able to scan the heavens, but is useless for things close at hand. To some extent this is true of Wagner, but less so than with most, and not in the sense in which it has been often asserted. The attacks which have been made upon Wagner's private character show little discrimination, for it is a simple truth that the particular vices of which he has been accused are just those from which he was singularly free. No charge has been more audaciously or persistently brought by ignorant writers or believed by an ill-informed public in England and America than that of morbid sensuality. Just as Wagner's dramas have

been called licentious, so his character has been described as sensual, in defiance of easily ascertainable facts. Not long ago the discovery was made that his health had been undermined by loose living when he was young. It is easy to invent such charges, for which there is not a particle of evidence, and unfortunately the reader is not always in a position to verify the authorities, and naturally thinks that the writer must have some ground for what he says. As a rule these statements have originated with Ferdinand Praeger's book *Wagner as I knew him*, a book which I am astonished to see still quoted in England, as if it were an authority. I have not seen it, and do not know what it contains. Its character was exposed by two Englishmen, Mr. H. S. Chamberlain and Mr. Ashton Ellis, soon after its publication in 1892, and it was consequently withdrawn from circulation in Germany by its publishers, Messrs. Breitkopf und Härtel. In England and America it still seems to be widely read, and is, more than any other single work, responsible for the false notions that are abroad about Wagner. Sensuality, that is in the morbidly sexual sense of the term, was no part of Wagner's character, nor could it be of the man who justly claimed that no poet had ever glorified women as he had done. His *Sentas*, *Elsas*, *Brünnhildes*, and I must add his *Isoldes*, rightly understood, afford the best answer to such accusations.

"But," it is said, "his music is unmistakably sensual." I must defer it to a future chapter to consider how far pure music, that is, music apart from words, is capable of expressing a specific human quality, but may here anticipate by saying that the nature of music is to assimilate the elements with which it is joined; the hearer may, within certain broad restrictions, put into it whatever he likes, and will therefore hear in it the reflection of himself. This is why different people hear such different things in the same music. If a man hears sensuality in the *music* of, let us say, the second act of *Tristan und Isolde*, it is his own interpretation. Another hears something very different, an anticipation of eternity, of that world beyond which the lovers are about to enter to be united with each other and with all nature in a higher love of which all earthly love, with its degrading garment of sensuality, is but the debased image. The music by itself will bear either interpretation; each hearer will find in it just that which he looks for and can understand. But when the words are added the meaning is clear. People are not "sensual" when death is right before them, as it is here. I do not wish to be understood as meaning that Wagner excluded sensuality from his works, or that he did not treat the most universal and most ungovernable of human impulses in accordance with its character. The drama must include everything human, and when passionate sexuality is a necessary part of the dramatic development, Wagner no more shirks it than did Shakespeare or any other great dramatist. But Wagner always treats it with such consummate grace and refinement that it ceases to be repulsive and appears in its own uncorrupted beauty, as in the *Venus* music and in the flower-maiden scene in *Parsifal*. Only to

the impure are the senses impure.

An unbiassed consideration of all that is known about Wagner's life will acquit him of all the graver vices, unless a propensity for living beyond his income be reckoned as such. Whatever his faults there was nothing dishonourable or mean about them, and he is entitled to the treatment that is always accorded by one gentleman to another, whether friend or enemy, so long as he does not disgrace himself. Surely it ought not to be necessary to insist upon this before an English public, but it has not always been observed.

Similar is the charge of "ego-mania," that is, of overrating his own importance, so often heard. There cannot be any notion of his over-rating his importance, for all are now agreed that his influence, whether for good or for bad, can scarcely be overrated. Only society requires, very rightly, that a man shall speak of himself and his achievements with a certain reticence, leaving it to others to judge of them. Nowhere that I know of has Wagner offended against this very proper rule. It has so long been the practice to represent Wagner as a man of overweening vanity, a man who tried to exalt himself at the expense of other artists, that some in England will not believe me when I say that there is no foundation whatever for such assertions. I only ask of those who think there is to read Wagner's own published writings, and to judge from them, not from what is said about him. I do not mean to say that he did not believe with the most intense conviction in his own idea of a new German dramatic art, uniting the separate arts in itself, and did not proclaim it as a thing of the first national importance; every serious reformer believes in himself in that sense. But that is not the same thing as asserting his own powers to realize it. With regard to these he speaks very modestly of himself as a beginner, a pioneer only. In fact the question of his own particular genius is, he says, irrelevant, and has nothing to do with the other one, adding rather cynically that genius is often given to the wrong people.

It is in this sense that I understand the famous words of his speech after the first performance of the *Ring* at Bayreuth, in 1876, which have been so often quoted in illustration of his arrogance: "You have seen what we can do; it is now for you to will. We now have an art if you will." Namely, thus: "Germany now has for the first time an indigenous drama, not imported from foreigners; if you accept it, try to develop and perfect it." Or shortly: "I and my friends have done what we can; the rest is for you to do." This seems to me the natural meaning of the words, and agrees with all his utterances at other times, namely, that the public must not leave it all to the artist, but must exert itself to cooperate with him. It has latterly become almost a fashion among some German authors to transgress all bounds of modesty in advertising themselves. Nietzsche, for example, leaves us in no doubt whatever as to what he requires us to think about him. But nothing of the kind will be found in Wagner.

The charge of "grapho-mania" is scarcely worth discussion, except to show what slender arguments have to be relied upon by those who try to prove Wagner insane. Ten, not *bulky* volumes, as Nordau calls them, but volumes of very moderate dimensions, some 30 per cent. of which are accounted for by his dramatic works, are not a very large allowance for a man who lived seventy years, and was often under the necessity of writing to eke out his income. They are scarcely sufficient to be regarded as an indication of insanity. The fact is, that Wagner, either as dramatist or as author, was not a voluminous producer. It is the quality, the intensity, of his work that is important, not its bulk. This is only another instance of the amazing indifference to the most easily ascertainable facts shown by Wagner's assailants, and of the truth that if you only assert a thing, however nonsensical, persistently enough, there will always be some who will believe it. I cannot be expected to go through in detail the whole string of aberrations which Nordau finds accumulated in Wagner. They are all of the same kind, and all equally fanciful.

The endeavours to prove Wagner a "degenerate" are professedly made in the name of science, so often a cloak for the most unscientific vagaries, by men who are disciples of the late Professor Lombroso of Florence. Lombroso was a serious man of science, and many of his investigations into the nature and indications of insanity have permanent value, but it is certain that he went much too far, and his views are only very partially accepted by those who are qualified to judge of them.[5] When a theory of insanity is made to include such men as Newton, Goethe, Darwin, and others who are generally supposed to be the very types of sober sanity, a Richard Wagner may well be content to remain in such company. We are reminded of Lombroso's own story of the lunatic's reply to one who asked when he was coming out of the asylum: "When the people outside are sane." In fact the theories when pushed to their extreme consequences become absurd. There is nothing discreditable to a serious student of science who in the enthusiasm of discovery presses his inferences beyond their valid limits, since all theory must at first be more or less tentative. Very different is the case when these dubious theories are applied by men with very modest scientific acquirements, or with none at all, to injure the reputation of a man whom they dislike. We may then fairly ask, with Lichtenberger, on which side the degeneration is more likely to be. These are the men who bring science into discredit.

[Footnote 5: For a very fair estimate of his work, see an article in the *Times*, October 20, 1909.]

It would not have been worth my while to dwell at such length upon the calumnies of irresponsible writers did I not know that they represent the popular opinion among the less well-informed in England of to-day, as in Germany thirty or forty years ago. They begin with people who ought to know better, and in time find their way into the magazines

and popular literature of the day, to be greedily read by a public which, next to a prurient divorce case, likes nothing so well as slander of a great man. We have heard much of late years about the decadence of the English Press, but editors know very well the public for whom they cater.

That Wagner's was one of those serene and universally lovable characters who live at peace with God and man it is far from me to wish to convey. Such men there are, and women, who seem lifted above the meaner elements of human existence, without envy, without reproach, untouched by its iniquities, unsullied by its vileness. Pure themselves and self-contained they see no guile in others, or if they see it they notice it not. Who has not met with such? who has not felt their power? When such innate purity of soul is united with high intellectual gifts we have the noblest creation of nature, and to have been called "friend" by one such is the highest honour that life has to offer.

But Wagner was not one of these. His was a stormy spirit—"The never-resting soul that ever seeks the new." He likens himself to a wild animal tearing at its cage and exhausting itself with fruitless struggles. He could not make terms with falsehood and sophistry, or leave them to perish naturally, but lived in ceaseless defiance of them. He was a man who inspired intense, devoted love, or intense hatred, according to the people with whom he was dealing. With his moral character in itself we have indeed no concern, but it seems necessary to explain why so many high-minded men who knew him intimately, and loved him passionately, at last fell away from him. The common theory of Wagnerites, that they were actuated by petty motives of jealousy, and the like, cannot be entertained for a moment. With Nietzsche it may well be that ill-health and drugs had begun their fatal work in 1876; they may account for the violence of his anti-Wagnerian writings, but surely the cause of his aversion lay deeper. Similarly with Joachim. Even the noble Liszt, who had stood by him and battled so bravely for him through the years of his deepest distress, though he never failed in his admiration of Wagner's art, seems to have cooled towards him personally when he was in prosperity. His staunch band of Zurich friends one and all became to some extent estranged after his exile was annulled. His acknowledged hasty temper will not account for it; hastiness wounds, but in a generous and ardently loving nature it does not estrange.

The cause is, in my belief, not far to seek. It lay in the domineering spirit which is so noticeable in every act of his life, every page of his writings. His life was his art. He was above all things a man of action, and all who belonged to him in any relation whatever had to serve him in his art or cease to be his. His power must be absolute; talents, energies, life itself if necessary, must be surrendered to the service of that one supreme purpose. Many were the men and women who did not flinch from the sacrifice. I need only mention musicians

like Richter, Cornelius, Porges, literati like Glasenapp and Wolzogen. Many, especially women, were ready to fling to the winds all thought of personal wellbeing, and life itself. Cosima, to save him and his art, sacrificed every worldly consideration. Ludwig of Bavaria did the same, and brought his country to the verge of revolution. Singers, like Hedwig Reicher Kindermann, literally gave their lives for him. And no less than this did he exact from all who aspired to be his disciples and supporters.

But Nietzsche's was a different character. He was Wagner's peer, and, though thirty years his junior, had his own purposes to follow. Nietzsche was, as he afterwards realized, under a delusion from the first. His highly organized musical nature had been taken captive, intoxicated by Wagner's music. But Nietzsche was a thinker, and it is contrary to the natural order that the man of thought should serve the man of action. Nietzsche was incapable of serving Wagner's art and had to leave him.

Was this a fault in Wagner? Who shall say? If it was, it was a fault which he shared with every earnest reformer who is not content with preaching, but enforces his precepts with action. Reform is no plaything; it cannot be achieved by listening to the well-meant advice of friends who know no higher goal than personal success, who have no glimmering of the motives that impel a great soul, who would fain tell the thunderbolt where it shall strike. Every great man lives alone; he has no friends and no disciples. His equals follow their own ends; his inferiors cannot breathe in the regions where he dwells. He must rely upon himself. Without this full dominion Wagner would not have been himself; he would never have founded Bayreuth, never have had his greater works performed, never even have composed them. And this brings us to the most conspicuous feature of his character, the centre of everything, namely, his uncompromising sincerity and truthfulness, qualities so magnificent in him that I doubt whether they have ever been equalled in any other, qualities which show Wagner no less great "as man" than he is "as artist."

It is certain—and no one knew it better than himself—that Wagner might easily have been successful from the first if he had liked. He might have been wealthy, popular, petted by the great, have lived in the luxury that he loved, at peace with all the world, if he had only consented to traffic with his art and to produce what the public wanted. For assuredly his talent for writing operas on the old lines was not inferior to that of Meyerbeer or Rossini. His *Rienzi* was the greatest immediate success of his whole life when grand operas, of which it is the type, were fashionable, and a few more works of the kind would have raised him above all anxiety for his livelihood. This can scarcely be questioned now; it has been asserted again and again by those who most hated him, and who were in the habit of denouncing him as "past help" because he refused to listen to them. To do so he would have had to sacrifice all that he held sacred. He

had "hitched his waggon to a star," and deliberately chose poverty, exile, public calumny and ridicule, domestic unrest, rather than allow the purity of his art to be sullied by departing for an instant from the ideals after which he strove. Witness the events of the fateful seventies, when his financial straits were perhaps at their worst, when all the powers of Germany, statesmen, theatrical Intendants, press, singers, seemed in league together to thwart the project of Bayreuth upon which his all depended; when even King Louis of Bavaria cooled for a time; when Bülow and Liszt had withdrawn their help, and Nietzsche had seceded in horror and despair; when the first effort of Bayreuth had left a ruinous debt, and the failure of the *Patronat-Vereine* shut off the last faint ray of hope. Well might the *Meister*, now advancing in age, have thought of accepting one of the dazzling offers which repeatedly reached him from Russia, from America, from Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, and other places. But he only saw in them lures to tempt him into degrading his art by commercial speculation with all its paraphernalia of advertisement and other sordid abominations. Never once did his courage falter; no thought of any concession, however small, however seemingly reasonable, which he held to be dishonourable to his art ever found a place in his mind. The surrender of *Die Walküre* alone would probably have turned the tide in his favour, and he was pressed for it by most of the great theatres, but in vain. To mutilate the *Ring* was in his opinion to dishonour it and prepare the way for its being misunderstood. So far from adopting any one of the many courses which could not fail to lead to success and popularity we find him occupied during this time in coaching singers personally, in building his theatre, and devising schemes for a school of technique where musicians, and especially singers, could learn the true methods of their art, naturally—though perhaps imprudently—believing that before his works could be understood as he meant them they must be rightly represented. Without funds! without patronage! with nothing but his own determined will! Can we wonder that the world's head was turned by such a gigantic personality?

Let those who call Wagner self-willed and perverse because he could not conform to *their* notions of what is right for an artist, who attempt to measure an infinite mind by the paltry canons of self-interest, reflect upon the harvest that we are now reaping from his unswerving loyalty to his art. To him alone, and to the conductors whom he trained, do we owe the almost perfect performances of our modern orchestras. It has been truly observed that Wagner's own immensely difficult works are better performed at the present day than were the far easier works of his predecessors before he came. The Richters and Mottls and Schuchs of our day are a very different race from the Reissigers and Lachners and Costas of a past generation. It was Richter who taught us in London how a symphony of Beethoven ought to sound; before he came, performances were approved which the present day would not tolerate. He, as well as his great compeers, was brought up in the school of Wagner, the essence of which lies in

...correctness..., in rendering the work as the composer intended it, with conscientious attention to every detail, not only of notes, but of rhythm, tempo, phrasing, dynamics, instead of the slovenly muddling which then passed for breadth of style, and the substitution of the conductor's own subjectivity for that of the composer. It has been well expressed in a few incisive words by one of the greatest of the school: "The privilege of an interesting subjectivity is given to few, its expression will always give evidence of that instinctive logic which is a necessary condition of intelligibility." [6] Call Wagner perverse, dislike his art, say that his dramas are chaos and his music discord—all this you have a right to do; but you cannot refuse your homage to his rectitude of purpose, his courageous and resolute struggle for the ideals which were before him.

[Footnote 6: I have translated rather freely so as to give the general sense, as von Bülow's German is not always very easy to follow. It will be found in his comments upon Beethoven's *Fantasie*., Op. 77.]

This is the secret of what is known as the modern German spirit—close attention to every detail, faithfulness to the work in hand, with the conviction that no part of the organism is so trifling as not to be vital. This it was, and not bookish education, that inspired the German army in its victories of 1870-71; this spirit it was that enabled the Meiningers in 1882 to fill our Drury Lane Theatre to overflowing with performances of our own Shakespeare in a foreign language. At the present day it still continues to actuate German trade and German handicrafts, while we English in our blindness think to dispose of it by cant phrases and sneers.

To the nearer friends of his home-circle Wagner's personality must have been singularly attractive, from the intelligent sympathy which he showed with everything human, and from the irrepressible gaiety which never forsook him for long. In times of stress it helped those around him to tide through the most crushing disasters.

Genius is not a thing apart by itself, severed from the rest of the world. Its one distinguishing mark is its intense humanity. If I may speak in paradox, the true poet is more truly ourselves than we are. The astronomical telescope is constructed upon the same principles as the terrestrial one, only it is more powerful and more perfectly made. Not only the lenses, but all the details of the mechanism are more highly finished; more thought and more labour are bestowed upon them; the parts are more skilfully co-ordinated together; it is a better instrument. We do wrong to genius in connecting it with mental aberration; it is more normal, more perfectly human, than we are; more human in its virtues, in its faults, in its follies, above all, in its consummate beauty; only with its greater perfection the organism becomes more delicate, and is more easily injured. For genius is exposed to heavier strains than we are, because it is in uncongenial surroundings. If one part happen to be imperfect, if, as we say, "a

screw be loose," the injury is more serious than in ordinary natures, and the exquisite adjustments may suffer in the rude handling of a stupid and clumsy environment, wrecking the whole system. This, and not natural proclivity, is the reason why genius so often shows a tendency to eccentric and abnormal conduct. The fault is with society, which feels instinctively that those who rise too high in excellence must be crushed. And this is the theme of every real tragedy. Othello, Lear, Njál, Grettir, Clarissa Harlowe, the Maid of Orleans, Antigone, Prometheus, and, as I hope to show, Tristan and Isolde, these are but a few among those who must perish from no fault in themselves, but because they are too noble for their surroundings.

"The greater the man, the greater his love." We should not set the genius on a pedestal to be first gaped at and then ridiculed. He needs before all else our love and our sympathy; for his nature is essentially that of a child, and, childlike, he craves for human love as the first necessity of his life. To those who set up an idol of their own fancy and worship that as his image, he will be cold and repellent, but to those who know him as he really is he will return their love with all the warmth and purity of his childlike nature. Two things are intolerable to a healthy-minded child—rough brutality and mawkish caressing; Wagner was fated to endure a full share of both. It is touching to read of Wagner's simple affection for those who were around him in humble capacities. Every one who has read his life knows of his kindness to his domestic servants. Now it is the village barber who is "gar zu theuer," now his gondola-man in Venice. His love for animals has been perhaps too much dwelt upon by his biographers, but it is very characteristic.

Mankind is not divided into Wagnerites and anti-Wagnerites; nor is it divided into Romanists and Protestants, nor into theologians and rationalists, nor into Tories and Radicals, nor into any other of our familiar party divisions. The true division is into great men and small, lovers of truth and sophists, honest men and thieves. Thieves and sophists wrangle, but the great and true "join hands through the centuries," and between them is eternal peace.

CHAPTER III

Wagner's Theoretical Writings

Nothing probably has more tended to discredit Wagner's art with thoughtful people than the statement sometimes made by his following that he has created a new art. Wagner himself never made any such claim. When he speaks of a new indigenous art of pure German growth, he is merely contrasting it with the foreign art—Italian operas and

French plays—upon which Germans had lived hitherto. When an art, like music or the drama, begins to flourish on a new soil, it is certain to exhibit new features, to show new developments, so that with respect to its external physiognomy it may in a sense be called new; but far truer is the very opposite statement, that Wagner's art is as old as art itself; its greatness lies not in any novelty of invention, but in his having developed the old forms into something dreamed of by his predecessors but never achieved before.

We often hear about Wagner's "theories," as if he had composed his art-works in accordance with some theoretical scheme. After a fairly close study of Wagner's writings extending over a great many years I must confess my inability to say what his peculiar theories were. The employment of music as an element of the dramatic expression was no invention of Wagner. What he found out was how to maintain the different elements, words, acting, music, in a natural relation to one another in the drama. This is art, not theory; we learn it from his works, not from his writings. It is true that Wagner's writings contain many very interesting and valuable speculations on artistic problems. If these are his theories, he must have abjured them the moment that he set to work composing. In *Oper und Drama*, for example, he has a very interesting discussion on the value of consonants in the German language and on the characteristic difference between the expression of the consonant and that of the vowel, arriving at the conclusion that alliteration is better suited for the German musical drama than the imported rime. Further, he shows—rather convincingly, I think—that the true subject for the drama is mythical. But not long after this he wrote *Tristan und Isolde*, in which alliteration is generally discarded for rime or blank verse, and a little later *Meistersinger*, which is a comedy of domestic life, and has nothing to do with mythology. Then there are the *Leitmotivs* which are used so methodically in the *Ring*—that it would seem there must have been some preconceived system. But Wagner never once mentions *Leitmotivs* in his writings, nor did he invent them. They have been dragged into the light by von Wolzogen, and whatever theories we have about them are due to him, not to Wagner.

There is indeed one doctrine which runs through all his writings, and may be taken as their general text, namely, that art is not an amusement but a serious undertaking, consequently that purity and truthfulness are just as necessary in art as in actual life. It is no excuse for the artist who deceives to say that his work is "only poetry," and has no serious significance. He carried this exalted notion of the mission of art almost to excess, if such a thing is possible with so noble an idea, when he insisted upon art being a matter of national concern. All the serious mistakes which he made in his life, those acts which the sober judgment of his most ardent admirers must condemn as ill-advised, sprang from his desire to identify art with national life, for example, his part in the Saxon

revolution of 1849, his proceedings in Munich, in 1865,[7] his attempts to influence Bismarck, etc.

[Footnote 7: See Note I. at the end of this chapter.]

Wagner's literary works are not easy reading; his German style, though grammatical and idiomatic, is generally very involved and obscure, often turgid. There is a want of self-discipline about the thought, and he is too hasty in committing ill-digested thoughts ill-arranged to print, while his style is full of tedious mannerisms, such as his constant use of futile superlatives for positives, the constant occurrence of certain words not always in their natural meaning, such as *„Bewusstsein, „Erlösung, etc.* It is in marked contrast to the lucid and finished workmanship of his dramatic and musical composition. His dislike for theoretical exposition, and the constraint under which he wrote are too manifest in his language. Nevertheless, the reader who perseveres will be rewarded. The fascination which Wagner's writings have for thinking minds is due to the importance of the problems involved. As Dannreuther has observed, wherever Wagner was brought to a stand a social problem lies buried; the problems which engage his attention are those which lie at the root of all art and all life. We may not always approve of the solutions which he offers, but we cannot fail to be interested. And as we travel on we gradually become aware of brilliant spots of verdure, passages here and there—sometimes sudden flashes, sometimes whole pages where the language and the thought are equally remarkable. What, for example, could be more admirable than this description of Mozart?

His artistic nature was as the unruffled surface of a clear watery mirror to which the lovely blossom of Italian music inclined to see, to know, to love itself therein. It was but the surface of a deep and infinite sea of longing and desire rising from fathomless depths to gain form and beauty from the gentle greeting of the lovely flower bending, as if thirsting to discover in him the secret of its own nature.[8]

Could any words give more concisely the peculiar character of the much misunderstood Mozart, "the most delicate genius of light and love," "the most richly gifted of all musicians"? Does it not tell us more than all the outpourings of Oulibichef?

[Footnote 8: *„Ges. Schr. (1872), iii. p. 304.*]

Or this, in speaking of the formation of the opera and the demand for better libretti after the period of Spontini?

The poet was ashamed to offer his master wooden hobbies when he was able to mount a real steed and knew quite well how to handle the bridle, to guide

the steed hither and thither in the well-trodden riding-school of the opera. Without this musical bridle neither musician nor poet would have dared to mount him lest he should leap high over all the fences away into his own wild and beautiful home in nature itself.[9]

I must apologize for these extracts to those of my readers who are able to follow the original, and I hope that others may yet feel something of the warmth of Wagner's language even in the feeble shadow of a very free paraphrase. Many more might be gathered from his works to show how vivid and forcible was Wagner's prose when he once threw off the restraint of cold logical reasoning. Other passages well worthy of perusal as specimens of his better style are the description of the theatrical sunset in *„Le Prophète“*, and especially the admirably worked-out metaphor of the *„Volslied“* as a wild flower in vol. iii. of his collected works, pp. 309 and 372 seq.

[Footnote 9: *„Ges. Schr.“*, iii, p. 298.]

Very different views have been expressed about Wagner in his capacity of philosopher. To some he appears as a verbose dilettante totally unable to put two ideas logically together, while others look up to him as a teacher of the profoundest truths. I cannot say that either view is wrong. On the one hand he possessed the deep insight which is the first qualification for a philosopher, but is found in so few; on the other he lacked the patience to express himself logically, feeling that in his art he wielded a far more powerful means of persuasion than logic. Those who persevere in studying his writings until they master what he really was aiming at cannot fail at last to admit that as philosopher he is at least suggestive, as art-critic he is amongst the very first of all times, worthy of a place beside Plato,[10] Lessing, Ruskin.

[Footnote 10: See Note II. at end of this chapter.]

A critical discussion of only the more important of the problems raised by Wagner would require not one volume but several. For the purpose of this book, which is only to help readers in understanding his works, I must confine myself to the one which directly bears upon his artistic production, namely, that of the organic union of all the arts into one supreme art, which as their crown and completion may be designated "art," as a universal, in distinction from the separate individual "arts." Such art, [Greek: *kat' e'xochaen*], can only be the drama, which already holds a position of its own above all the other arts from the fact that these only *„depict“* or *„describe“* while the drama *„represents“*; its characters actually enact the events to be expressed, whence the expression is marked by a directness and vividness not possible to the other arts. The natural tendency which different arts show to unite and support each other is

evident in many familiar phenomena, as, for example, illustrated books. Lessing, in his luminous essay, has traced the limits of the arts of depicting (painting and sculpture) and of describing (poetry). Painting with him is the art of rest, poetry that of movement. Wagner's theory asserts that each art, when it reaches its natural limits, tends to call in the help of another art to express what lies beyond its own domain. If the two are able to coalesce so as to become organically one, it will be found that the expressive power of each has been enormously enhanced by the union, just as the union of a man with a woman in marriage enhances the value of each for the community.

With Lessing painting and sculpture are determined by the law of beauty (*„Schönheit.“*); poetry is the wider art, including all the elements of painting, but not bound by the same restrictions. Who can forget his fine contrast of the howling Philoktetes in *„Sophokles.“* with the gently sighing Laokoon, both in mortal agony, but the latter unable to express his pain because, being in marble, he dared not distort his countenance? With Wagner the notion of beauty (*„Schönheit.“*)[11] belongs by its very definition exclusively to the arts that address the sense of sight, painting and sculpture, and from them it has been transferred to music, but as a metaphor only. To speak literally of "beautiful music" would be a contradiction in terms.

[Footnote 11: It should be noted that the German and English words, having a totally different origin, differ somewhat in meaning. "Schönheit" comes from "schauen," and has therefore reference to the sense of sight, while "beauty" is from the root of *„bene.“*, *„bonus.“*, and was originally a moral conception, not a sensual one at all. In modern language the meaning of the two words is practically identical, but the distinction is very important for the understanding of Wagner. *„Schönheit.“* with him means *„sensual.“* beauty.]

The one aim of dramatic technique must always be to obtain the utmost clearness, truthfulness, and completeness of *„expression.“* I must confess that many years ago, when I first began the study of Wagner, filled with the enthusiastic Hellenism of Schiller, I was not a little startled at Wagner's apparent insistence upon truthful expression at the expense of beauty, and could not but feel that it was contradicted by every movement of his music. No doubt many others have felt the same hesitation; but there really is no cause for alarm. Wagner's is the true doctrine. Let us turn for a moment to another art, that of architecture, where the line of demarcation between decoration and construction is easy to recognize. Wagner's position, if applied to architecture, would be that the builder has only to consider how to construct in the best possible way to attain the purpose for which the building is intended, and elegance of external appearance must be subservient to that. If he do this skilfully, so that every part is seen to unite harmoniously with all the others to form an organic whole, there will emerge quite of itself a gracefulness, an artistic

beauty, founded in truth, which are high above all intentionally constructed decoration. It is the beauty and truth of nature, that of adaptation to an end. There is no question of sacrificing euphony, melody, or anything at all; on the contrary, the doctrine declares that by right adaptation the expressive power and beauty of every part will be enhanced. The notion that Wagner's music is unmelodious had its origin in the bad musical ears of his early critics.

The arts of design, i.e. painting, sculpture, and the kindred arts, are in space alone, and movement is excluded from them. The arts of expression, gesture, poetry, and music are all arts of movement in time. The first named, therefore, must necessarily take external beauty (*„Schönheit.“*) as their sole guide and must confine their attention exclusively to the superficial appearance of the objects they imitate. They can only arrive at the inner character indirectly, through its external manifestation, and in the hands of an inferior artist the step is an easy one to pretence and falsehood. Defective construction can easily be hidden beneath an outer covering of graceful forms which distract the eye from noticing the weakness and falsehood beneath. We need only look around us at the decoration of any modern drawing-room to find gross examples of such perversion of art. This explains Wagner's mistrust—noticeable especially in his earlier writings—of the arts of design with their principle of beauty. An artist who possesses true poetic inspiration will be in no danger of falling into errors of this kind; with him external beauty is expression of inner goodness, as it is in nature, who never covers up defects by external ornament.

We have therefore to recognize two distinct kinds of beauty in art, two kinds of pleasure that we experience: external, with which painting and sculpture are alone directly concerned—beauty in the narrow sense; and inner or organic. Wagner has expressed it in a sentence which defies even a free translation. Speaking of the lovely melodies of the Italian opera he says: *„Nicht das schlagende Herz der Nachtigall begriff man, sondern nur ihren Kehlschlag.“* Men cared only for the pleasing sound of the nightingale's voice, nothing for the beating heart from which it sprang.

We are now able to understand his famous doctrine that the drama is the end, music the means, and therefore secondary. In the Italian opera the relation was reversed; music was made the end, the drama being only a vehicle for the music. This is dramatically wrong, and has led to a false and unnatural form of art; in the drama music can only be a means of dramatic expression.

It is necessary here to enter a caution against a very serious misunderstanding into which many of Wagner's critics have fallen, a misunderstanding very natural to those who look upon the drama as a literary production. It has been supposed that Wagner intended to subordinate the music to the poetry, as if the function of music were

to illustrate and vivify the more definite thought contained in the words. This view has been held by many critics, from Aristotle onwards. It was the view of Gluck, and will be found formulated in the *‘épître dédicatoire’* prefixed to his *‘Alceste’*. Wagner’s theory is essentially different and is peculiarly his own. With him the *‘drama’* denotes, not the text-book, but the actual performance on the stage, in which there are three co-ordinate elements, acting, words, and music, not one of which is subordinate to the others, but all of equal value, expressing different sides of the dramatic subject-matter. Of the inability of words in themselves to inspire music, he is very emphatic: “No verses of a poet, not even of a Goethe or a Schiller, can determine the music. The drama alone can do this, i.e. not the dramatic poem, but the actual drama as it moves before our eyes as the visible counterpart of the music.”

In order to be effective the union of the three elements must be *‘organic’*, and I must now explain what is meant. When we speak of a work of art as an *‘organism’* we mean that the different parts of which it is composed co-operate together towards the purpose of the whole in such a way that not one of them is superfluous or could be dispensed with. It resembles in this respect the products of nature, and life, which is only a complex form of organized activity. In the higher natural products, especially those we speak of as *‘living’*, the single parts are not dead weights, but are themselves organisms, containing within them individual and complete systems of living forces, acting independently, and at the same time, as subordinate units contributing to the purpose of the whole, so that shortly we may say that, as each part is conditioned by the whole, so the whole is conditioned by the single parts. When a person loses a limb, and has it replaced by an artificial one, his first impression is of the enormous weight of the new limb, although it may only weigh about a quarter of the old one. This is explained by the fact that the new limb is a dead weight, whereas the former one was a living organism. That is to say, when he lifted it, the nervous impulses transmitted from the brain were sustained and enforced by forces within the limb itself; being alive it *‘helped’* in the effort, whereas the mechanical limb, however perfect its adaptation, will always remain a piece of dead mechanism, a separate thing from the body to which it is attached and simply opposing its own inertia to the nervous effort.

In the *‘mechanical’* joining together of parts, each remains isolated; if one be abstracted the others remain as they were, while in an *‘organic’* union they combine to a whole, and if one be withdrawn the whole is destroyed, or at least vitally impaired. This furnishes us with a criterion for the technical construction of every work of art, whatever it be; each single part must contribute its share towards the whole; there must be nothing superfluous. The work has an idea to express; if we find (in a drama, for example) that no scene, no single speech even, or sentence, can be omitted without

impairing the work as a whole, and weakening its expression, then the work is technically as perfect as it can possibly be made; its value will then depend only on that of the idea to be expressed.

Now let us turn to Wagner's criticism of the sunrise scene in *Le Prophète*, which I mentioned a few pages back, in the first part of *Oper und Drama*.^[12] Here was a unique opportunity for a great dramatic artist. After the representation, not unskillfully contrived, of the victorious career of a young and aspiring hero, in the supreme moment of his destiny, the sun rises, adding its glory to his triumph, as if the very heavens were shedding their blessing upon the deeds of a noble man;—so it might have been. But Meyerbeer and Scribe care nothing for that; such is not the effect either felt by the audience or intended by the poet. The latter had nothing higher in his mind than a grand spectacular effect, which may be omitted without the rest of the drama being any the worse, and the result is in the worst sense theatrical, but not poetic—"effect without a cause."

[Footnote 12: *Ges. Schr.*, iii, p. 372.]

Compare with this the scene in the third act of *Parsifal*. The verdant landscape is here no mere theatrical decoration; if it were, we should scarcely go into a theatre to see what can be seen in far greater perfection in any green place on a spring morning. It is the dramatic representation of an idea perhaps suggested to Wagner by Goethe's *Faust*, but as old as Christianity itself. The task is achieved; the spear has been regained, and all nature smiling in its flowery robes rejoices in the redemption of that Easter morning; even the withered flower-maidens add their strains to the universal chorus. How is such a miracle possible? Only by music in organic union with the dramatic situation. Persuasive as a living person it is able to carry us into realms far beyond those of language and reason, to the realm of wonder. The decorations of the Grand Opéra are as artificial and mechanical as modern dress; they are imposed by the fashion of the day, the caprice of the luxurious, and stand in no relation to the body to which they are fitted.^[13]

[Footnote 13: Those who are interested in the subject will find some admirable observations in Lessing's *Hamburger Dramaturgie*, 11tes. and 12tes. Stück, where the critic compares the ghost of Ninus in Voltaire's *Semiramis* with the ghost in *Hamlet*. He condemns the former because it is nothing more than a poetical machine, while Shakespeare's is one of the persons of the drama. His position is essentially the same as Wagner's.]

The loose construction of the Italian opera has at least one advantage; it can be trimmed to suit the local exigencies of performance. With the new drama this was impossible. Wagner's insistent refusal to permit any mutilation of his work always appeared to Intendants and Impresarii who were anxious to meet him halfway like

monstrous egotism. What Rossini and Meyerbeer had always consented to without the smallest hesitation might, they thought, content a Richard Wagner. The reports of the Intendants to their respective Governments, of Lüttichau in the forties, of Royer in Paris in 1861, show how far the authorities were from understanding the nature either of the work which they were undertaking or of the man with whom they had to deal. Rossini and Meyerbeer had never had any other aim than their own personal success; with Wagner the integrity of his art was far above all personal considerations. On this point no concession on the composer's side was possible. You may take five shillings out of a sovereign and there still remain fifteen shillings, but if you take a wheel from a watch the whole mechanism is destroyed; it was just this that distinguished his productions from operas, and in conceding the principle that they might be trimmed he would have surrendered everything.

It might seem superfluous to have dwelt so long upon a point which, when clearly laid out, can scarcely be controverted, were it not that it has been continually misunderstood, not only by nearly everybody at the present day, but even by critics of the rank of Gluck, Goethe, and Grillparzer. To speak either of music as enforcing the words or of the words as forming a basis for musical expression is to place one of them—in the former case music, in the latter the words—in an inferior position towards the other, whereas they are organic parts of the whole, and co-equals. Wherever either principle is adopted it will result in that very looseness of construction which is the vital infirmity of the Italian opera. And the poetry will be of the kind fashionable with some literary people under the name "lines for music," the principle of which seems to be Voltaire's: *„Ce qui est trop sot pour être dit, on le chante..* Once the principle of organic unity is conceded as the first and most vital condition of a work of art, the rest of Wagner's doctrine follows directly. The governing whole is the drama, the thing to be enacted in its actual representation on the stage, and the different elements, gesture, music, words, are the instruments of its expression, to be so co-ordinated together that each shall express just that which it alone is able to express and no more. The first outcome of the union when rightly and skilfully effected is to impart the one quality which is the final and only aim of all artistic technique—clearness of expression. The new drama can represent not only higher ideas, but can express them more intelligibly than that which uses words alone.

It will now perhaps be asked why these three particular arts and no others have been selected for dramatic purposes. Because they are the three ways in which all living beings utter their thoughts. They have belonged together from the beginning, and still do so; they have parted company for a time, but have never been divorced.

Before considering this it will be well for me to explain some terms which I shall have to use in the following. Poetry has commonly been

divided into "lyric", "epic," and "dramatic"; these terms answer to three different phases of expression. Lyric poetry is the purely subjective emotion of the poet uttering itself in words. Epic poetry on the other hand deals with things and people external to the poet. The drama is, as we have seen, not poetry at all; the actors perform the acts themselves, using words only to explain the reasons for their acts; dramatic poetry therefore involves both lyric and epic elements.

The most primitive, most natural, and simplest means by which a living being can utter itself is gesture-action. It is not necessary to speculate on prehistoric conditions. We need only observe the world around us, the behaviour of our friends and acquaintances, particularly those of South-European blood, to recognize how direct and eloquent is the expression of gesture. On the stage a simple series of dramatic actions can be fully represented by gesture and scenery alone with a very high intensity of emotional expression.

All movement in nature is rhythmic. I need not trouble my readers with the evidences of a fact which is well known in science, but will refer them to the lucid demonstration in Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, Pt. II., ch. 10.

Rhythmic gesture then, or dancing, is the most primitive art, and it is purely lyric, i.e. subjective. It is very important to bear this fact of dancing, of which acting is only a species, as the primitive form of art before our minds. It is common to men and animals. I have often wondered whether the extraordinary development of Wagner's histrionic faculty did not stand in some mysterious relation to the close sympathy which existed between him and that most consummate of all actors—the dog.

The vital activity of the throat and vocal cords becomes sound; song may therefore be considered as a peculiarly specialized form of gesture, but with the radical difference that as a vehicle of expression it addresses the ear, not the eye. The fact that it enters the brain through a different channel gives the art of sound an entirely different character from that of gesture proper; moreover, from being in time only, not in space, it is apprehended more immediately by the inner sense, and the impression received is more intimate, more forcible. Still it retains the same lyric or subjective character.

It was, I believe, Lord Monboddo who first observed that inarticulate sound, music in its most primitive form, is the earliest form of utterance, and is prior to language. Lord Monboddo's researches into the origin and progress of language (1773) were valued so highly by Herder that they were at his instance translated into German. The conclusion at which he arrived, that the most primitive form of utterance is not language but music, that language grew out of song just as the art of writing grew out of picture-painting, is especially

valuable from the fact that it was afterwards adopted by Charles Darwin.[14]

[Footnote 14: *Descent of Man*, Pt. III., ch. 19. The whole of that part of the chapter may be read in this connection. Unfortunately, the speculations are somewhat vitiated by the *idée fixe* of modern science that everything must be referred to "courtship." i.e. sexuality.]

The "music" which Darwin and Lord Monboddo conceive as the vocal expression of primitive man is of course not the highly-wrought product which we now understand under that term; we may suppose it to have been *„rhythmic“* but not *„metric“*. It was nearer to the cries of wild animals, and to some it may seem at first absurd to describe such sounds as music at all. I do not think so; on the contrary I find in the cries of some animals and many birds all the essential qualities of music. They have tone, rhythm, cadence, in a very high degree, and also melody, though vague and rudimentary. The essential difference between melody and mere succession of sounds consists in its being intelligible, that is, in its conforming to a scale or musical scheme of some sort, but that scale is not necessarily the one recognized in modern music. Our ears are so accustomed to associate melody with a certain diatonic scale, and with accompanying harmony, actual or potential, that it is very difficult for us to comprehend as melody successions which do not conform to that scheme, as, for example, the melodies of Oriental nations, the scales of which are far more complex and difficult to understand than ours. It is a very remarkable fact that while the course of evolution is generally from simpler to more complex organisms, that of the musical scale is just the reverse. Primitive scales are highly complex, and involve intervals not appreciable by us as melody; with time they gradually become simpler; and in the diatonic scale, especially in its most modern developments, where the distinction between major and minor tends to become effaced,[15] we seem to have reached the limit, and the scale is reduced to the simplest possible numerical relations. However this may be, I know that to a person who has lived in close converse with nature and possesses a musical ear the cries of wild animals and birds are full of melody in the strict sense, though it is rudimentary and different from that of our concert-rooms. And it is reasonable to suppose that man, when he first emerged with far more highly organized faculties than any beast, would gradually raise his musical expression into something higher, something more melodious, than that of other creatures. Particularly as his reason developed he would devise a scale; the rhythms would become more definite and at the same time more varied and complex. The result of these improvements would be to make his utterances more intelligible.

[Footnote 15: Such is the deduction which I draw from recent theories of harmony. See in this connection *„Neue musikatische Theorien und*

Phantasien_ (Stuttgart, 1906), 40. Also Louis and Thuille, Harmonielehre (1908), especially Pt. I., ch. 6. The idea can be traced back to Hauptmann.]

Helmholtz has observed that there is much more in a musical sound than its mere timbre_, and Wagner has noticed how every musical instrument has not only its vowel sound, or timbre_, but also its peculiar consonant. We need not go so far as to connect the flute with an "f," the trumpet with a "t," etc., since the instrumental consonants need not conform exactly with those of the alphabet; it is enough that each instrument has its own characteristic way of attacking the tone. So we gain the idea of articulation; the point of its entry into the musical expression marks the beginning of language_.

Hitherto the expression has been, as we have seen, purely lyric; the lower animals have no other. But as man rises out of his bestial condition and acquires reason his wants become more numerous and diverse. The mere expression of his inner feelings no longer suffices; he differentiates objects in the external world, and needs sounds—names—to express them. For this he utilizes the newly developed faculty of language. It is the most momentous crisis of his development, the point where he becomes a human being, severed by a wide gap from other animals, and incomparably above them. The mark of language has from the first rightly been made the crux_ of the theory of the evolution of man; it is the natural inevitable outcome of his developing the faculty of reason. Thus the need for communicating the perceptions of external objects calls forth epic_ expression.[16]

[Footnote 16: "Auf das was vor mir steht zeige ich; was in mir vorgeht drücke ich durch Töne und Gebärden aus; was aber abwesend oder einst geschah bedarf, wenn es vernehmlich werden soll einer zusammenhängend geordneten Rede. So ward das Epos."—Herder, Kalligone_.]

We may now lay down a scheme of the three fundamental vehicles of human expression based on their historical development. We have

Emotional or subjective:_
Gesture—obvious and material.
Music—warmer, deeper, and more spiritual.
Rational or objective:_
Language.

But a warning must be added against pressing this classification unduly. All schemes of nature are only approximate; there are no such sharply divided compartments into which our notions may be pigeon-holed. Language may of course be intensely emotional, but we may notice that just in proportion as it becomes emotional it calls in the aid of music; the voice becomes melodious, it develops rhythm,

accent, cadence, and ultimately becomes poetry, which is language united with a large element of music.

Students of economic science have of recent years given attention to ethnology, and their researches into the origin and primitive characteristics of labour have brought to light some facts which are very interesting to us. The familiar distinction between *work* and *play* has no root in nature. Animals do not look upon their labours as a painful task, only to be endured for a time and then to be rewarded by an interval of diversion; to the horse or the dog the day's work is the day's treat; and so with those men whom we contemptuously call "savages." It is the same with artists; no artist has mastered the technique of his work until it has become a pleasure and a plaything to him. There could not be a more significant comment on the unnaturalness of a civilization in which periods of leisure for the workman have to be wrung from the community by legislation. The true workman, like the true artist, is never happy unless he is at work; he needs no diversion.

Of the greatest interest to us are the results of the inquiries of economists into the relations between work, rhythm, and song amongst primitive people. Especially valuable is a treatise by Dr. Karl Bucher, professor of national economy in Leipzig, entitled *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, which ought to find many readers in England if it were translated. I know few modern books that are more fascinating, and it would be hard to say whether its charm lies more in its solid scientific method or in its admirable literary presentation and apt illustrations from the delicate verse-song of the most primitive peoples.

"*Im Anfang war der Rhythmus*." According to Dr. Bücher, all work, when efficient, tends to be rhythmic and each kind of work has its peculiar rhythm. This is especially the case when the labour is carried out in common by a number of people, and the rhythm is embodied in a song, or rhythmic word of command sung by the leader. Innumerable instances will at once occur to everybody—rowing, hauling, marching, sewing, mowing, etc. In primitive people the impulse to sing the rhythm is even more marked than it is among ourselves, with whom the pressure of civilization helps to suppress all natural expression of feeling, and the disturbance of so many cross rhythms tends to obliterate the primary pulsations. The rhythm is an essential part of the work, and not a mere ornamental adjunct; people sing, not to "keep their spirits up," but to help on the work; until the workman has acquired the rhythm he works imperfectly, and tires very quickly. Those forms of work which do not admit rhythm, such as adding figures, copying MSS., etc., are the most fatiguing. Still more so is labour where the natural rhythm is subject to frequent interruptions. Hence walking in the streets of a town is much more wearying than walking in the country; you have to break the rhythm at every few steps and never get the "swing." The constant

interruptions of rhythm by goods in shop-windows, advertisements, etc., is, I am sure, largely the cause of nervous degeneracy in towns.

It cannot surprise us to find that amongst primitive people dancing is the most universal occupation. All dance, dance to frenzy. Originally the dance does not express joy or any other emotion; it is simply the human impulse to activity, work, the most fundamental thing in human nature. From the dance rhythm finds its way into music and poetry, both being in the beginning intended to accompany dancing. One thing is certain, that neither music nor the dance originated in sexuality. Eroticism scarcely ever occurs in the poetry of primitive peoples. It enters at a later stage.

It is not necessary to trace how, out of these primitive beginnings, there grew the ancient drama of the more civilized countries, always retaining the three elements from which it had sprung in closest union. Speaking of the Indian drama in the time of the semi-mythical Bharata, the Indian Thespis, Sir Monier Williams writes:

The drama of these early times was probably nothing more than the Indian Nautch of the present day. It was a species of rude pantomime, in which dancing and movements of the body were accompanied by mute gestures of the hands and face, or by singing and music. Subsequently dialogue was added.....

In Greece the early lyric epoch is represented by the Paians, Dithyramps, etc., at the festivals of Apollo and Dionysos, rhythmic dances to accompaniment of cithara or flute, with words generally improvised. Out of the Bacchic dithyramps grew the tragedy. In the works of the great Attic tragedians the chorus, or dance-song, which had descended from earlier times still remained the principal feature of the representation. It was the drama that crystallized out of the music and dance, not the music that was called in to support or adorn the drama. Not until the time of Euripides did the chorus become a secondary element of the representation, and from this time on the drama begins to decline, becoming more and more a literary product.

It would be a worthy undertaking for a competent student to set himself the task of bringing order into the chaos of Wagner's theoretical writings. They are crowded with thoughts of the deepest import, which seem to point the way to further inquiry, but which remain suggestions only. The most tiresome quality in Wagner's literary style is that he scarcely ever comes to the point. Whenever he asserts a rule in clear and unmistakable language, it is either brought in almost parenthetically amidst a mass of rhetoric, or—as, for example, in the dictum of music being a means to the dramatic end—he treats it with scorn, as something too obvious to be stated. In either case its chances of gaining the reader's attention are seriously diminished by such wrong method. A student who should

undertake the task of ordering his thought would need to possess, in addition to the highest musical and dramatic qualifications a metaphysical habit of mind such as is rare at the present day, and a sympathetic capacity for discerning the grains of golden truth amidst the dross. He must construct anew. Wagner's theoretical edifice will not stand as it is; it is too loosely jointed; but the materials are valuable. That there will ever be a real science of aesthetics I do not believe; art would cease to be art if it lost its mystery. For the present at least we must be content to remain in darkness as to the precise conditions of musical expression, and eschew theory. That music does reveal the nature of things in a way different from words can scarcely be questioned. So, too, does all nature through its silent music reveal more than meets the senses. But we cannot say exactly how or why. Enough that the divine reason whereby the world is fashioned is not the same as our human reason, and will not be forced into its forms.

NOTES

I

LUDWIG II. AND WAGNER

Although I have no intention of defending the extravagances of the Wittelsbach kings and may say at once that my sympathies are entirely with the patriotic citizens of Munich who in 1865 succeeded in turning Wagner out of a position which he ought never to have held, it is only fair to point out that even from the standpoint of material gain the lavish expenditure of those art-loving princes has proved a splendid investment, of which the results may now be seen. What is it that has enabled Munich to double its population in about twenty years and has raised it from being a rather sleepy old-fashioned German town to its present flourishing condition and made it the most delightful capital in Europe, a meeting-place for the cultured of every country of Europe and America? What else but the art-collections and musical performances? Had Wagner then succeeded in founding his art-school and theatre, with Semper, the builder of Dresden, as his architect, and his own supreme mind directing the whole, who can say what the result might have been?

II

PLATO AS AN ART-CRITIC

I ought to say here that I find nothing more admirable in Plato than his criticism of poetry, and I cannot understand the difficulties which scholars find in his treatment of artists in the *Republic* and elsewhere. After all, scholars have as a rule little experience of any art that lies outside the narrow range of their own studies. Plato's remarks appear to me the perfection of common sense. Would any

sane statesman, when devising such a revolutionary political scheme as is contemplated in the *Republic*., not take the opportunity of putting a bridle upon the mischievous vapourings of political poets, reformers, dreamers, schemers, *et hoc genus omne*? It should never be forgotten that the poet with the attractive fascination which he possesses in his art is an enormous power in society, all the more dangerous because his power is so subtle, and his doctrines not in themselves untrue. Can it be doubted that our own Byrons and Shelleys, with their frothy extravagances about freedom, have largely contributed both to the socialism and to the libertinism with which the politics of every nation in Europe are now infected? Even the great Schiller was led astray by the false watchwords of his time, and highly as I revere Goethe I cannot deny that the sensuality of his poetry has had a most baneful influence upon modern Germany. Many more might be named, and the subject is well worthy of fuller treatment. With regard to Schiller, however, it ought to be explained that "freedom" at that time in Germany meant only one thing, freedom from the foreign tyrant—Napoleon.

Remember that it is not all poets whom Plato wishes to banish, not those who feel the responsibility of their high calling, but only a certain class. Nowadays poets do not slander the gods; it is not worth their while, because nobody believes in the gods. They have other ways of undermining society. Plato everywhere shows an unerring feeling for art. Aristotle is a recorder and classifier, but no critic.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROOTS OF GERMAN MUSIC

Dr. Milman, in his great *History of Christianity*., observes that no religious revolution has ever been successful which has commenced with the Government. Such revolutions have ever begun in the middle or lower orders of society. The same is true of other branches of the intellectual life of man. Neither Governments nor academies and schools can ever originate anything new in art, politics, language. All growth springs from the unsophisticated masses; growth is organic, from below. The blossom must fade, and the seed fall to the earth before it can bring forth new life. Academical training concerns itself with the models of the past; its useful work consists in criticizing, purifying, directing the raw material into something higher, better, more useful than it was in the rough, as the gardener produces new and better varieties; but it can no more originate than the gardener can create new plants; and in perfecting it often emasculates.

The reason why the Elizabethan drama is so infinitely more impressive than the technically more perfect drama of the Restoration is that it is steeped in nature and reality, whereas the later stage represents men and women under the fashionable conventions of polite society. "The people" indeed includes high as well as low, but none but the very strongest natures—a Shakespeare, a Beethoven, a Goethe—can endure the stress of Court favour. Where the national nourishment from below is deficient, an elegant artificial semblance may indeed be forced; but it is felt to be wanting in root and to lack that spontaneity and universality which are the very life's breath of all true art and specially mark the art of the people.

In England culture has severed itself entirely from popular life. The very word "popular," unlike the German *„volksthümlich“*, carries the notion of vulgarity. Yet the lower classes among themselves are never vulgar; they only become so when they copy the manners of those above them, and their poetry is the very reverse of what we understand by that word. The *„Volkslied“* exhales the very perfume of nature. It may be uncouth, harsh, weather-beaten, but the perfume remains, and it is never offensive like the modern music-hall song, which is the *„Volkslied“* of a class that tries to ape its social superiors.

All, or nearly all, our foremost English poets of recent times have been products of that system of public school and university education which is justly the pride of modern English upper-class life. Admirable in many ways as this system is, it is essentially one of artificial forcing. The routine is rigidly prescribed by fashion, and is so devised as entirely to exclude all intimate fellowship with the common people. Nature and reality have no part in English scholastic life; "good form" and "sound scholarship" count for more than the heart of man. That such a system fosters character and produces first-rate men of action and rulers is undeniable, but it is fatal to poetry, and the poetry which we produce is what might be expected—refined, highly polished, but artificial and wanting in sincerity. It bears the same relation to true poetry that etiquette and polished manners do to truth and nature. To realize the difference between the poetry of the school and the poetry of nature compare the faultless English and elegant sweetness of the *Idylls of the King* with the vigorous and expressive, but often ungrammatical, prose of Mallory, or compare Virgil with Homer, Horace with Sappho, a chorale by Mendelssohn with a chorale by Bach. Or compare a modern refrain dragged in for no other reason than because the poet has felt that the form requires a refrain of some kind and has tried to find one that is suitable—compare such a refrain by Morris or Rossetti with

In the spring time,
The only pretty ring time
When birds do sing,
Hey ding a ding ding.

sung in the very joy of its heart by a childlike and poetic soul. Both are poetry: but one is poetry of the drawing-room, the other of the fields and forests; one is pretence, the other reality; the latter is hardly poetry at all, and cannot be criticized logically; it is rather human feeling finding its natural expression in verse of greater or less perfection according to the skill of the versifier, but always truthful, never posing, using no sophistic formulas, meaning just what it says.

These preliminary remarks were necessary because I am sure that it is to the narrow notions of classical elegance prevailing in England, and to the want of sympathy with nature and the children of nature, that so many fail to understand Wagner. German art, at least all that was produced before the Franco-German war, is redolent of nature. When reading a volume of typically German songs such as *„des Knaben Wunderhorn“* (whether they are technically genuine *„Volkslieder“* or not, is of no consequence) one feels as if one were walking through a German forest. Even in the art which is necessarily confined within a room the artist's mind seems to be wandering outside, and the portrait-painter will admit through some open window or crevice a breeze from field and forest beyond. In the same spirit the musicians, and particularly the most German of all, Bach, Haydn, Schubert, Beethoven, delight in the rhythms of the popular dance. Of all modern composers Wagner was the most *„volksthümlich“*; the roots of his art are in the *„Volks-Sage“*, the *„Volkslied“*, and the dance, and the masses have always been true to him. He makes it his boast that while intellectuals were raging and warning men not to heed his siren-tones, the public in Germany, France, Italy, England, wherever the performance was tolerably adequate, paid no heed, but invariably met him with the warmest enthusiasm.

Jakob Grimm, in his essay on the *„Meistergesang“*, illustrates the deep and pensive innocence of the *„Volkslied“* by the story of the infant Krishna, into whose mouth his mother looked and beheld within him the measureless glories of heaven and earth while the child continued its unconscious, careless play. "Such," he continues, "is the completeness (*Ganzheit*) of Nature as compared with the halfness (*Halbheit*) of human effort."

The condition for the growth of truly popular art is that society shall present a coherent whole, the upper and lower classes united in a bond of common sympathy with a feeling of brotherhood between them. English society was not always so divided as we see it now. We possess a wealth of popular song which has come down to us from mediaeval times, a heritage nobler than that of any other nation; But can it be said that our national life is in the smallest degree inspired by these songs? They have indeed latterly become a fashion; we collect them, arrange them with pianoforte accompaniments, listen to them at concerts. It is a mere fashionable craze, like that for "the simple life," and differs in no whit from that ridiculed by Wagner in the

Italian opera, and in Meyerbeer, as an attempt to extract the perfume from the wild flower that we may have it conveniently to put upon our pocket handkerchiefs and carry about with us, to enjoy the sweets of nature and care nothing for the soul. To know the *„Volkslied“* we must descend from our fine palaces, and know it in the place where it grows, and become one with them who brought it forth. We must live their life, must learn so see what they see, to love what they love, if we would understand their language.

Precisely parallel is the art in which the English genius specially delighted, architecture. Noble and simple, learned and lewd, severed by the Conquest, were united in the church, and our cathedrals are in the truest sense the creations of the people. Like the *„Volkslieder“*, like the great epics and the Icelandic Sagas, these works are anonymous. No one knows, and no one seems to have cared, who made them. They were built for the glory of God, not for that of man.

In about the twelfth century in Germany the whole community was one body, scarcely differentiated into classes as regards their Intellectual life. There were masters and servants, noblemen and plebeians, as now, but they followed the same ends, received the same education, and shared the same amusements. The *„Volk“* was the entire community, from the prince on the throne to the village child. Literary education was confined to the clerical orders. The word "ballad," which is, or was, the English equivalent of *„Volkslied“*, signifies a dance, and at this early period the bond between dance and song was still intact; the song was danced, and the dance sung to, as it is to this day in the Shetland and Faroe islands, and in parts of Norway and elsewhere. The ballad was a popular composition, in the sense just described, but this does not mean that ballads grew up of themselves, as wild flowers. Each owed its origin to some poet, who composed music and words together. But the people who sang it cared little for the personality of the poet; so long as his song was a good one it was received and sung, but he was forgotten. Nor did they show much respect for his text or tune; they trimmed both as they pleased, cut away what they did not like, added and altered, changed names, turned sense into nonsense, or less often nonsense into sense, moved by their sweet will alone. It can be seen going on now in Germany among students and foresters, and in all places where they sing. In a society where men are free to follow their own natural bent, their minds uncorrupted by books, the public taste is generally not only healthy, but often very dainty and critical. They will find at least what they like themselves, and have no need to consult any one else. Thus the *„Volkslied“* was the creation as it was the property of the people in just the same sense as were our mediaeval churches. The fact that the authors are not recognizable is vital for this kind of art.

The recreations of the people at this time were "„Sagen, Singen, Tanzen.,," story-telling, singing, dancing, in which all joined, high and low together; no others were known. At the close of the

twelfth century, a great change began to take place in German song, partly through the influence of foreign troubadours, but far more owing to changes in social conditions. The reviving interest in letters is indicated by the founding of universities in Italy and France, by the publication of cyclopedias and other educational treatises. There arises a cultured class outside the Church. When the nobleman received a scholastic education, and consequently could form a literary circle of his own, he began to look down upon the ignorant rustic and popular poetry was affected accordingly. The Courts attracted a special class of professional singers, the *„Minnesingers..*, and it was natural that the more talented among the people should be no longer content to blossom unknown, but should seek engagement at the Courts where they were honoured and paid. Thus the *„Volk..* was drained of its talent; the poet becomes famous, art loses its native innocence and becomes more like what we see it now, where the name of the poet is of more consideration than the pleasure to be derived from the poem.

The Court poets of the thirteenth century do not here concern us for their own sake. Their song was short-lived and eventually withered under the degenerate *„Meistersingers..* But their work was not lost.

With the decline of chivalry and the disappearance of Court life as a thing apart the *„Volkslied..* began once more to flower. From the fourteenth century to the sixteenth song was universal, and it is from this time that the ballads of our collections are mostly gathered. But now its character has changed; the short period of fashionable prosperity has not failed to leave its mark. Words, music, and dance are no longer bound together in such close alliance. The first to part company from the rest to begin an independent existence is always the text, which becomes literary poetry for silent perusal or recitation. Song is then no longer poetry set to music, but rather music accompanied by verse. Instead of the two being co-ordinate, music is now first, and the words are only its vehicle. The change was very gradual, but the *„Volkslied..* in its latest and most complete development is practically an instrumental composition, retaining, however, its bond with the past on the one hand through the words, on the other through the *„canto fermo..* in the tenor, the familiar ancient tune round which the counterpoint was woven in a kind of canonical imitation, first (fifteenth century) in three parts then (sixteenth) in four, but always with the *„canto fermo..* in rhythmic contrast to the rest of the composition. It has been pointed out by Liliencron[17] that what appears at first sight to be rhythmic chaos in the polyphonic *„Volkslied..* is really a highly artistic and effective device for bringing the *„canto fermo..*—the ancient tune—into prominence; whilst the other voices are generally in *„tempus imperfectum..* or square time, the tenor is in some other contrasting rhythm. The standard of musical education must have been exceedingly high at this period in Germany, since we hear of these

difficult compositions being sung, not only at concerts and festivals, but in private circles as a common recreation. Indeed, as Sir H. Parry has observed,[18] the practice of combining several tunes is by no means so uncommon among people destitute of all musical training as might be expected. At the present day in Germany, a girl of the lower classes may often be heard singing at her work while her companion adds an extempore part with considerable skill.

[Footnote 17: *Deutsches Leben im Volkslied*. Introd., p. xxix.]

[Footnote 18: *Art of Music*., pp. 99 seq. For an account of the musical culture in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see the Introduction to Dr. Naylor's *Shakespeare and Music*., a most interesting and useful little work.]

The divorce between music and words became complete when songs were arranged in transcriptions for various instruments. For now the orchestra and the *Kapellmeister* have come into being and the further development of music is instrumental. With the invention of printing and the influence of the Italian Renaissance with its humanistic and pseudo-classical ideals the dissolution is completed. Poems are no longer sung but only read, while instrumental music follows its own paths alone.

In the Middle Ages instrumental music can scarcely be said to have existed as an art. Musical instruments—"giterne and ribble"—were known and played upon. "Fiddlers, players, cobblers, and other debauched persons" tramped the country and appeared at festivals in company with jugglers and mountebanks. Towards the beginning of the sixteenth century, private orchestras were maintained by the noble and the wealthy. Still the instrumental band held at best but a secondary place beside the vocal choir. "Harping," says the ancient bard, "ken I none, for song is chefe of myn-strelsé." The music which it played differed in no essential respect from that intended for singing; indeed the part-song was often arranged without alteration for instruments, and so instrumental technique grew out of vocal technique, but—and this is important—retaining important rhythmic characteristics from the dance. Exactly as all stone architecture—Gothic, Classic, Saracenic—bears the features of its wooden parent, so does our modern instrumental music reproduce the physiognomy of its origin, uniting the flowing cantilene of the voice with the marked rhythm of the dance, and we may notice in any modern instrumental composition how the two are contrasted together, now the one feature predominating, now the other.

There remains yet another current in the stream of musical development of at least equal importance with the growth of dance and song. I cannot here enter fully into the history of ecclesiastical music. We are only concerned with the influence exerted by Dutch and Italian composers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries upon the development of later German music.

While pope and prelate cared only for the outer logical shell of Christian doctrine, which they could use as a weapon in their struggle for power, art laid hold upon its vital essence. Those politicians who are in the habit of sneering at Wagner's steadfast belief in the saving power of art for human society would do well to cast a glance at the course of each development of the Christian ideal, the political and the artistic respectively. In the Middle Ages the one showed itself in councils like those of Nicea and Ephesus, in political popes like Gregory VII. and Innocent III., in Isidorian decretals, excommunications, interdicts, tortures, indulgences; the other in our mediaeval cathedrals, in the poetry of a Dante, the paintings of a Giotto and a Raphael, the sculpture of a Michael Angelo, the music of a Palestrina, and our politician might then ask himself which he thought had been the more beneficial as a social force. There still remain as our meagre heritage from these times of "faith," on the one hand the orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed, on the other certain festivals and celebrations in the cathedral of a small Bavarian town, little known, scarcely noticed, but still in the full glory of their pristine mediaeval beauty.

No one who has not attended the celebrations in the cathedral of Regensburg can fully measure what has been lost for mankind through the domination of human rationalism in the place of religious devotion. Here alone in Europe all who will may yet hear the great masters of the sixteenth century rightly performed with the ancient ritual, and Gregorian chant that belongs to it, without pretence, without pomp or pageant, with the single purpose of serving God worthily in that true spirit of mediaeval sincerity and purity which our historians are apt to pass over unnoticed in their rancorous eagerness to proclaim the sins of the Church. The compositions of Palestrina and his compeers represent music in its highest form as pure song in its most perfect consummation, attaining as song an elevation which has never even been distantly approached since. "The centuries have no power over the Palestrina style," says its historian; "it can neither fade nor die." Truly does Wagner say we shall never believe the vocal school which followed it to have been the legitimate daughter of that wondrous mother.

The predominant feature of this music is harmony, brought forth by the union, not of sounds, but of melodies—different and contrasting melodies united in harmony, that is the characteristic of the polyphonic school, and the rhythm is marked, not by accents, but by changes of the chords. It is a rhythm of quantity alone, not of accent and quantity combined, as in the song and the dance and in modern music. Thus, although dancing was by no means excluded from the church in early times—its trace still remains in the name choir [Greek: choros] for that part of the church where the dancing was performed[19]—its most characteristic element, accent, came to be banished from the music of the church as something foreign to the

character of religious worship. But the loss was amply repaid by the wealth and richness which the harmonic structure was able to acquire, and which was rendered intelligible by that fine and expressive method of handling the separate voices which we know as counterpoint. This is not without some interest for us, because, widely as Wagner's harmonies differ from those of Palestrina, we shall find that they too can often only be understood through the progression of the voices. The same is true of Bach's harmonies. Harmony was generated by polyphony, and not *vice versa*; that is, men first tried fitting melodies together, not chords, and when they had learned to do this skilfully, so that they sounded well together, harmony came into being. It does not follow that the music was unrhythmic because it was unaccented, and because in writing it was not divided into bars. No music can be intelligible without rhythm. The rhythmic pulsations are there; they are distinctly felt by the hearer in the performance, and in modern editions the barring is always introduced; but it is less crude, less obvious, through not being enforced by strong accents.

[Footnote 19: Ménil, *Histoire de la Danse*, where an interesting account of church dancing in the Middle Ages will be found.]

We have already seen how the *Volkslied* became fertilized by the polyphony of church-music. At the same time the music of the mass itself received an important impulse from the *Volkslied*. The employment of well-known popular song-melodies as *canti fermi* in sacred contrapuntal compositions had a very beneficial effect upon those works, inasmuch as it introduced a bit of fresh popular life into music just at the moment when it was in danger of degenerating into pedantry and triviality.[20] Possibly the secularization of church music went too far, and at the Council of Trent the proposal was very seriously considered whether the music of the church should not be restricted to the traditional Gregorian chant, which had never been popular and never will be, because priests cannot ordinarily be found to sing it properly. The point at issue in this celebrated discussion really was whether in polyphonic song the words could be made intelligible,[21] for if not the music would become a mere decorative feature, and the mass itself unmeaning. Precisely as in the Wagner controversy of three centuries later, the question was whether art was a diversion only to be enjoyed for the sake of the pleasure which it afforded, or whether it had a serious didactic purpose founded on a reality. It is impossible not to be struck with the similarity of the issues involved with those of the Wagner struggle. In both the question was raised whether music could be justified in detaching itself from its basis—in the one case religious, in the other dramatic—and assert an absolute existence for itself. Still closer is the resemblance when we consider the dramatic character of the Roman ritual, with its sublime conceptions of Real Presence and Transubstantiation. The ritual during Holy Week, for example, is the story of the Passion, partly narrated, partly in a sort of idealized representation. When the solemn moment of the Crucifixion is reached

on Good Friday, when the officiating priests advance in turn to adoration while the Cross itself lifts its voice in "Reproaches" to the multitude with Palestrina's music, who does not feel the dramatic directness of the representation?

Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te? responde mihi.

Chor. [Greek: agios ho theos, agios hischuros, agios 'athanatos.]

Quia eduxi te de terra Aegypti: parasti crucem Salvatori tuo.

Chor. Sanctus deus, sanctus fortis, sanctus et immortalis. Miserere nobis.

—The chorus answering each "Reproach" alternately in the Greek of the Eastern Church and the Latin of the Western Church. Such music as this has quite a different character from that of our concert-rooms; it is music which means something.

[Footnote 20: Ambros., *Gesch.*, ii. p. 286.]

[Footnote 21: Ambros., *Gesch.*, iv, pp. 14 seq.]

The problem was definitely settled for the church by the music of Palestrina. But he did not change the course of history, and with his death in the same year (1594) as that of his great contemporary Orlando Lasso, his work came to an end. His influence had indeed been profound, and he left as his disciples and successors men of gifts scarcely inferior to his own; but the fashion had changed; Italian humanism and the sway of the Press destroyed worship, destroyed spontaneity, and by the year 1600 the pure vocal style and the *Volkslied* had both passed away.

Our results so far can be very shortly summed up. Modern music has three main elements, which were fed from three sources:

Rhythm – Cantilene – Polyphony.

— — —
The dance *Volkslied* Church music.

It has been my endeavour in the preceding to show how these three intermingled with and reacted upon one another. The outcome of all three has been modern German orchestral music; for the distinctive music of modern Germany up to Beethoven is orchestral. In saying this, I have not forgotten the great German song-composers, but even their work is insignificant beside that of the instrumentalists, and has been so affected both in design and in technique by instrumental music

as in a great degree to lose its vocal character. The choruses of Handel and Bach are almost entirely instrumental in character.

The change which came over artistic expression from about 1600 on implied a deeper and more vital change in the conception of art itself. Till then men had believed the things they told in their art. Byzantine saints, Cynewulf's Scriptural legends, German *Heldenerzählungen*, Icelandic *Sagas*, down to the saints and angels of the pre-Raphaelites, all represented realities to the poet; he would have felt no interest in telling of things which he did not believe to be true. But henceforward we have art for its own sake; the truthfulness of the subject-matter is of no account; the sole canon of art is beauty of form; its purpose not instruction but pleasure.

I know no episode in the history of art that is more instructive than the birth of the Italian opera. It was typically a product of the Renaissance, but it came at the very end of that movement, when the freshness of its early vigour was past, when learning had declined into pedantry, and its graceful art was lost in *barocco*.

The period of Italian history known as the Renaissance is important because it brought forth a greater number of geniuses of the highest rank than ever existed together in any country before or since, except perhaps in the great time of Athens. But in itself it was a falsehood. It was an attempt to revive former *Italian* greatness, forgetting that the greatness of Italy had been exclusively military and political, whereas the modern movement was literary and artistic. It committed the blunder of confusing together under the term "classic" two very different forms of culture, the Greek and the Roman, very much as we now group Hindus, Moslems, and Chinamen together as "Orientals." All that was really great in art was Greek, but they were content to receive it through the tradition of the most inartistic nation that ever lived. Far indeed were the Renaissance humanists from the noble simplicity of Hellenic art.

The Renaissance movement in Italy was not only, like the German Reformation, anticlerical; it was atheist and immoral, at least in its later degenerate period, and it is likely that the representatives of the latest modernism who met and aired their views in the Florentine salons at the end of the sixteenth century, were inspired as much by hatred of religion, or by what is called love of freedom, as by enthusiasm for art. Hitherto the Renaissance had taken little notice of music. It was a barbarian art; how could Florentine exquisites, disciples of Machiavelli, men of the vein of Lorenzo di Medici, Leo X., and Baldassari Castiglione be expected to occupy themselves with the art of men bearing such names as Okeghem or Obrecht? Popes and Cardinals, however, had shown themselves much better connoisseurs of art than the humanists, and had brought these barbarians to Italy, had given them high appointments and become their pupils. The fact that

the antipathy of the humanists to music was extended to that of their own great countrymen, to Palestrina, Vittoria, Suriano, cannot be entirely accounted for by their dislike of everything clerical, still less by want of taste. The cause lay far deeper. It was the transition from the old order to the new, from mediaeval faith to modern rationalism, from art to science.

Art and science both contemplate Nature, and seek to turn her gifts to account to better and ennobled human life. Art accepts the beautiful objects of Nature as they are, without questioning. The artist says: "Let me lead you by the hand; I have seen something new and beautiful; here it is; try to see it too, with my help, that we may both enjoy it together." But he uses no compulsion; with those who turn a deaf ear to him he is powerless. Science on the other hand tries to compel belief by irresistible processes of logic; the scientist's axiom is that if the premises be true the conclusion *must* follow, and he pours scorn upon all who refuse assent to his interpretations, denouncing them as ignorant, superstitious, if not wilfully blind and perverse. Mystery, according to the ancients the beginning of philosophy, has no place in science; what cannot be explained is superstitious and must be rejected as false. The source of art, as of religion, must be sought not in the ineffable, incomprehensible phenomena of nature, but in the human mind, in reason, to which all art must conform.

This was the spirit in which the founders of the *nuove musiche* sought to carry out their reforms; their intolerance rivals that of Lucretius or Haeckel. It is impossible to suppose that men of their highly-cultured aesthetic sense were deaf to the purely musical beauty of polyphony. They were trained in its school, and had employed it themselves most skilfully in their madrigals. It was the *mystery* of the mass and of its attendant music which they detested.

Another consideration must be added. Hand in hand with this rationalizing tendency, indeed only another phase of the same phenomenon, is the striving for self-assertion of the individual, which is the mark of all progress towards higher civilization. The contrapuntal mass or motet expressed the commonwealth of the Church, where the individual disappears, absorbed in the community. The *nuove musiche* sought to emancipate the individual, and allow him to express his own independent existence. Thus the progress of the modern musical drama presents an exact parallel to that of the Greek drama, from before Thespis onwards, except that here the change from lyric to dramatic representation was slower, because, there being no preconceived plan or model for the reformers to work by, the development was gradual and natural instead of violent.

The year 1600 marks with considerable accuracy the transition from the old order to the new. The two greatest masters of the old school had recently died, and with them their work expired. At the wedding of

Henri IV. of France with Maria de' Medici in Florence, in that year, was performed the opera *Euridice*., the joint work of Caccini and Peri, which is the starting-point of the new music.

The details of the invention of the *nuove musiche*., the ideas which brought it forth, how these were nursed in the salons of Florentine noblemen, especially in that of Bardi Conte Vernio, are all well known. They did not proceed in the first instance from musicians, but from scholars, who, having read in the course of their studies about Grecian (or Roman—it was all the same to them) dramatic music, determined to add to the other accomplishments of the new order that of reviving the ancient drama with its music. They were vehement in their denunciations of the barbarous institutions of counterpoint and loudly called for a return to the only true principles of music as taught by the ancients. With this end in view they drew into their circle the most gifted musicians whom they could find, and expounded to willing and zealous ears the principles of music as embodied in the rules of Plato and Aristotle, omitting, however, to state where they found them in the works of those philosophers. The first result was the opera, or operas (for there seem to have been two, one by Caccini and one by Peri, welded into one) *Euridice* performed at the royal wedding. It was followed by other similar works and the series has continued in unbroken course for three centuries, through Monteverde, Carissimi, A. Scarlatti, down to our own time. The physiognomy of the early operas of the classic revival is still distinctly traceable in Rossini, Donizetti, and the early Verdi, after whom its career was suddenly cut short almost in the height of its fame by the publication of the first part of Wagner's *Oper und Drama* in 1851.

From the very beginning the Italian opera was what it is now, frivolous, insincere, imbecile. Its sole function was, and always has been, to help idlers of the upper classes to while away their evenings. The absurd notion of a Platonic music was rivalled by the absurdity of the composition. The inane dialogue was made up of interminable recitative, in the midst of which an occasional chorus—introduced in conformity with supposed classical practice—must have come as a most refreshing relief; for choruses they could write. It was dramatic in so far that it was provided with all the paraphernalia of the stage and that the singers walked about as they sang. Possibly, too, the performers had some initiation into modern methods of operatic acting, and would raise one arm at the word *cielo*., two arms at certain other words, etc.; but it would be hard to detect any living dramatic idea in those mythological heroes and heroines, Dafnes, Amors, Tirsis, Ariannas dressed up as stage shepherds and shepherdesses. The only *raison d'être* of the music in the minds of the fashionable audience was—then as now—to provide a stimulus for conversation and flirting, or a pleasant diversion in the intervals of their business transactions.

But it is easy to ridicule the follies and failures of men who were striving after an ideal. More profitable to us it will be to trace what substantiality their dream of dramatic revival really possessed, and if we strip it of the false garment of classicity in which it masqueraded, and of its self-asserting intolerance, there is no question that, whatever the results of the efforts of these reformers, their intention was admirable. They themselves, the composers, were deeply in earnest; their objects were not what they supposed, but they were entirely worthy, and though we may wonder at their failure to appreciate the entrancing beauty of polyphonic music, we must admit even here that their objections were not without some force. To realize this we must transfer ourselves in imagination to their conditions and endeavour to consider the problems from their standpoint, remembering how they were impelled by the irresistible law of progress, the assertion of individualism, and by the desire for dramatic treatment.

The main objection brought by the reformers against polyphony was that the elaborate imitative treatment of the voices made the words unintelligible. We may remember that exactly the same objection had already been raised at the Council of Trent by clericals themselves. Vocal music alone, the reformers contended, can be recognized as true music, for music is essentially language and rhythm, and only in the last place tone.[22] Consequently, *right declamation* is of its essence. On this ground they objected to mixing together high notes and low, fast movement and slow, to dividing a syllable between many notes, to repetition of words and phrases. Especially significant is the advice given by *Vincentio Galilei* to composers to study the expression of gifted actors.[23]

[Footnote 22: *Ambros.*, iv, p.165.]

[Footnote 23: *Ib.*., p. 170.]

It is impossible not to treat seriously a movement founded upon such arguments as these. They are in the main incontrovertible. We seem to be breathing the very atmosphere of *Wagner*, and it would be scarcely too much to say that the humanist movement of the *Bardi* salon was in its *intention* the forerunner of the German movement dreamed of by *Herder*, *Schiller*, *Jean Paul*, and accomplished by *Wagner*, who at last succeeded in finding what the others had sought, namely, the true relations between words, music, and acting. Even the idea of concealing the orchestra originated with them. Why, then, did it not succeed? Why did the very name of Italian opera become a by-word for all that is frivolous and inartistic in dramatic art? The answer must be sought in the dictum of *Dean Milman* quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Art is an organic growth, and cannot be created by authority. A drama which has been manufactured by fitting together words, action, and music in such manner as appears right to the composer, or according to models, real or fanciful, however skilful be the

execution, is no drama; it lacks the breath of life; it is not a living organism, but an artificial counterfeit.

In Wagner's theoretical writings there are few things of more practical importance than the principle repeatedly insisted upon that a work of art is not a production of a gifted artist which he exhibits for his audience to criticize, and either to admire and enjoy or to reject according to their capacities, but is a mutual interaction, a conversation as it were between the artist and his public, _to which both contribute_. Nor is art a diversion to be taken up as a relaxation after the fatigue of serious work, but a labour requiring the best efforts of the hearer's faculties. Every artist worthy of the name has something new to say, something which has not been heard before, but is characteristically his own, and cannot be understood without an effort. Artist and hearer must co-operate together towards a common end. Wagner's first purpose throughout his life was to educate his public, or, to use his own phrase, prepare a soil in which his art could flourish. Whenever an attempt is made to create an art by authority, whether it be Court patronage, theoretical exposition, or any other form of authority, this important principle is forgotten. The would-be teachers of the people scatter the seed irrespectively of the soil, and the attempt, however laudable, is ill-timed.

The subsequent history of the Italian opera has been told by Wagner himself in the entertaining pages of the first part of his *Oper und Drama*., which should be carefully read by all who wish to gain a distinct understanding of his aims. A useful supplement to Wagner's treatise will be found in a conversation which took place between him and Rossini in 1860, a "scrupulously exact" account of which has been published forty-six years after it took place from notes taken at the time in a pamphlet by E. Michotte of Brussels.[24]

[Footnote 24: Paris, *Librairie Fischbacher*., 1906.]

It would have been impossible for the opera to continue as it had begun. People would not have gone to the theatre to hear dreary recitatives, and from the very first we hear of concessions being made to the singers—i.e. to the audience. By degrees there forms itself that peculiar kind of vocal melody which we recognize to-day as distinctively Italian. Not, be it noted, melody proper, which is the very truest expression of the human soul; not the melody that was known to the great Germans, but "naked, ear-tickling, absolute melodic melody; melody which is nothing but melody; which glides into our ears—we know not why; which we sing again—we know not why; which to-day we exchange for that of yesterday, and forget to-morrow—still we know not why; which is sad when we are gay, merry when we are sorrowful, and which we yet hum—just because we know not why."

Let us not be misled by Wagner's bantering description into despising Italian melody and supposing it to be a thing utterly worthless. True,

it has not the musical elevation of German melody. The little Neapolitan urchin who basks all day in the sunshine, sings, steals, and is ready to drive a knife into his companion, is not perhaps as high a type of humanity as the English public-school boy. Nevertheless he has a charm entirely his own, and his large round eyes will make you forget his sins. Woe to art and to mankind when our hearts are closed to such influences! Italian operatic melody is the expression of Southern Italian individuality, and has in its very irresponsibility a certain fascination different from that of the far nobler German music. Wagner waged warfare, not against the Italian opera, not against operatic composers, but against impostors and sophists, and while trampling upon the serpent in his own path he was as little likely to remain untouched by the good-natured loveliness of the Italian as he was to slight the high intelligence, the artistic receptiveness and thoroughness of the French. On reading his works it is hard to escape the impression of a lurking fondness for Rossini on Wagner's part, even while he is making game of the whole school. Above all, Italian melody possesses one quality which is the highest of all in melody—it is eminently singable. No German, unless perhaps Handel, ever understood the human voice as did the Italians. Wagner's own words leave no doubt as to what he thought. In one of his earliest writings he utters a prayer that German composers may one day write such melody and learn such treatment of the voice as are found in Bellini's *Norma*. But, like Odysseus, he stopped his ears to the siren-song (his own expression) while at the same time learning from it and assimilating what was good therein. Wagner's vocal melody was largely modelled on that of the Italians. *Tristan* itself was conceived for Italian singers, and the part of *Isolde* was originally intended for *Mdlle. Tietjens*. He even adopted Italian mannerisms, operatic turns, trills, suspensions, cadences, and bravura tricks. We may follow how these Italicisms appearing in all their banality in his earlier works become more and more expressive as his style develops.

[Music: *Rienzi*., ACT V.
Du stärk-lest mich, du gabt mir ho-he Kraft]

[Music: *Tristan und Isolde*., ACT III.
Won . . . ne Kla-gend]

Cadences of the common Italian type with 6/4 chord or suspension swarm in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. In *Tristan* they never have the stereotyped character which they have in his earlier works.

[Music: *Lohengrin*., ACT II.
Ein Glück dass oh-ne Reu]

The finer characteristics of Italian melody, that easy tunefulness which seems to have sprung naturally and without effort out of the mechanism of the vocal organs, is above all noticeable in the music of his noblest creation, *Brünnhilde*.

[Music: *„Walküre“*, ACT III. SCENE I.
O heh re-stes Wun-der]

[Music: herr - - - lich-ste Maid]

[Music: *„Siegfried“* ACT III. SCENE III.
Sieg-fried-es Stern ... Sie ist mir e-wig, ist mir
im-mer Erb' und Eig - en ... Ein ... er ist mir]

The flower-maidens' chorus in *„Parsifal“* might be called the apotheosis of Italian song. What Wagner means by his scathing ridicule of the Italian opera and Italian melody, is not that it is worthless, but that it has no meaning. In short it is not the drama.

We recognized the radical fault of the Italian opera to be its subordination of the drama to the music. In opposition to this it has been asserted that the music aids the drama by carrying on the action. Let us examine this by the light of one example, the well-known seduction scene of Zerlina in *„Don Giovanni“*. The form of music as such is determined by rhythmic repetitions of themes, varied or not. The scene is full of dramatic charm and has great capabilities. Don Giovanni begins insinuatingly: "Give me your hand, Zerlina; come away with me to my castle." The timid peasant girl at first hesitates. "No, no," she replies, "I dare not—yet how I should like to!—but what would Masetto say?" All this is in the most winning and seductive melody; it is exactly the tone in which a young nobleman and a rather coquettish but entirely innocent young girl would express themselves. The situation becomes warmer; Don Giovanni is more pressing—he puts his arm round her—he is just about to kiss her, when suddenly the scene begins over again from the beginning with "Give me your hand," etc., and the whole episode is rendered absurd! Up to this point we have been so transported by the interest of the scene and the appropriateness of the expression that we almost feel ourselves to be taking part in it, but the repetition checks our feelings like a douche, by the necessity felt by the composer of preserving the musical form. Had the action and the music been carried right through to the second part, Zerlina's inexpressibly tender

[Music: An-diam!]

would have been most thrilling, and the way would have been naturally prepared for the entry of Elvira just in time to save her.

Absolute or instrumental music requires the strict form which is effected by means of balanced repetitions in order to supply that intellectual element without which it cannot be understood, and which in vocal music is afforded by the words. The drama needs no such restrictions and cannot endure them. Human actions are not subject to mechanical laws; they are intelligible in themselves, but cannot be

measured out. Human life is a continuous whole, one action leads naturally on to another, without any break, and to attempt to range the actions of men and women under schemes of arias, cavatinas, duets, choruses, each existing for itself and sharply separated from all others, can only render them unintelligible and ridiculous.

CHAPTER V

THE WAGNERIAN DRAMA AND ITS ANTECEDENTS

We have already seen that the drama is distinguished from all other forms of art by its essential quality of directly enacting the things to be communicated instead of merely describing them. Since only human things can fitly be so enacted by human beings, dramatic art is generally identical with human art; it is the art of representing the actions of men and women—or of deities conceived as idealized human beings—in such a way as to reveal the motives by which they are impelled, their characters. The adjective "dramatic" may, however, be understood in two ways, according as our interest is centred in the actions themselves, their contrasts and conflicts, or in the motives or characters of the persons engaged. In the former case the drama will endeavour to represent decisive and exciting actions passing in rapid succession before the eyes. This may be called the spectacular drama, and its greatest master is Schiller. When Goethe is described as "the least dramatic of all great poets" it is in this sense that the word is used. Goethe often hankered after spectacular effects, but was never very successful in producing them.

But if we consider the essence of a dramatic conception to lie in the conflict of opposing motives, not necessarily discharging themselves as action, but subdued, and the more impressive because kept under restraint within the soul of the actor, we shall rank Goethe amongst the very foremost of dramatic poets. Examples of what I will call the moral drama are all Goethe's maturer plays, such as *Tasso* and *Iphigenie*. To this class also belong Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* and the representative French plays of the classic epoch. They are, generally speaking, bad stage plays, but are extremely interesting to read, and gain in interest the more they are studied. In the works of the greatest of all dramatists, such as Sophokles and Shakespeare, the spectacular and moral elements are so closely united as to be inseparable. In the Attic drama the more striking spectacular events had, for technical reasons, to be kept out of sight. Ajax piercing himself with his sword, Oedipus tearing out his own eyes, are, like the thunderstorm in *Lear*, the outcome of terrific internal motives bursting all confines with the force of an irresistible torrent. Our interest is centred, not in the actions

themselves, but in the motives which produced them, in the characters.

Wagner, with his conscientious habit of accounting to himself for everything that he did, found his artistic level more slowly than do most poets. When the stylistic crudities of his earlier productions had been overcome, he began the work of his maturer life with *„Rheingold“*, the most spectacular drama ever written. *„Walküre“* and *„Siegfried“* were continued in the same vein, and it is very significant that he broke off the composition and laid the work aside just at the monstrous dragon-fight. It is no strained conjecture that as the difficulties of his gigantic subject accumulated he at last realized the practical impossibility of what he had undertaken. To bring the whole story of the fall of the ancient Germanic gods into a spectacular drama on the scale of the *„Ring“* was beyond even his mighty powers, and in *„Die Walküre“* he is like a man trying to break away from the path which he has laid down for himself, to get rid of the cumbersome spectacular element and let the action develop itself naturally from within. With all its unrivalled beauties the *„Ring“* as a *„drama“* is a monstrosity. It turns upon motives which are not apparent from the actions and have to be explained in dreary and most undramatic length. Its very foundation is wrong; its central figure, the prime author of the new and more blessed world which is to follow, is the offspring of an incestuous union for which there is no occasion whatever. The myth itself has sometimes been held responsible, and it has been asserted that Wagner had to reproduce the tradition as he received it. Nothing of the kind is true; Wagner has altered the entire story, taking, leaving, or altering just as he pleased. In the *„Völsunga“* paraphrase of Eddic lays, upon which the story of the *„Ring“* is founded, the child of the unnatural union is not Sigurd, not the golden hero "whom every child loved," but the savage outlaw Sinfjötli, half wolf, half robber, one of the most terrible creations of mythology. To conceive such a union as bringing forth a hero whom we are expected to regard as the very type of human nobility and guilelessness is an artistic blunder which we can only explain by supposing that Wagner found his material unmanageable. He was struggling with impossibilities and gave up the attempt.

From this he turned to *„Tristan“*, rushing at once to the opposite extreme. The absence of clear and decisive action in *„Tristan“* is as remarkable as the excess of action in the *„Ring“*. Persuaded that the motives and characters of men must be known before their actions can be understood, and that these can only be revealed in music, he has given us in *„Tristan“* music such as no mortal ear ever heard before or since; but action there is little or none. He scarcely deigns to tell even the most vital incidents of the story. Can any one say that he has understood the events connected with Morold and Tristan's first visit to Ireland and the splinter of the sword from the play itself without an independent explanation? Or that Tristan's reasons for carrying off Isolde are clear to him from Marke's account? Without these incidents the whole story is

unintelligible, but with Wagner in his then mood they counted for nothing in the flood of emotional material. It was in *Die Meistersinger* that Wagner found the final equation between impulse and action, and the public has again judged rightly in placing that work first among all his dramatic compositions. But the musician and the philosopher will always turn to *Tristan*.

There are four principal epochs in which the drama has been a flourishing reality in Europe. They are: 1. In Athens in the fifth century B.C. 2. In Elizabethan England. 3. In Spain in the seventeenth century. 4. In France under Louis XIV.

Of the influence of the Elizabethan drama upon the Wagnerian drama it is difficult to speak to any good purpose. Shakespeare is the common heritage of all German dramatists, Wagner as well as others, and it is not too much to say that the enthusiasm for Shakespeare which began towards the end of the eighteenth century was the stimulus which roused the German nation to create a drama of its own. It is enough for the present if we note that the Elizabethan drama is characteristically human and popular. True, the Elizabethans revel in courts and high society, as do the populace; they represent kings and rulers as they are beheld from outside, and there is always a "Sampson" or "Gregory," or "Citizen" or "Merchant" ready as a chorus to express with great shrewdness his opinion of the doings of his betters.

For an opposite reason we may pass over very shortly the French classical drama, namely, because it does not seem to have weighed with Wagner at all. Corneille, Racine, and their contemporaries are little mentioned in his writings; certainly he shows no enthusiasm for their art. Yet the influence of the French stage was by no means a negligible quantity in the development of the German drama.

It was Lessing who in the trenchant prose of his *Hamburger Dramaturgie* first revolted against the French domination, the strength of which may be judged from the list there given of works performed in the Hamburg theatre from April to July 1767. Of the fifty-two plays there enumerated, fifteen were German, thirty-five French, and two from other languages—only one being English. In itself the French influence was not altogether for evil; what was bad was the unlimited sway of a foreign art. The French sense for elegance of form is far more acute than that of either Germans or Englishmen, but with the Louis Quatorze dramatists it had degenerated into pedantry. The "Unities," rightly understood, are a very important feature of every drama. Aristotle has treated this much vexed question with his customary Hellenic moderation. Inner unity is an indispensable qualification of every work of art; dramatic unity is technically called Unity of Action, that is, the mind must be able to receive the work as a whole, and it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Only nature is at once varied and eternal. Out of this

may proceed the Unities of Time and Place, but so far from being obligatory they were not even always observed in the Greek tragic drama itself, where they seem specially called for by the presence of the chorus and where the fact that a dramatic performance was always a competition made some restrictions binding upon all competitors necessary. Aristotle's only rule about time is that the length must be such that it can be easily comprehended (*_Poet._*, vii. 1450_b_), and he adds in a general way that in his day tragedy generally tried as far as possible to keep within one revolution of the sun, or thereabouts (*_Ib._*, v. 1449_b_). Of the third Unity, that of Place, he says nothing at all.

Aristotle's eminently practical generalizations of the features of the drama as it existed in Athens in his day were exalted by the French dramatists of the seventeenth century into rigid inviolable laws, and a dramatist would in a doubtful case think it necessary to demonstrate to his public in a special discourse that he had not been guilty of any breach of the law in this respect! The authority of the supreme law-giver was incontestable; the only question was how to interpret his enactments. Does, for example, "one revolution of the sun" mean twelve hours or twenty-four? This and other such weighty matters were subjects of warm controversy. Lessing's mind was critical rather than creative; he, too, was an enthusiastic student of Aristotle, and read with far truer artistic intelligence than Corneille. The criticism of his *_Hamburgische Dramaturgie_* cleared the way for the great creative poets of the end of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. It was a period of experiment, both in subject-matter and in form. The latter hovers between that of classic tradition and the licence of Shakespeare, while the subjects are generally taken from foreign history or from Greek mythology; only occasionally, as in *_Götz von Berlichingen_* and *_Wallenstein_*, from German history. The entire dramatic movement of this period is an endeavour to find a workable compromise between the classic and the Elizabethan drama, an endeavour which attained a fair measure of success a little later in the superb classic tragedies of Grillparzer. Still, noble as were its achievements in this direction, the German nation had higher aims. As it gained in self-consciousness and conceived its own artistic ideals it could not but feel itself worthy to bring forth an art characteristically its own. Till now the only indigenous German art had been instrumental music, and the stupendous achievements of a Bach, a Haydn, a Beethoven must have helped to bring home to the Germans the artistic capabilities latent within them.

The decisive step in German art was taken by Richard Wagner, whose appearance is like a world-catastrophe. In one vast flood, comparable only to the tide of his overwhelming music, all that was trivial and experimental was swept away. What was strong enough to swim in the tide was invigorated and strengthened; Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Grillparzer, Weber, Mozart, Beethoven, and their compeers are both better performed and better understood now than they were before

Wagner's appearance, but all the second-rate has perished. The days of experimenting have passed; the danger now threatening German art is not from abroad, but is within itself, from those of its own body who, just when the only hope lies in sobriety and self-restraint, are goading it on the career of intoxication.

There remain the Hellenic and the Spanish dramas. Wagner's true spiritual progenitors were Sophokles and Calderon. Different as are the creations of two such widely separated epochs in their external physiognomy, they possess one vital characteristic in common. In both man is the instrument of higher powers; whether they be, as in the one case, Zeus or Ate, or, as in the other, Honour or Christian faith, matters little. These are the real actors, impersonated in flesh and blood in the heroes.

An Englishman who, like myself, is ignorant of the Spanish language and people can never hope to understand, still less to expound, their literature. The Spanish drama is largely dependent upon subtleties of metre and diction which cannot be reproduced in translations, and it is inspired by motives very different from our own. Our watchwords are "self-interest," "freedom," "progress"; those natural to the Spaniard are "honour" and "Catholic Christianity." No great people has been so uniformly true to the traditions of its nationality as the Spanish. Alone among the nations Spain has refused to assimilate the rationalist formulas fashionable in other countries; she has preferred to relinquish her foremost place in the European commonwealth rather than her ideals. To us the policy of Philip II appears as perverse as the notions of honour and Christianity appear extravagant in Spanish dramas; the reason is that we are not Spaniards, and we read their history through the spectacles of rationalist historians. But if we once concede their fundamental notions as they understand them, we must acknowledge that Spanish history and Spanish art proceed directly out of them more logically, more naturally, than in those nations which are continually being drawn aside, now this way, now the other, by the political notions and passing philosophies of the day.

Wagner made his first acquaintance with the Spanish drama in the winter of 1857-58, when engaged on the composition of *Tristan*, and at once seized its character with the sympathetic insight of genius. His remarks in a letter to Liszt written at this time^[25] are so noteworthy, and bear so directly upon the work with which we are concerned, that I will add a translation of a portion of the letter:

I am almost inclined to place Calderon by himself and above all others. Through him, too, I have learned to understand the Spanish character. Unprecedented, unrivalled in its blossom, it developed so rapidly that its material body soon perished, and it ended in negation of the world. The refined, deeply passionate consciousness of the nation finds expression in the

notion of *honour*, wherein its noblest and at the same time its most terrible elements unite to a second religion. Extremes of selfish desire and of sacrifice both seek to be satisfied. The nature of the "world" could not possibly find sharper, more dazzling, more dominating, and at the same time more destructive, more terrible expression. The poet in his most vigorous presentations has taken for his subject the conflict of this *honour* with the deep human feeling of *sympathy* (*Mitgefühl*). The actions are dictated by "honour," and are therefore acknowledged and approved by the world, while the outraged sympathy takes refuge in a profound melancholy, the more telling and sublime for being scarcely expressed, and revealing the world in all its terrible nullity. Such is the wondrous and imposing experience which Calderon presents to us in magic creative charm. No poet of the world is his equal in this respect. The Catholic religion intervenes as a mediator, and nowhere has it attained greater significance than here, where the opposition between the world and sympathy is pregnant, sharp, and plastic, as in no other nation. How significant too is the fact that nearly all the great Spanish poets in the latter half of their lives retired into the Church, and that then, after complete ideal subjugation of life they could depict that very life with certainty, purity, warmth, and clearness, as they never could before when actively engaged in it. Their most graceful, most whimsical creations are from the time of their clerical retirement. Beside this paramount phenomenon all other national literature seems insignificant.

[Footnote 25: No. 255 of the *Collected Letters*.]

Wagner knew Greek, but seems to have read his Aeschylus and Sophocles in the excellent translation of Donner. From his seventeenth year onwards, his exclusive occupation with music and the drama left him little time for the study of classics. Yet he was a born classic. In the earlier period of his school life, when at the *Kreuz-Schule* in Dresden he showed remarkable aptitude for Greek, and translated half the *Odyssey* into German as a voluntary task when he was about thirteen. Unfortunately in the next year his family moved to Leipzig, where his zeal was checked by the pedantry of schoolmasters, and his studies soon began to take another direction, but throughout his life he remained ardently in sympathy with Hellenic culture. His remarks on the *Oedipus* tragedies of Sophocles are well worthy the attention of those who value the poetry above the letter of a work. He was attracted to the Spanish and to the Hellenic drama because they were akin to himself. He was himself cast in a tragic mould, in that of the

heroes of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Calderon. Prometheus suffering torments rather than submit to the will of an iniquitous ruler is Wagner voluntarily sacrificing all that made life dear to him rather than adopt the conventional falsehoods of society. He is Prince Fernando suffering disgrace and imprisonment rather than betray his country. He is Tristan and Isolde going willingly to death rather than sully their honour.

CHAPTER VI

THE EARLIER VERSIONS OF THE TRISTAN MYTH

The origin of the Tristan myth is lost in antiquity. The Welsh Triads, of unknown date, but very ancient, know of one Drystan ab Tallwch, the lover of Essylt the wife of March, as a steadfast lover and a mighty swineherd. It is indubitably Celtic-Breton, Irish, or Welsh. There were different versions of the story, into the shadowy history of which we need not enter; the only one which concerns us is that of a certain "Thomas." Of his French poem fragments alone have come down to us, but we have three different versions based upon it:

1. The Middle-High-German poem of Gottfried von Strassburg, composed about 1210-20.
2. An old-Norse translation made in 1226 by command of King Hakon.
3. A Middle-English poem of the thirteenth century preserved in the so-called Auchinleck MS. of the library of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh, and familiar to English readers from the edition published by Sir Walter Scott. The poem was probably composed by the famous Thomas the Rhymer of Ercyldoune or Earlstown in Berwickshire. A reliable edition by G. P. MacNeill has been published by the Scottish Text Society, with an introduction giving a full and interesting account of the legend in its various recensions.

In these versions the story of Tristan and Isolde has nothing whatever to do with the Arthurian court or the quest of the Grail. It became exceedingly popular and was told again and again in varied forms in every language in Europe. But even before this Sir Tristan had sometimes been included among the Knights of the Round Table, such honour being deemed indispensable to the dignity of every knight who had any pretensions to fame.

Wagner was well versed in all the Tristan literature, and composed his own version for the stage out of the materials which he found. In order to understand his way of dealing with his subject-matter it will be worth our while to follow the outlines of the old story, which is essentially the same in all the three versions, though the incidents, and especially the names, are somewhat varied. I shall follow in the

main the most important of the three, that of Gottfried von Strassburg, so far as it goes, with occasional supplementary additions from the Norse and English.

There was a certain King of Parmenia named Riwalin Kanelengres (in the Norse saga he is King of Bretland; in the English he is called Rouland rise, King of Ermonric), who, leaving his own country in the charge of his marshal, Rual li foitenant, joined the court of the powerful King Marke of Cornwall "and of England" in Tintajol. There he falls in love with Blanscheflur (Norse: Blensinbil), the king's sister, but, on his being recalled to his own land to meet an invasion from his enemy Morgan, she begs him to take her with him. "I have loved thee to mine own hurt," she says. "But for my being pregnant I would prefer to remain here and bear my grief, but now I choose to die rather than that thou, my beloved, shouldst be put to a shameful death. Our child would be fatherless. I have deceived myself and am lost." She is married to Riwalin and placed for safety in his stronghold Kanoël while he marches to battle. He is killed, and she, on hearing the news, dies after giving birth to a son who, in allusion to the melancholy circumstances of his birth, is named Tristan.

Tristan is instructed by his tutor Kurwenal in the seven arts and the seven kinds of music, and in all languages. One day he is carried off by some pirates, and, on a furious storm arising, he is put on shore alone on the coast of Cornwall, and finds his way to King Marke's court at Tintajol, where he is honourably received.

Meanwhile his marshal, Rual li foitenant, has set out in search of him, and, after wandering through many countries, arrives disguised as a beggar at Tintajol. Tristan brings him before the king, to whom he relates the whole story of Tristan's birth and parentage, which he has hitherto kept secret, showing how he is King Marke's own nephew. He is now overwhelmed with honours, and dubbed a knight, but is soon obliged to return to Parmenia to fight the old enemy Morgan. He is victorious and after some time returns to Cornwall, where he finds that the country has been subjugated by the King of Ireland, Gurmun the Proud, who has sent his brother-in-law, Morold, to collect tribute—thirty fair youths—from the Cornishmen. Tristan, on arriving, at once challenges Morold to decide the question of tribute in single combat with himself. They fight: Tristan is wounded; Morold calls upon him to desist from fighting, saying that his weapon is poisoned, and that the wound cannot be healed except by his sister Isot, the wife of King Gurmun. Tristan replies by renewing the attack; Morold falls, and Tristan severs his head from his body, and, on Morold's discomfited followers embarking hastily for their own country, Tristan throws them the head, scornfully bidding them take it as tribute to their king. But on their reaching Ireland, Isot the queen, and Isot the Fair, her daughter, cover it with kisses, and treasure it up to mind them of vengeance upon the slayer of their kinsman. In the skull they find a splinter from the sword, which they keep.

Tristan's wound refuses to heal, and he sets off for Ireland accompanied by Kurwenal to be treated by Queen Isot. On reaching Develin (Dublin), he puts off alone to the shore, in a small boat, taking only his harp with him. He introduces himself to Queen Isot as a merchant named Tantris; she receives him favourably, heals his wound, and appoints him tutor to her daughter, at last, on his earnest entreaty, dismissing him to return to his home.

On returning to Marke's court he finds that intrigues have arisen and a party has been formed to overthrow him. As the nephew of the childless king he is the next heir to the throne of Cornwall, but, being in fear of his life, he persuades Marke to marry, that he may beget a child to be his successor. Reluctantly King Marke permits him to return to Ireland to obtain "the maiden bright as blood on snow," Isot the Fair ("by cunning, stealth, or robbery," says the Norse). There now follows an episode of the regular type. On Tristan reaching Ireland disguised as a merchant, he finds the country being ravaged by a terrible "serpant," and the king has promised his daughter with half of his kingdom to whoever shall rid them of the scourge. Tristan slays the monster, a certain "Trugsess" or steward, who wishes to marry Isot, claims to have achieved the deed, but his fraud is exposed through the machinations of the women. Queen Isot and her daughter have recognized in Tristan their former acquaintance Tantris, and when polishing his armour the princess finds the sword with a gap in its blade exactly fitting the splinter which she has taken from Morold's skull. She now realizes who Tristan is, and, filled with anger and hatred, she goes with the sword to where Tristan is in his bath, determined to wreak instant vengeance upon the slayer of her uncle. Tristan cries for mercy, obscurely hinting that he is able to reward her richly if she will only spare his life. Her mother enters with her attendant or companion, Brangäne (Norse: Bringvet); matters are discussed, Brangäne argues with great eloquence that he will be much more useful to them alive than dead, and at last a bargain is struck. In return for his life Tristan promises that he will find the Princess Isot a husband who is much richer than her father. They all kiss and are reconciled, the princess alone hesitating to make peace with the man whom she hates in her heart. Everything is speedily arranged, King Gurmun consenting to the marriage of his daughter to his country's enemy, the slayer of his kinsman.

Before they depart on the voyage to Cornwall, Queen Isot brews a philtre, which she entrusts to Brangäne, directing her to administer it to King Marke and his bride on the day of their wedding. On the ship Isot continues to nurse her hatred for Tristan. "Why do you hate me?" he asks. "Did you not slay my uncle?" "That has been expiated." "And yet I hate you." By and by they are thirsty, and a careless attendant finding the love-potion handy, gives it to them to drink. At once they are overcome with the most ardent love for each other. Brangäne is drawn into the secret, and on reaching Cornwall, is sent

to take Isot's place in King Marke's bed.

It will not be worth our while to follow the details of the rest of the story, which is made up of a series of shameless tricks played by the lovers upon King Marke, whereby they are enabled to enjoy their love together in secret. At last Tristan is banished the court, and takes refuge with a duke of Arundel in Sussex, named Jovelin, who has a daughter, named Isot of the White Hand, of whom he becomes enamoured. Here Gottfried's story ends, unfinished, but it is continued in the other versions. Isot of the White Hand is married to Tristan, but remains a virgin. We can omit the adventures with giants, etc., which follow, but the end must be related. Tristan has been wounded in a fray, and again no one can heal the wound but his former love, Isot the Fair. A messenger is sent to bring her, with orders that if he has been successful he shall hoist a blue-and-white sail for a signal as the ship approaches; if unsuccessful, a black one. She comes, and the blue-and-white sail is seen; but Isot of the White hand, out of jealousy, informs Tristan that the sail is a black one. Uttering the name Isot he expires. She enters too late, and dies with her arms around him. "And it is related that Isot of the White Hand, Tristan's wife, caused them to be buried on opposite sides of the church, that they might not be together in death. But it came to pass that an oak grew from the grave of each, and they grew so high that their branches twined together above the roof."

Such is the story from which we are asked to believe that Wagner drew the materials for his Tristan drama. The earlier part of Gottfried's story is not unskillfully told; all that relates to Riwalin and the birth of Tristan is worthy to stand beside the best products of German mediaeval poetry. But from the time when Isot and her intriguing mother enter on the scene the story is as dull as it is immoral. What sane-minded person can possibly take an interest in a succession of childish tricks played by two lovesick boobies upon a half-witted old man? The plot is trivial in the extreme, and the characters are contemptible; most contemptible of all are the hero and the heroine. The spectacle of a knight on his knees before two women, imploring them to have mercy upon him, and, in return for his life, promising to find a rich husband for one of them would be hard to match. Add to this the constant obtrusion of the poet's own personality, with his moral reflections and trite philosophy, one can only wonder how the much admired epic can ever have been listened to with patience. Deep indeed must culture have sunk at the courts of Germany when princes and nobles could take pleasure in such fustian while they possessed the stories of the great epics, the Nibelungenlied, the Gudrunlied, and the delicate lyrics of Walther von der Vogelweide.

Wagner's procedure in dealing with such a story as this is that of Siegfried with the sword. Instead of trying to patch and adapt he melts the whole down to create something entirely new out of the material. Wagner's story is not the same as that of "Thomas" and

Gottfried, if for no other reason than that he has only one Isolde. Whatever dramatic interest the older story may possess lies in there being *two* Isoldes, and in Tristan's desertion of one for the other, of an unlawful mistress for a lawful wife. It seems from certain remarks of Wagner[26] that he at first intended to preserve this feature of the original, but discarded it as the emotional unity of his subject-matter grew upon him.

[Footnote 26: Especially his remark on the kinship of the Tristan and Siegfried myths (*Ges. Schr.*, vi. 379), for the kinship lies in the feature I have mentioned, the desertion of one love for another.]

The essential feature of Wagner's drama is that the love of the hero and heroine remains unsatisfied. Their motives are consequently quite different from what they are in Gottfried, and all the complex intrigue which is the chief interest of the older story falls away of necessity. On the other hand he has retained from Gottfried much more than the names of the persons, many subordinate motives, not vital to the story, and likely to be unnoticed by many, but which his skilled eye detected as effective for scenic representation. Such are Isolde's hatred and violent denunciations of Tristan before they drink the philtre (Gottfr. 14539, 11570),[27] Brangäne's distress and remorse at the effect of her trick (11700, 12060); the play upon his name, "Tantris" for "Tristan." Kufferath quotes—unfortunately without giving a reference—a *Minnelied* of Gottfried, which is obviously reproduced in the second act, where the lovers keep harping upon the words "mein und dein." Many references which are obscure in Wagner are explained in Gottfried's epic, such as the circumstances of Tristan's first visit to Isolde in Ireland, with the splinter in Morold's skull. Even the description of the boat in which he came as "klein und arm" is accounted for by Gottfried (7424 seq.). Tristan's motives for insisting upon Marke's marriage are, as we gather from casual indications, the same as those set forth in Gottfried. He has been entangled in political intrigues. Utterly free himself from any sordid or selfish motive, he insists upon Marke's marriage as the only possible means of obtaining tranquillity for his distracted country, whereas in Gottfried he acts under fear of assassination.

[Footnote 27: I quote from the German translation of Karl Pannier in Reclam, which is the most recent.]

CHAPTER VII

WAGNER'S CONCEPTION OF THE TRISTAN MYTHOS

Wagner's treatment of his material is worth a closer consideration

because it is characteristic of his conception of the drama. Like every poet of the first order he regards it exclusively from the moral standpoint. In a former chapter I drew a distinction between the drama which depends upon the play of human actions for their own sakes and that in which the interest is centred in the motives or characters of the actors. The character of any individual is only another name for his permanent will, the abiding metaphysical side of his being and its most direct expression is music, while words are the proper vehicle of the logical intellect. Gottfried's epic—the latter part of it I mean, with which alone we are concerned—is entirely spectacular in the sense in which I have used that term. The poet conducts us through a succession of incidents related as being interesting or amusing in themselves. Wagner, for reasons which I have explained, in dramatizing the story, went to the opposite extreme, and composed a work so entirely musical that it makes the impression of a gigantic symphony. Gottfried cares nothing for the moral characters of his heroes. Wooden, soulless puppets are sufficient for him so long as they act and react upon one another. But the drama which centres in these characters cannot be satisfied with nonentities; the poet had therefore to create them himself, and the incidents then dropped out as superfluous.

For a character to be poetically interesting it is not necessary that it should be faultless. But it must be human—intensely human, both in its virtues and in its defects; then the large-hearted spectator can reverence its nobility and sympathize with its shortcomings without his aesthetic or moral faculties being outraged. Some loftiness of purpose there must be in a dramatic hero, something which raises us out of ourselves and calls forth feelings of worship and awe in spite of what seem to be his errors. "Es irrt der Mensch so lang er lebt"—"It is not the finding of truth, but the honest search for it that profits"; the spectacle of a noble soul striving against adversities and often failing, but never crushed, is one which touches the heart most deeply, and is the proper subject of tragedy. Above all the hero must be truthful; we must not be always on the watch to find him out unawares, as in actual life.

Wagner's drama has been often described as a story of adultery; we are even told that it would have no interest were it not a tale of illicit love, and so it is regarded by nine out of ten of those who witness the performance without having closely studied the text. That such a notion should prevail in spite of the clearness of the text on this point is due to the fact that most people can only conceive of a drama as spectacular. They expect incidents, and, finding none, they seek for pruriency. All they see is a man and woman in passionate love for each other without any hope of ever being married, so they conclude it must come under the familiar heading of illicit love. The difficulty of the language is no doubt partly responsible for this gross misapprehension, and the music gives no help. It tells of the passion, but can say nothing about its legality. Of adultery or illicit love

there can be no question in Wagner's *Tristan*, if for no other reason than that Isolde is not married to King Marke, and owes him no allegiance. She has been carried off to be married to him, but that is quite a different thing. Are we to suppose that after all that happened on board the ship she consented to become the wife of King Marke? Certainly the text gives us no authority to suppose anything so incredible; we only learn from some words of King Marke in the second act that she is still an inviolate virgin. Even if we could believe the gentle and chivalrous Marke capable of committing such an outrage upon a woman as to go through a form of marriage with her against her will, no rite so performed would be binding by any law of God or man. Without her consent she cannot be the wife of King Marke. The point would not be of any real importance did it not seem to lend colour to the absurd charge of licentiousness and sensuality which has so often been brought against Wagner.

I have already remarked that an important difference between the old conception of the story and Wagner's lies in the fact that in the latter their love remains unsatisfied. The notion of their longing being fulfilled is utterly foreign to Wagner's *Tristan*, nor is there at any moment the smallest hope of their ever possessing each other in this life. However consumed they are with love they retain perfect mastery over themselves. This is so abundantly clear from the first moment when their love is revealed—when they drink the potion—that it is inconceivable for a misunderstanding to occur to any one who follows the text with any attention. Were the mistake confined to vulgar and careless people who make up the bulk of the audience, however deplorable, it would be intelligible, but from scholars and professional critics we expect at least acquaintance with the text. An author who enjoys a deservedly high reputation as an authority upon Greek art and is widely read by young students writes in a recent work: "Any one at first hearing of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* would perceive that it was a most immoral subject.... It is an artistic glorification of adultery." How, one must ask, does the learned author reconcile this statement with Tristan's words just before he drinks the supposed poison: "Tristan's Ehre—höchste Treu"? What is the meaning of the whole dialogue of the second act, of Tristan's address to Isolde at the end, and of her reply to him when both go forth to die? How does it come that at last, when all obstacles have been surmounted, when nothing more hinders the lovers from full possession of one another, he deliberately puts an end to his own life? This and much more could only be explained by supposing that Wagner wrote, in operatic fashion, words without meaning, with an eye solely to stage effect. It is the old story! Wagner having been once written down as the poet of licence and immorality, the facts have to be altered to suit the theory.

Tristan's crime is indeed in the eyes of a chivalrous soul a far blacker one than that of adultery. He has betrayed his friend, his sovereign, his kinsman, his benefactor, and has broken his faith

towards the woman who trusted him. He is so completely overcome with love for the woman whom he himself has brought to be the bride of his uncle, that no going back is possible. But one course is yet open to him to save his honour. He may die; and he accordingly seeks death with full consciousness and determination. Three times he tries to rid himself of life: first when he drinks the supposed poison with Isolde; again when he drops his sword in the duel with Melot; the third time he succeeds, when he tears off his bandages at the decisive moment, when no escape is possible but by instant death.

Love for its own sake is not a subject for dramatic treatment. Love-stories are the bane of love. In real life we do not talk about our love-affairs, most men thinking that they have quite enough to do with their own without caring to hear those of other people. Still less do we wish to hear the vapid inanities which seem proper to that condition poured forth on the stage. I know of no European drama of any importance which treats of a prosperous and happy love as its principal subject; it needs the delicate pen of a Kálidása to make it enduring. It does not of course follow that love is to be altogether banished from dramatic art. The dramatist surveys the whole field of human life and could not, if he wished, afford to neglect the most powerful and universal of human motives. All depends upon the treatment, and no subject is more beset with difficulties. The earlier Greek dramatists, with their usual unerring judgment, avoided sexual love, i.e. the love between a young woman and a young man, although love-stories and love-lyrics were well known to them. The only play which has come down to us where love is a predominant motive is the *Trachiniae*. The love of Deianeira is the ardent longing of a highly emotional young woman and mother, but its very intensity brings disaster on both herself and her husband. Broadly speaking, love is a legitimate motive for the dramatist when it is used, not as a purpose in itself, but as a setting for something else. In the words of Corneille, "l'amour ne doit être que l'ornement, et non l'âme de nos pièces," and this is how it is generally employed by the best dramatists. The love of Benedict and Beatrice, for example, is simply a setting for their witty talk and repartee. On the Spanish stage love is often a setting for entertaining intrigue, as in Lope de Vega's *El Perro del Hortelano*. In Schiller's *Wallenstein* the love of Max and Thekla is a refreshing breath of pure air through the abyss of treachery and corruption; almost the same applies to *Romeo and Juliet*, and in both the end is death. Of the Elizabethans, Ford seems to have had a predilection for love-plots, but all, as far as I remember, end tragically. I have selected, as they occurred to me, a few representative plays from the dramatic literature of different countries; an exhaustive inquiry would, I feel sure, only confirm the view that a preference for love subjects for their own sake is a sure sign of decadence in the drama. Goethe, who in his youth swore to dedicate his life to the service of love, and unhappily kept his vow; Goethe, who nauseates us with love in his romances and lyrics, who even in the Eternal City cannot forget

his worship of "Amor" and his visits to his "Liebchen," never misuses love in his dramas. He tells us sarcastically that on the stage, when the lovers are at last united, the curtain falls quickly and covers up the sequel.

A work of art like *Tristan und Isolde* can never be understood by the norms which prevail in society. By the social theory, marriage is a contract between two parties for their mutual advantage; it is inspired by a refined form of selfishness. That spontaneous self-immolation which marks the love of pure and vigorous natures lies beyond its intelligence. The law is satisfied if only the parties subscribe their names in solemn agreement before a proper civil or ecclesiastical authority. It could not well be otherwise, for the true-born *Aphrodite Ourania* will not submit to any bonds but her own. I should be indeed misunderstood if it were thought that I was advocating licence in any form whatever. What is called "free-love" is pure sensuality, the bastard *Aphrodite Pandemos*. Nothing is more sacred to me than the marriage vow, but I hold that the marriage vow itself needs the sanction of love, and that when this is absent, or has broken down in the stress of life, I say—not that sin is justified, but that love will take vengeance upon those who have insulted her name. Lovers whose object is sensual enjoyment with as little personal inconvenience as possible, who break the law while wishing to escape the legal penalty, have nothing in common with Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Those who love for the sake of loving, whose love is stronger than life, who readily and cheerfully accept death as the due penalty of sin, these, and these alone, are beyond the pale of human conventions; they can only be judged by the laws of a higher morality than that of human tribunals.

Some details of the story we must construct for ourselves, and are entitled to do so when they are not essential. The poet is himself not always conscious of all the bearings of what he composes; he works by inspiration, not by reason, and we know that Wagner himself was sometimes under singular delusions with regard to his own works. Two questions will occur to everybody at the beginning: 1. Has Isolde started on the voyage to be the bride of King Marke with her own consent? 2. Does she love Tristan before they drink the potion? Many will answer these questions quite positively, the first in the negative, the second in the affirmative. But the indications are very shadowy indeed in the text, and the old story, the only source which could throw any light on the question, tells the contrary in both cases. Perhaps it will be contended that the constant presence of the love-motive at decisive moments leaves no doubt that they love each other from the beginning. To this I reply that it is not possible for a musical strain by itself to prove anything. It can only call to mind as a reminiscence something with which it has been definitely connected before. We cannot do better than leave such questions to be answered by each according to his own judgment. Like a skilful painter Wagner has drawn secondary incidents with a shadowy outline in order

that the attention may be concentrated on the main features. The main thing is to realize that they are inessential, but those who feel the need of greater clearness may reconstruct for themselves. My own belief is that their feelings at the beginning of the first act are a very subtle and complex mixture, of which they could not then have given a very clear account even to themselves, and that the poet has therefore, with consummate artistic skill, purposely left them unexplained.

The one decisive and all-important motive of the drama is the love of the hero and the heroine in conflict with Tristan's honour; and on this the whole force of the musical torrent is concentrated. In the end love must prevail. Love, with Wagner, is the divine possession which dominates every noble heart, but here it is incompatible with the conditions of human life, and of that honour which is its very breath. And so at the end, as the lovers pass through their death-agony clasped in each other's embrace, the love-motive soars triumphant and joyous above the surging billows of the orchestra, and they are united in the more glorious love beyond, in the "love that is stronger than death."

I have now to speak of Wagner's much discussed "pessimism." At first sight it might seem a strange contradiction to speak of pessimism in a man who composed *Die Meistersinger*, whose love of all things beautiful was a passion, whose faith in human nature, unshaken by every disillusionment, would almost seem like madness, did we not know that it was that very faith which finally carried him through to victory. Wagner's pessimism was not borrowed from Schopenhauer, but was his own, as it is, in one form or another, the creed of every thinking man, the foundation of every satisfying philosophy and art. Pessimism does not consist in looking only at the dark side of things, and closing the eyes to all that is beautiful; that is blindness and ignorance, not philosophy. Pessimism is on the contrary the outcome of an intense love, of a passionate delight in the harmony, the fitness, and beauty of nature, inspiring a keenly sympathetic soul. He cannot close his eyes to the fact that all this lovely world is made to perish; that its individuals are engaged in a fierce warfare upon one another; each preys upon its fellows with a savagery which shuns no cruelty and reck of no crime. Love itself in its mortal embodiment withers and turns to evil. His moral sense tells him that this ought not to be; there must be some delusion; is it in nature or is it in his own understanding? As a rule we put this darker aspect of nature out of sight; we exclude the poor, the vicious, the unhappy from our company, because they would hinder us in our mad pursuit of pleasure, and it needs the strength and sincerity which accompany the advance of years to bring a revolt against the selfish blindness of our youth. As we watch and learn from the terrible tragedy of nature, as we realize more and more the baseness and depravity of human life, our faith becomes stronger that beauty, truth, righteousness, are eternal and cannot be born only that they may perish; that man is not "a wild and

ravering beast held in check only by the bonds of civilization," but is a divine and immortal being. Our vision gradually opens and we learn more clearly that all which we once took for pleasure and for pain are unreal, visionary reflections from a higher and purer existence where all creation is united in the eternal embrace of love. For those who, through courage and sincerity, through faith and hope and love, have attained the higher insight, have seen the very face of Brahm behind the delusive veil of Mâyâ, there is no discord or contradiction in all this; despair gives way to a resigned quietism, to that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Such is the ineffable insight of the artist, and no poetry is satisfying which does not spring from this source. Wagner in the letter I quoted before, speaks of the cheerful playfulness of Spanish poets after they had adopted the ascetic life. The philosophic pessimist is not a fretful and malignant caviller who sneers at the follies of others because he thinks himself so much wiser than they. Any one may note among the ascetics of his acquaintance, those who take no pleasure in what delights others and live a life of self-denial and abstemiousness, how cheerful is their conversation, how bright and steadfast their glance, how their tolerance of the follies of others is only equalled by the saintliness of their own lives.

Such is Wagner's pessimism; it is the pessimism of the Vedânta philosophy; that is to say, it is most clearly formulated in that system, and in the Upanishads upon which it rests, but really it is the common basis of all religions.[28] It breathes in the poems of Hafiz, in the philosophy of Parmenides, Plato, and the Stoics, in the profound wisdom of Ecclesiastes, in mediaeval mysticism, and the faith of the early Christian Church. Buddhism and Christianity are both pessimist in their origin. It is not an "opinion," i.e. a creed or formula which may be weighed and either accepted or rejected, but is an insight which, when once understood and felt, is as self-evident as the air we breathe. But it is an insight which can only be attained through moral discipline, never through the rationalism of vulgar and self-seeking minds. Nor is it for those who are enlightened at all moments of their lives, but only in times of poetic exaltation, when the faculties are awake and become creative.

[Footnote 28: Except Islam, which is rather a moral discipline than a religion.]

CHAPTER VIII

ON CERTAIN OBJECTIONS TO THE WAGNERIAN DRAMA

In this chapter I propose to consider certain criticisms which are

often made on Wagner's treatment of the drama, which differ from some of those mentioned before, in being intelligible and worthy of respect, since they have not been made maliciously or through ignorance. In so far as they are invalid they rest upon misunderstandings which can easily be accounted for by Wagner's unparalleled originality, by the novelty of his art, necessarily involving a wide departure from the classic standards by which alone the critic can form his judgment. To comprehend his work we must give up many of those cherished canons which hitherto have passed unquestioned.

Wagner's *Tristan* has often—even by Lichtenberger—been described as a philosophic work; and as abstract thought or philosophy, it is said, is foreign to art, a work which admits it must be condemned. Let us first understand what is meant by philosophy. It is surely a train of thought in the mind of the spectator, not in the object which he contemplates. Anything in the world may be the subject of philosophic thought, or may suggest it; there is plenty of philosophy to be drawn from a daisy, but we do not therefore call a daisy a philosophic flower. So, too, we may philosophize about Wagner's *Tristan*, but the philosophy is our own; it is not in the work. What is meant no doubt is that the work itself is not a concrete reality, but an exposition of an abstract conception. Philosophy has only herself to blame if abstractions are in the naïf, ordinary mind opposed to realities, for it is unhappily true that nearly the whole of our current philosophy does consist of abstractions which are mere "Hirngespinnste," rooted in words and not in nature; philosophy itself has in art become a term of reproach from being associated with unreality. We must, however, distinguish between notions which are real but difficult to grasp and those which cannot be grasped, because there is nothing in them, and this distinction cannot be made without thought and labour from which the ordinary mind shrinks, being too indolent or indifferent. Poetry is not opposed to philosophy, and is not the less poetry when it concerns itself with those higher notions which are outside the range of our more ordinary comprehension, [Greek: hos philosophias ousaes megistaes monsikaes]. Both poetry and philosophy deal in abstractions, only in both the abstractions must be true, i.e. must be true general statements of ideas found in nature; when this is the case poetry and philosophy are indistinguishable, except by mere external and conventional features. Under which heading are we to class, for example, Plato's *Republic*? Or the *Upanishads*? or the book of *Job*? They are generally thought of as philosophy, but all who have even partially understood them will feel their poetic spell. Or if we take our greatest poems, to mention only some of those most familiar to us: *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust* or Marlowe's, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát*—all of these might be just as well classed under philosophy as under poetry. Only untrue philosophy is unpoetical, that which has grown out of the reason of man. Abstractions manufactured by human reason are no more philosophy than an account of centaurs

and gryphons is natural history. They are not to be found in Wagner's *Tristan*.

The particular philosophy which Wagner's *Tristan* is supposed to set forth is that of Schopenhauer. But Schopenhauer's doctrine of Negation of Will or Nirvâna—for it is identical with that of Buddhism—is a negation of existence itself absolutely. The man who puts an end to his own life does not attain Nirvâna; he is not dissatisfied with life in itself, but only with its conditions, and he passes through the endless cycle of Samsâra until the moment arrives when, sickened with the wearisome struggle, he longs for complete annihilation. The lovers in *Tristan* look forward to a renewed existence beyond the grave, in the "realm of night," where, freed from the trammels of the senses their love will endure, purified from the pollution of human lust in glory undimmed by the sordid conditions of human life.

Sehnen hin zur heil'gen Nacht
Wo ur-ewig einzig wahr
Liebes-Wonne ihm lacht.

Such a future life would with Schopenhauer only be a renewal of the misery of existence in another form. It is the Christian, not the Buddhist, way of feeling that inspires the lovers. Christianity starts from the insufficiency and misery of human life, but contemplates redemption therefrom by love, whereas Buddhism conceives of no possibility of redemption. Its release is annihilation, and it is a religion of despair, not of hope.

It would be interesting, if it did not take us too far from our present subject, to compare this conception of love with that of Sokrates as set forth in the *Symposium* of Plato. Sokrates believed fully in immortality, but wisely refrained from speculating on the conditions of existence after death. His *Eros* is confined to this life, but none the less he treats it as a divine gift. Love is the mediator and interpreter between gods and men; and love of the beautiful, which manifests itself in the procreation and love of offspring, is the desire for immortality, the children being the continuation of the immortal part of their parents.[29] This is the lower mystery. The higher, which is not revealed to all, is the gradual expansion of love until it comprehends the eternal Idea. The beauty which we love in the individual becomes a stepping-stone from which we may rise to the love of all beautiful things, passing from one to many, from beautiful forms to beautiful deeds, from them to beautiful thoughts, laws, institutions, sciences, until we contemplate the vast sea of beauty in the boundless love of wisdom, a beauty which does not grow and perish, but is eternal. There could be no finer commentary on Wagner's *Tristan* than this wondrous speech of Sokrates in the *Symposium*.

[Footnote 29: It is worth noting in passing how this beautiful conception of Plato coincides with views expressed in our own day by a scientific man of the highest distinction, the foremost living representative of Darwinian evolution, Professor Weismann. See his *Essays on Heredity*.]

It is true, however paradoxical it may seem, that Wagner's very stupendous power is itself a source of weakness; it is too great for more limited minds to grasp. If love is really the one divine fact of human existence, to which all else is as nothing; and if at the same time a pure and burning love resolutely followed of necessity leads to destruction, then how are we to live at all? Is this life to count for nothing? I shall not attempt to answer this question. I cannot bring the truth that all noble and generous actions are bound to end in failure, to bring death upon their doers, within the scheme of a divinely ordered universe. I will only observe that it is a truth tacitly acknowledged by all who compose tragedies or take pleasure in witnessing them. How else could we endure to contemplate the failure and destruction of a Lear, a Wallenstein, a Deianira, an Antigone?

Here our attempts to extract philosophy out of the Tristan drama must cease. My only purpose has been to show that its abstractions are warm with the living breath of reality, and whatever is beyond this must be left for the student to carry out for himself, from the point of view of his own mind. Such exercises are interesting and salutary to the philosophic mind, but for minds trained in the modern formulas of "self-interest" and "liberty" they are only possible after a complete reconstruction of the foundations of knowledge, a "reevaluation of all values."

The decisive part played by the magic love-potion has given rise to much comment. Hostile critics ridicule it, and condemn the whole work as turning on an absurdity, while those who are favourable try to explain it away, but their explanations have always seemed to me more unnatural than the thing explained. Why may we not accept it as it is evidently intended? In art at least, rationalism has not yet—thanks perhaps to Shakespearian traditions—prevailed so far that we must exclude supernatural motives altogether. Wagner could scarcely have used the myth and the names of Tristan and Isolde without introducing the philtre with which they have always been associated. It would be just as reasonable to explain away the ghost in *Hamlet* as the love-potion of Isolde; if we accept one we can accept the other, for in both the prime mover of the tragedy is supernatural. Lessing, in comparing the ghost of Hamlet's father with the ghost of Ninus in Voltaire's *Semiramis*, has some remarks which are equally valid for all supernatural motives in the drama. The principle which he evolves is that a supernatural being to be admissible must interest us for its own sake as a living and acting personage; in other words, it must be an organic portion of the play, not a mere machine brought in for stage effect. "Voltaire treats the apparition of a dead person as

a miracle, Shakespeare as a perfectly natural occurrence.” I do not think that the difference between what is allowable and what is not could be more clearly put than in this last sentence. We are not obliged to believe that the potion is the sole cause of their love; that they hated each other as deadly enemies at one moment and became lovers at the next. Such a notion would be altogether too crude. We are justified in supposing that behind Isolde’s rage and Tristan’s disdain there lies a deeper feeling, as yet unconfessed but sufficiently deep-rooted to endure when the anger of the moment has passed away, and that this is what is effected by the draught.

A very marked characteristic or mannerism of Wagner’s dramas is the tedious length of explanation in some scenes or soliloquies, and they have often been severely criticized. There is one in *Tristan*, King Marke’s speech at the end of Act II., and I may say at once that after all that has been said the objections cannot be entirely set aside. It numbers nearly two hundred bars in slow tempo, and takes about ten minutes. The argument generally used in defending it is that the action is laid within, and the interest is in the music. But the objection—to me at least—is not that the action is at a standstill, but that the scene is undramatic, and much of it unmitigated prose. The action has stood still nearly all through the act, but no one would wish to miss a bar of any other portion. The king’s reproaches of his friend and vassal for his treachery, and the music with its gloomy orchestration, mostly of horns, bassoons, viola, and lower strings, with occasional English horn, and the deepest notes of the clarinet interspersed with wails of the bass-clarinet, are profoundly touching and proceed naturally out of the situation. Had there been nothing more than these it might have been much shorter, but Wagner has taken the occasion to try to throw some light upon the circumstances that preceded the events of the play. If they were to be told they should have been told earlier. Here we have forgotten our perplexity at the beginning and are now thrilled with the situation, not at all in the mood for hearing explanations. Nor does it really explain; if the hearer does not already know why Isolde was brought to be the bride of King Marke, he will scarcely learn it from Marke’s speech.

When I spoke just now of Wagner’s predilection for long soliloquies and prosy explanations as a mannerism, I do not think that I was expressing myself too strongly. Thus in *Die Walküre*, in Wotan’s long speech to Brünnhilde in Act II., he sketches the main events of *Das Rheingold*. In *Siegfried* the amusing riddle scene, a reminiscence of the Eddic *Alvismál*, seems intended to relate events which have gone before. In *Götterdämmerung* it is Siegfried who just before his death tells the story of the preceding evening.[30] In *Parsifal* Gurnemanz explains all the circumstances to the Knappen. How undramatic are these explanations we shall realize when we compare them with such soliloquies as Tannhäuser’s account of his pilgrimage or Siegmund’s story of his life, which, though

equally lengthy, keep us spellbound from the first bar to the last, because they directly lead up to and form part of the scene which is actually before us. Tannhäuser's wild aspect and manner, Siegmund's desolation and longing for community with other human beings, are in direct connection with the story told.

[Footnote 30: From which we may conclude that Wagner when composing the tetralogy contemplated the separate numbers being sometimes performed singly. For this the explanations are again inadequate. Much better it would have been to provide at the performance a short printed or spoken introduction, a plan which in my humble opinion might well be adopted in most plays.]

I am, of course, only expressing an individual opinion, because I feel bound in giving a full account of the work to say how it appears to me; others may very probably feel it differently. It matters little. Even if I am right in thinking that Wagner has miscalculated the effect on the stage, *Tristan* will still remain a work immeasurably superior to a thousand that are faultless.

CHAPTER IX

MUSIC AS AN ART OF EXPRESSION

"Art generally ... as such, is nothing but a noble and expressive language, invaluable as a vehicle of thought, but by itself nothing.

"Art, properly so called, is no recreation; it cannot be learned at spare moments, nor pursued when we have nothing better to do. It is no handiwork for drawing-room tables, no relief of the ennui of boudoirs; it must be understood and undertaken seriously or not at all. To advance it, men's lives must be given, and to receive it, their hearts."

These words, among the first written for serious publication by John Ruskin when he was a young graduate of Oxford, are the text of his whole life's teaching.

"Daily and hourly," writes Carlyle, "the world natural grows out of a world magical to me.... Daily, too, I see that there is no true poetry but in reality."

More than two thousand years before Plato had written in the third book of his *Republic* against the indifference to manly virtue and the cult of a languishing effeminacy in the poetry and art of his day. He inveighs against the [Greek: panarmonia] and [Greek:

poluchodia] of the musicians, by which we may understand over-instrumentation,—as if the Athenians even then had their Berliozes and Strausses—and continues (I quote from Jowett's translation): "Neither we nor our guardians whom we have to educate can ever become musical until we and they know the essential forms of temperance ([Greek: *sophrosunae*]), courage, liberality, magnificence ([Greek: *megalorepeia*]), and their kindred, etc."

The teaching of all these three great masters, and I might have multiplied quotations from the works of the greatest—but only from those of the greatest—thinkers of ancient and modern times, is the same: that art is not a mere play of beautiful forms, but that the artist must know a truth and have been able to express it; that his work must be approved or condemned according as that truth is healthful or the reverse. It is the doctrine of sincerity, and is opposed to the common and weaker doctrine of "art for art's sake"—i.e. that art is self-contained, that we occupy ourselves with it solely for the pleasure which it affords through our senses, that it has no didactic purpose. By this latter view, beauty in art is an idea quite distinct from utility or morality; by the other, beauty, utility, and morality are fundamentally one, being all emanations from the one supreme Idea of creation named by Plato—"the Good," or "the Good in itself," "the Idea of Good."

Can we apply this distinction to music? All the other arts derive their subject-matter from the material world, but Polyhymnia seems to detach herself from her sisters, to soar away from the things of this earth, and to dwell in the ethereal regions of pure ideality. The objects of painting, poetry, sculpture, etc., are those of our surroundings; the artist only puts the things familiar to us in nature in a new light, and, by concentrating the attention upon certain aspects, reveals much that minds less poetic than his had not noticed before. The morality which these arts are able to convey is the morality of nature. But music is not concerned with any material objects; its means are rhythm, melodic intervals, harmony, all purely ideal existences, and seemingly all connected in some mysterious way with number, itself an immaterial idea of time. And although the manner of our perception of harmony has, to some extent, that of melody to a still smaller extent, been explained in our time by physiologists, the explanations only relate to the form of our perception. They show how, through the harmonic overtones, the mind is able to recognize the connection between a chord and the one which preceded it, but cannot tell why one progression of harmonies is pleasant, another the reverse, as Helmholtz himself was fully aware. How then can it be possible for music to be a vehicle of thought? What can it have to do with "temperance, courage, liberality"?

The question is not one which I can hope fully to answer within these pages, but it cannot be altogether passed over; we must know something of the nature of music, must have some clear notion of what it is if

we are to understand its relation to language in the drama. The explanation given by Leibnitz that it is an *„exercitium arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi“* is quite inadequate. Music is not a purely intellectual affection like that of number and proportion, but is in the highest degree emotional. The pleasure which we receive from contemplating a mathematical process of great complexity is altogether different from that of music. Highly complex as are the mathematical relations of the vibrations which convey musical tones from the instrument to the ear the final result of those relations, the impression on the rods of Corti's organ in the Cochlea, are as purely physiological as the impressions of touch. Scientific, i.e. inductive, research must always find an end at the point where the organs become too small for observation; it can throw no light on the nature of the impression transmitted from Corti's organ to the consciousness.

A suggestion has been put forward by Schopenhauer which may be viewed as an attempt to explain transcendently the nature of music. It is well known that, according to Schopenhauer, a work of art represents the (Platonic) Idea of the object which it depicts, this Idea being itself the first and highest stage of objectivation of Will. Music is, however, a direct objectivation of Will, i.e. not through an Idea.

Music, therefore, is not like the other arts the image (Abbild) of an Idea, but an image of the Will itself, of which the Ideas are also the objectivity. This is why the impression which music makes upon us is so much more powerful and more penetrating than that of the other arts, for they tell only of the shadow, music of the substance. But inasmuch as it is the same will that objectivates itself, only in quite different ways in the Ideas and in music, so there results, not indeed a *„resemblance“*, but rather a *„parallelism“*, an *„analogy“* between music and the Ideas which appear in the world, multiplied and imperfect as phenomena.

Beyond this we must not follow our author. Schopenhauer no doubt possessed a very keen sense for music, but his theoretical education was of the slightest, and his further remarks make the impression of his having read up *„ad hoc“* some theoretical writer of his time. But we may accept his definition as at least a first step in the inquiry.

The objective world lies before us in two forms, as light and as sound. From the visible world of light we receive all the data for our *„understanding“*, in the forms of time, space, and causality. Beside it lies the world of sound, in time alone, and appealing directly to our inner emotional consciousness, or, as we vaguely express it, to the *„feelings“*, which the light-world can only reach indirectly through the understanding. Both these worlds are fundamentally one, differing only in their manifestation, and, however diverse they may appear, they are united by the element common to

both, Rhythm. In general the language of the understanding is articulate speech, that of the emotions is music. The Unity subsisting between these two worlds, of understanding and emotion, of language and music, can only be realized intuitively; it can scarcely be demonstrated. But we have vivid illustrations of it in many familiar facts, for instance, that animals are able to make themselves understood to us and to each other without articulate language, by gesture and song. Thus we have the mutual relations of the two dramatic elements. Shortly stated, words tell the story, music the feelings of the persons. Gesture would seem to hold a place between language and song, appealing to the emotions as directly, and sometimes almost as forcibly as sound.[31] These relations are not so sharply marked off from each other as appears in the analysis. In a highly wrought organism each part, while keeping strictly to its own functions, is nevertheless capable to some extent, when necessity arises, of extending its field. It is like a well-disciplined army where the duties of each unit are strictly laid down, but where the units themselves possess intelligence and are capable when needful of independent action, and a continual intercommunication between all the parts ensures their harmonious working.

[Footnote 31: The reader who is interested will find the subject more fully treated in Wagner's *„Beethoven...“*]

Applying what has been said to the drama let us select one incident of our work, the tearing down of the torch by Isolde in the second act. The words have told us that the torch is a signal of danger, and now the sounds of the hunt having died away, its removal informs Tristan that the way is clear for him to approach. More than this the poet could scarcely do in the words. To have expatiated upon the awful consequences which the lovers know full well must inevitably follow, on the conflict of hope, awe, heroic resolution, defiance of the certain death before them—to have told all this in words would have necessitated a long speech, most unnatural and undramatic at such a moment of tension, and could scarcely have avoided degenerating into bombast. By a few simple transitions, a few devices of instrumentation, the orchestra relates all this and much more, while Isolde's flute-motive, so exquisitely graceful and tender in the preceding scene, has now become a shriek of resolution bewildered but undaunted in the supreme crisis, above the savage call of the trumpets to death. So far the music; we *see* in the torch hurled from its shining post and left expiring on the ground, a symbol of the drama that is concentrated in the act; of Tristan's glory extinguished in the realm of night. All this in the scenic representation forms one issue, the different elements coalescing in the hearer's mind into a single dramatic incident.

Wagner's view of the relation of music to words has been the subject of much controversy, often unhappily very heated. Before Wagner the common notion was that music in combination with words had only to enforce them and to accentuate their declamation. Such was the view of

Gluck. As regards lyric productions, the setting of songs to music, this principle may be sufficient, but the case is different when both words and music are controlled by a dramatic action.

Another view places music in a class altogether by itself, apart from the other arts, and unable to unite with them except in so far as to employ them as its vehicle. Wherever music appears in company with poetry, music must take the lead, must be governed by its own laws, retain its own forms, while poetry, its compliant servant, must avoid all higher expression and accommodate itself as best it can to the music. So the highest form of music will be instrumental, where it is unfettered by the ties of poetry.

A little work published in the fifties by the Vienna critic, Dr. E. Hanslick, entitled *Vom musikalisch-Schönen*, discusses this question very fully. It attained great celebrity at the time of its publication and is still read. It is the best attempt that I have seen to state theoretically the case against Wagner in sober and reasoned language, and though it contains a few misunderstandings it is free from offensive personalities and well worthy of attention. The author is a disciple of that school of German aestheticians of which F. Th. Vischer is the foremost representative.

According to Dr. Hanslick, music, being an art isolated from objective nature, can never be anything but music. Whatever it expresses can only be stated in terms of music; it can never present a definite human "feeling." The essence of music is movement, and it can represent certain dynamic ideas. Thus, although it can never express love, hope, longing, etc., since those feelings involve a perception (*Vorstellung*) or a concept (*Begriff*), things foreign to its nature, it can represent given ideas as strong, weak, increasing, diminishing, etc.—or as anything which is a function of time, movement, and proportion. It can also *by analogy* suggest in the hearer the ideas of pleasing, soft, violent, elegant, and the like. Whatever is beyond this is symbolical. Movement and symbolism are the only means by which music can express anything. The notion that music can express a definite feeling was, the author declares, universally held by aestheticians at that time, and amongst those who held it he seems to include Wagner. By way of exposing its fallacy he quotes the air from Gluck's *Orpheus*:

[Music: J'ai per - du mon Eu - ri - di - ce— rien n'é - ga - le mon mal - heur.]

It would be possible, he says, to substitute words of an exactly opposite meaning—

J'ai trouvé mon Euridice,
Rien n'égale mon bonheur—

without the music being affected in any way. This being so, he continues, music can never unite with words to express any notion at all, and the only form artistically admissible is absolute or instrumental music. The pleasure which it imparts is the same as that which we derive from a kaleidoscope, except in so far as it is ennobled by the fact of its emanating from a human mind instead of from a machine. The union of music with words is a morganatic marriage, in which the words must suffer violence. With this the author believes himself to have demolished Wagner's canon that in the musical drama the music is only a means, the end being the drama.

Undoubtedly there is much truth in these observations. If for the moment we confine our attention to instrumental music it is undeniable that a musical melody in itself can never be anything but music. Wagner himself has insisted that music attains all the fulness of which it is capable as absolute or instrumental music, and as this truth has been too often forgotten by composers, we have nothing but gratitude for an author who once more strives to bring it into notice. But it is only a one-sided truth, and insufficient. By the same rigid reasoning it might be contended that a human face, being nothing but modelling and colour, can never express anything but functions of lines and forms, and colours. Everything in nature as well as in art has for those who look below the surface a significance beyond its external features. Nor does it follow that music will always remain content with its own glorious isolation, that it will never seek for union with other arts, sacrificing indeed its pristine purity, but gaining mightily in warm human expression. Even in the heyday of absolute music, in the instrumental compositions of Sebastian Bach, we may notice this tendency, though here it is rather the dance than poetry with which it strives to ally itself; while in Beethoven's symphonies the yearning for human community and human fellowship is noticeable from the first, and in the final work it breaks its bonds and dissolves into song.

The primary error in Dr. Hanslick's argument is that it begins at the wrong end, and tacitly assumes that art can be controlled by theoretical speculations. An *a priori* development of the theory of art out of supposed first principles must in the end lead to contradictions and absurdities, and every one must feel his conclusion that the union of music and words is illegitimate—a view which, among other things, would deprive us of Schubert's songs—to be an absurdity. Had the inquiry commenced with familiar instances from existing works of art in which music is felt to possess a very vivid power of expression and then been carried backwards to find what it can express and what not, and what are the conditions of its expression, the results might have been valuable and we should have been spared a dissertation resting wholly upon confusion of the meaning of words. Here a definite meaning has been attached to the word "feeling" (*Gefühl*); it is understood as including such feelings as "hope," "love," "fear," etc. These, of course, music

cannot express. Wagner himself insists that music can never express a *definite* feeling, and even censures it as a "misunderstanding" on the part of Beethoven that in his later works he attempted to do so.[32] The best word to denote what music can express is that used by Helmholtz—*Gemüthstimmung*—untranslatable into English, but for which we may use the term "emotional mood" as denoting something similar. It is a *tuning* or a *tone* of the mind, a *mood* that music expresses, and from a word of such vague meaning there is no risk of false deductions being drawn.

[Footnote 32: Wagner, *Ges. Schr.*, iii. 341; iv. 387.]

All our musical sense revolts against the dictum that music cannot under any circumstances express a general feeling. Take, for example, Agatha's outburst on seeing the approach of her lover Max in the second act of *Der Freischütz*:

[Music: All' *mei - ne Pul - se schla-gen, und das Herz wallt un - ge - stüm, Süß ent - - zückt ent - ge - - gen ihm,.... etc.*]

Would it be possible to hear this passage and not feel the melody as a direct and most vivid expression of joy?—joy, that is, in the abstract, but not a definite joy at some given event—that is told by the words and scenery? Whatever share words and gesture may contribute is as nothing compared with that exultant and rapturous outburst of melody. Wherever there is any character-drawing in Italian opera, it is in the music, not in the words, as, for example, in the more dramatic portions of Elvira's music in *Don Giovanni*. The frequent movement in octaves imparts a nobility and dignity to her expression which are altogether absent in the words.

The paraphrase of the words of the air from Gluck's *Orphée* is amusing enough as a *jeu d' esprit*, but surely cannot be taken seriously. Hanslick seems to have misapprehended the music; it does not express grief, and is not intended to. The *words* express the desolation of Orpheus at the loss of his beloved, but the *Stimmung* of the melody is one of calm resignation. It is the serene self-restraint with which Gluck loves to imbue his classic heroes and heroines, and which is equally appropriate to joy and grief. Grillparzer, whose authority both as a dramatist and as a sensitive lover of music is rightly esteemed very highly, has declared that it would be possible to take any one of Mozart's *arias*, and set words of quite different meaning to them. This may be true of many of Mozart's *arias*, which were often composed more with regard to the organ of a particular singer than to the text before him, but is assuredly not true of his great dramatic scenes and finales.

Whatever value such speculations may possess vanishes before the unconscious instinct of the creating artist. It is well known that

German dramatists and poets have from the beginning felt keenly the need of musical expression. If the need was less felt by English dramatists of our great period the reason is that it required the development of music in the hands of the great German masters before its power could be fully known. Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Hoffmann, Richter, and a host of others all sighed for the aid of music.[33] Kleist declared music to be the root of all the other arts. Their dream could not be realized until the right form of the drama which could unite with music had been found. It was at last found by Wagner after repeated trial and failure. He determined the form as that in which the characters act out of their own inner impulses. The historical drama shows men as torn hither and thither by external political considerations. The action is impelled by wheels within wheels of intrigue and complex psychological mechanism. For such subjects the romance, with its almost unlimited powers of expatiation, is the proper vehicle, but they are unfitted for music; they necessitate wearisome explanations of complicated motives altogether foreign to the direct emotional character of musical drama. The musical character is the one who is entirely himself, and whose motives are therefore clear from the first; such subjects are to be found above all in the mythologies of imaginative and poetically gifted peoples. That does not of course mean that other subjects are excluded, for there is no domain of life which may not offer the same conditions, provided only that the characters have a strong and well-marked individuality. When once this principle was discovered the musical drama became a reality. Wagner uses for this form of drama the term *„reinmenschlich“*—purely human—an expression which was in keeping with the humanitarian views prevalent at the time when he wrote, but not free from objection and apt to be misunderstood in our day.

[Footnote 33: Many utterances of German poets to this effect will be found reproduced in Chamberlain's *„Richard Wagner“*.]

If the drama longed for the means of expressing its own inmost nature, no less did music seek for a nearer approach to objectivity and to the conditions of human existence. If it is true that music is the root of all the arts, then it must also be the root of human life, and must seek to reveal itself in life and in the drama which is the mirror of life. The desire for human expression is already, as we have seen, very clearly discernible in the symphonies and sonatas of Beethoven, but it is since his time that the most remarkable development has taken place. The programme music of Berlioz, Liszt, and other composers has rightly been condemned by many critics, but the mistake was in the manner of the composition rather than in the intention, which was natural, indeed inevitable. Wagner's assertion that with Beethoven "the last symphony has been written"—rationally understood, of course, as meaning that nothing beyond is possible on instrumental lines—is quite true. There was nothing left but for music to take form in things of human interest. Only the composers, perhaps as much

from want of an adequate dramatic form as from want of skill, failed to attain their end. While evidently striving to follow out Beethoven's hint, „mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei“, their powers failed, and they produced more „Malerei“ than „Empfindung“. The reader may consider by the light of these remarks the passage in Liszt's „Faust“ symphony in the slow movement, where Gretchen is represented as plucking a daisy, repeating, „He loves me, he loves me not,“ etc. The composer has depicted the scene with wonderful skill and exquisite poetic feeling, but the essence of Goethe's scene, which lies entirely in its unconscious innocence, is gone in this highly wrought artificial presentation. It is the difference between nature and art, between the naïve, pure-minded maiden and the actress painted and decorated for the stage.

There are few persons, I believe, who on hearing an instrumental composition do not feel a desire to form a mental picture of its contents, so to speak, to objectivate it in their minds. Aestheticians tell us that we are wrong, and we are apt to laugh at each other's pictures, but we all do it. Beethoven, as we know from his friend Schindler and his pupil Ries, often, if not always, had some object before him when composing his instrumental works. The fact that the same music suggests different interpretations to different minds will not disturb us if we remember that music does not and never can „depict“ or „describe“ its object: for that we have the arts of poetry and painting. What music can give is the emotional mood which it calls forth, and which may be common to many objects very different in their external character. A „stormy“ movement may be referred to a storm of winds and waves, or to a storm of human passions, and so might suggest a battle, a shipwreck, a revolution, a violent emotion of love or hatred, or a play of Shakespeare. But the aversion which we naturally feel to the labelling of sonatas and symphonies with titles is in my opinion justifiable,[34] because here we recognize an attempt to stereotype one particular interpretation, instead of leaving the mind of each hearer free to form his own.

[Footnote 34: The latest and most atrocious outrage on good taste in this respect is the labelling of Beethoven's great B flat sonata as „the Hammerklavier.“ All musicians of finer feeling should unite to kill this absurd name.]

A musical composition is a vessel into which many wines can be poured. It cannot in itself express either any material object or any definite feeling which involves such an object. No music can alone, without a suggestion from elsewhere, express a person, a place, or love or fear or a battle or „a calm sea and prosperous voyage,“ or any similar thing. But it has a marvellous power of receiving suggestions which are offered to it, by words or otherwise, of carrying them on and, by means of its own forces of movement and proportion, intensifying their expression to, a degree inconceivable without its aid. Mathematics

present an exact analogy to music, and are to science what music is to art. Both are ideal forms which in one sense only attain complete individuality when they are pure, but in another sense have no meaning until they are applied to some object of nature. A mathematical formula is only true so long as it remains an ideal in the mind; but its existence has no other purpose than to state a law for material phenomena, when it at once loses its essential qualities as a mathematical formula, certainty and accuracy. In this way we may understand simultaneously the supremacy of absolute music and the truth for which Wagner contends, that music can never be anything but expression.

Dr. Hanslick's dictum that music has no other means for its expression than movement and symbolism cannot be admitted. It can express through association. All the senses have in some degree the faculty of recalling in the mind impressions with which they have once been associated. Who has never had the memory of his home or of some place familiar to his childhood recalled by the scent of a flower or a plant? No sense possesses this power in anything like the same degree as that of hearing, especially when the connection has been established through a musical strain. It is on this principle that Wagner mainly relies in his dramatic musical motives. In itself the connection is in the first instance artificial. A musical strain of a striking individual character is brought into connection with some idea of the drama, it may be a person or a scene or an incident, in short, anything which may serve as a dramatic motive, and thenceforward whenever the musical strain is heard, the idea with which it has been associated will be called up in the mind of the hearer. All the resources of modern music are then at the disposal of the composer for exhibiting his motive in the most varied lights, intensifying, varying, contrasting, or combining with other motives, as the dramatic situation requires.

It often happens that the musical strain is heard before its association with an idea of the drama has been established, as, for example, in the instrumental prelude. The idea then seems to hover in the music as a vague *presentiment* (*Ahnung*) of something that is to come. A superb example of this occurs at the end of *Die Walküre*. Wotan has laid his daughter to rest, and surrounded her with a barrier of fire. "Let none cross this fire who dreads my spear," he cries, and at once the threat is answered by a defiant blast from the trombones uttering a strain which has not yet taken definite form, but which we learn from the sequel is the theme proper to Siegfried the hero, who is destined to bring to an end the power of the god.

Or the motive may reappear after it has served its purpose on the stage; it is then a *reminiscence* of past events. No finer example of this could be found than in the music of Isolde's swan-song, the so-called *Liebestod*, which is built up out of

the motives of the life into a symphonic structure of almost unparalleled force and truth.

CHAPTER X

SOME REMARKS ON THE MUSICAL DICTION OF *TRISTAN UND ISOLDE*.

Before beginning the detailed consideration of our work, I wish to say a few words on some features of the music. As I am writing for the general reader and not for the musician, I shall endeavour to express myself in generally understood terms, and avoid technical details.

Each of Wagner's works presents a distinct and strongly defined musical physiognomy marking it off from all the others. The music of each is cast in its own mould and is at once recognizable from that of the rest. The most characteristic features of the music of *Tristan und Isolde* are its concentrated *intensity* and the ineffable *sweetness* of its melody. The number of musical-dramatic motives employed is very small, but they are insisted upon and emphasized by a musical working out unparalleled in the other works. In *Rheingold*, for example, some twelve or fifteen motives—if we count only those of well-marked contours, and which are used in definite dramatic association—can be distinguished; whereas in the whole of *Tristan* there are of such *Leitmotive* in the narrowest sense not more than three or four. The treatment is also very different. The *Ring* is not entirely innocent of what has been wittily called the "visiting-card" employment of motives, while in *Tristan* the musical motive does not repeat, but rather supplements, the words, indicating what these have left untold, thus entering as truly into the substance of the drama as it does into that of the music.

The most important motive of all, the one which pervades the drama from beginning to end, is the love-motive. Its fundamental form is that in which it appears in the second bar of the Prelude in the oboe (No. 1).^[35] Variants of it occur without the characteristic semitone suspension (1.a.) or with a falling seventh (1.b.). The cello motive of the opening phrase of the Prelude may also be considered as derived from the same by contrary movement (1.c.).

[Footnote 35: See the musical examples at the end.]

Of equal importance, though occurring less frequently, and only at important and decisive moments, is the death-motive (2). This motive is less varied than the last, recurring generally in the same key—A flat passing into C minor—and with similar instrumentation, the brass

and drums entering *pp* on the second chord.

The second act opens with a strongly marked phrase which is the musical counterpart of the great metaphor so conspicuous throughout the act, of the day as destructive of love. The working out of this motive whilst the lovers are together is a marvel of musical composition, and it always returns in the same connection.

Perhaps we may also include among these fundamental musical-dramatical motives one occurring in the middle of the second act at the words "Sehnen hin zur heiligen Nacht" (No. 4). It is akin to the death-motive proper, but the solemn harmonies are here torn asunder into a strain so discordant that without the dramatic context it would scarcely be bearable. It is the rending of the bond with this life and with the day. The music here reminds us that, however heroically the lovers accept their inevitable end, they feel that it means a rough and painful severance from that life which was once so dear and beautiful.

Other motives are reminiscences more or less of a purely musical nature or connected only in a general way with scenes or incidents of the drama. They call back indistinctly scenes of bygone times, and will be spoken of as they occur in the work.

The best preliminary study for Wagner's use of motives is that of Beethoven's sonatas and symphonies. *Macmillan's Magazine* for July, 1876, contains a valuable article by the late Mr. Dannreuther which will be useful as an introduction, and ought to be familiar to all who are interested in modern developments of music. Mr. Dannreuther there treats of the type of variation peculiar to Beethoven, which he compares to the metamorphosis of insects or of the organs of plants: "It is not so much the alteration of a given thought, a change of dress or of decoration, it is an actual creation of something new and distinct from out of a given germ." He then proceeds to trace the principle in some of Beethoven's later works, and shows how for example the great B flat sonata (Op. 106) is built upon a scheme of rising tenths and falling thirds; the A flat sonata (Op. 110) upon two simple melodies. Wagner's procedure is similar; he takes a musical motive which has already been used and brings forth out of it something totally new, scarcely resembling its parent in external features, and yet recognizable as the same.

The problem before Wagner was how to render this new acquisition available for the drama, and we shall best understand him if we look upon him as all his life seeking its solution, each work representing an experimental stage rather than a perfectly finished model. In the earlier part of the *Ring* he began with a purely conventional conjunction of a musical strain with a tangible and visible object—a ring, a giant, a goddess, etc. This is wrong method, and, although generally his instinctive sense of dramatic propriety kept him from

going very far astray, the effects of his wrong procedure are occasionally visible. Why, for example, should a given melody in thirds on two bassoons denote a ring? and why should it bear a thematic kinship to another melody denoting Walhall? The association is purely conventional and serves no purpose, for the material object, a ring, is fully expressed in the word; there is nothing more to be said about it than that it is just a ring, and we do not want the bassoons to repeat or confirm what is quite intelligible without them. In *Tristan* this pitfall is mostly avoided, but it is in *Die Meistersinger* and *Parsifal* that we find the motives most skilfully employed.

A critical analysis of the harmonic structure of our work does not fall within the scope of this treatise. It will be found in text-books specially devoted to the subject. I can here only offer a few general remarks.

Modern harmonies are made theoretically much more difficult than they need be by our system of notation, which grew up in the Middle Ages. The old modes knew no modulation in our sense, and in the seventeenth century, when the tempered system came into vogue, making every kind of modulation possible, the old notation was retained. How unsuited it is for modern music appears from the drastic contradictions which it involves. It is quite a common thing to see the same note simultaneously written as F sharp in one part and as G flat in another. This is what makes modern harmony seem so much more difficult than it really is, for when the music comes to be *heard*, these formidable-looking intervals resolve themselves into something quite natural and generally not difficult of apprehension by a musical ear. Unfortunately we are compelled to learn music through the medium of a keyed instrument, generally through the most unmusical of instruments, the piano, and we learn theory largely through the eye and the reason instead of through the ear. The problems of harmony will seem much simpler if we remember that its basis is the *interval*—music does not know "notes" as such, but only intervals—that the number of possible intervals is very small and their relations quite simple, and that everything which is not reducible to a very simple vulgar fraction is heard, not as a harmony, but as a passing note, an inflection of a note of a chord. In fact the advance made in chord combinations since the introduction of the tempered system is not very great. All, or nearly all, the chords used by Wagner are to be found in the works of Bach. The suggestion to explain Wagner's harmonies by assuming a "chromatic scale" rests upon a misapprehension of the nature of a scale. Every scale implies a tonality, i.e. a tonic note, to which all the other notes bear some definite numerical relation. There cannot be a chromatic scale in the scientific sense in music; what we call by that name in a keyed instrument is merely a diatonic scale with the intervals filled in; it always belongs to a definite key, and the accidentals are only passing notes. It is in passing notes that we must seek the key to Wagner's harmonies. With Wagner

more than with any other composer since Bach the parts must be read horizontally as well as vertically. As long as we look upon harmonic progressions as vertical columns of chords following one upon the other we may indeed explain, but we shall never understand them. Each chord must be viewed as the result of the confluence of all the separate voices moving harmoniously together. This, too, will help us to grasp the character of "altered" chords, so lavishly employed by Wagner, and of "inflection," by which term I mean to denote all kinds of passing notes, appoggiaturas, suspensions, changing notes, and the like. All are phenomena of harmonic notes striving melodically onwards, either upwards or downwards.

Although little has been done in the invention of new combinations, the character of the harmonic structure has changed considerably since the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This is evident at first glance on comparing a score of Haydn or Mozart with one of Wagner or Liszt. There, although chromatic harmonies are not unfrequent, they occur only sporadically, the general structure being diatonic, whereas with the later masters the whole tissue is chromatic; the score fairly bristles with accidentals, and a simple major or minor triad is the exception. Very different too is the periodic structure. The phrases no longer fall naturally into eight-bar periods inter punctuated with cadences, but are determined by the text, and although the eight-bar scheme is generally maintained—much disguised, it is true, but still recognizable—it is determined not by half-closes at the sections, but by the eight beats of the two-line metre, while the periods follow each other in even flow without any indication of cadence. In other words the musical form is governed by the declamation.

Theory of harmony is one thing, living music quite another. The musical hearer of a work like *Tristan und Isolde* will understand its harmonic structure, though he know nothing of the theoretical progression of the chords, provided the performance be good, i.e. correct, just as a man ignorant of grammar will understand a sentence which is clearly enunciated. The composer needs no theory of harmony; his ear is his only guide, as the eye of the artist is a sufficient guide for his colouring without any theory of colour. There is only one thing which the composer must keep before him and which the hearer must consciously be able to recognize—the Tonality. The problem of harmony therefore in practice reduces itself to that of modulation. To recognize the tonality quickly and certainly, look for the cadences. They are as it were landmarks, placed along the melodic road, indicating from time to time where we are.

I cannot dismiss the subject of harmony without mentioning the chord which from its employment at decisive moments and its extraordinary mystic expressiveness has been called the soul of the *Tristan* music. Its direct form is

[Music]

as it occurs in the beginning of the Prelude.

The instrumentation of *Tristan* does not present any special features different from that of Wagner's other works. It is less heavily scored than the *Ring*, and at the same time the instrumentation is more concentrated. Wagner usually employs his wind in groups of at least three in each colour—e.g. three flutes, two oboi and one English horn, two clarinets and a bass clarinet, etc.—and so is able to keep his colours pure. It is partly to this that the extraordinary purity of his tone in the tutti is due, partly also to the sonority imparted to the brass by means of the bass tuba, and still more to the consummate skill of the composer in the distribution of his parts.

There is an interesting note at the beginning of the score in which the composer seems to be trying to excuse himself for using valve instruments in the horns. While admitting the degradation of tone and loss of the power of soft binding resulting from the use of valves, he thinks that the innovation (which I need scarcely observe is not his) is justified by the advantage gained in greater freedom of movement. In such matters one must be allowed to form one's own judgment, and though it may seem like trying to teach a fish to swim, a humble amateur may be permitted to wish that Wagner had here resisted the tide of progress. It is not only that the tone and power of binding are injured, but the whole character of horns and trumpets is altered when they are expected to sing chromatic passages like the violin and the clarinet. As the point is of some interest, I should like to bring it before the reader with some examples. The essential character of the horns is nowhere more truly conveyed than in the soft passage near the beginning of the overture to *Der Freischütz*, and it is the contrast between the two nature scales on the C horn and the F horn which gives the character to this lovely idyll. The trumpets are capable of even less variety of expression than the horns, as their individuality is even more strongly marked. How entirely that character is conditioned by the mechanism of the instrument may be illustrated by an example. The third movement of Beethoven's seventh symphony contains an interlude *molto meno mosso*. The choral theme is accompanied by a continuous A, sustained in octave in the violins, which in the intervals between the verses descends to G sharp and returns

[Music]

The repeat at the end enters *ff.* after a strong crescendo, and at this point the sustained A is taken over from the violins by the trumpets and given forth with piercing distinctness above the tutti of the orchestra, the effect being one of extraordinary brilliancy. Now comes the point with which we are concerned. In the intervals the

trumpet cannot descend to G sharp, because it has not got the note in its natural scale, and is therefore obliged to repeat

[Music]

Indisputably the composer would have written G sharp had the trumpet been able to play it; it was only the defective scale of the instrument which led him to write A, but the effect of hearing A when we expect G sharp is electrifying; the unbending rigidity of the trumpet is here expressed with a vividness and force which nothing else could have given.

Many more examples might be brought from the works of the great composers to show how the horns and trumpets have lost in expressive power by having adopted the chromatic scale of other instruments. Wagner's use of the brass generally is most skilful; he is especially happy in avoiding the blatancy and coarseness which soils the scores of some composers. Neither trumpets nor drums are much used continuously in the score of *Tristan*. The former are often employed in the lower part of their scale and only for particular effects. Trombones generally utter single chords, or slow successions of chords, adding solemnity to the sound, and crowning a climax. A favourite instrument with Wagner is the harp, and he uses it freely in *Tristan*. The effect is, as it were, to place the orchestra upon springs, adding lightness and elasticity to the tone, as may be noticed in the accompaniment to the duet at the end of the first act.

We often hear Wagner's melody described as if it were not melody in the ordinary meaning of the word, but a kind of "recitative" or "declamation." The great French singer, Madame Viardot Garcia, was asked on one occasion in a private circle to sing the part of Isolde. She took the score and sang it *a prima vista* to Klindworth's accompaniment. On being told that in Germany singers could not be found to undertake the part, alleging that it was too difficult and unmelodious, she naïvely asked whether German singers were not musical! Assuredly any person to whom Wagner's music, especially that of *Tristan*, appears unmelodious is unmusical, or at least defective in the sense for melody. Wagner's music is easy to sing; much easier, for example, than that of Mozart. This, however, is only true for singers who are highly musical. The great majority have not had any real musical education, and it is to these that the common notion that Wagner's music is unsingable, that it ruins the voice, is due. The notion that recitative and melody are things opposed to one another is itself a misunderstanding. The characteristic mark of recitative in the narrow sense is that it is not bound by rhythmic forms, and therefore has a somewhat dry, matter-of-fact character, which would become tedious if it continued unrelieved—as life would be dull without any sweets. Wagner says: "My melody is declamation, and my declamation melody." There is no line of demarcation; they are as inseparably united as emotion and intellect. But although the

stream of emotion in human life is continuous, it is not continually at the same tension. Moments of high exaltation alternate with more subdued intervals, and a very large part of the mechanical routine of life is emotionally almost quiescent. In the drama the emotional element alternates with the narrative, and according as the one or the other predominates, the weight of the expression is in the music or the words; each therefore rises and falls in alternation. Even in Shakespeare's spoken drama traces of this ebb and flow may be noticed, the language becoming more musical under the stress of higher emotion. In the opera the intervals between the lyric *arias*, etc., had to be filled in with dry explanation or narrative, and there arose the *recitative secco*, a rapid recitation in which the melody is reduced to a mere shadow. The German language was unfitted for dry recitative of this type, and these filling-in parts had therefore to be spoken—a device which proved intolerable, since it destroyed the illusion of the music. Wagner, as we saw, got over the difficulty by choosing a form of drama in which the emotional element was supreme, and the narrative filling in reduced to a minimum. We further saw how in *Tristan und Isolde* the principle is driven to such an exaggerated extreme as sometimes to render the action almost unintelligible. Nowhere is the music unmelodious or uninteresting, but it is elastic and pliable and changes its character with the emotional intensity of the dramatic situation, being more subdued in parts of the first act, asserting itself whenever rage, irony, tenderness, or other emotion call for expression; omnipotent in the great love-duet, culminating in the nocturne, and once more soaring in highest ecstasy in Isolde's dissolution, with endless gradations in the portions between. Hearers who are not accustomed to the dramatic expression of music attend only to those moments of intense lyric expression, just as in the opera they attend only to the *arias*; all else appears to them uninteresting and unmelodious. This is to miss the essential thing in Wagner's works—the drama itself; but it is precisely what is done by those hearers who are incapable of the effort of following attentively the dramatic development.

CHAPTER XI

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT AND MUSIC

It remains for us now to examine the work itself, scene by scene, that we may see how the principles of art which we have been considering in the preceding chapters are illustrated. The following notes are written with a practical end; they are intended to assist those who are unacquainted with the work and are about to hear it for the first time to follow the composer's intentions. They do not profess to give a full commentary or explanation, but only to start the reader on the

right path that he may find the way for himself. Those who read German should begin by thoroughly mastering the text. Tristan is not like a modern problem play to be understood at once from the stage, without any effort. There are many, I regret to say, who spare themselves even this trouble, but it is indispensable, for even if singers always enunciated their words more distinctly than they do, it would be quite impossible to follow the difficult text on first hearing. Beyond this, however, very little preparation is necessary; especially the study of lists of *Leitmotive* should be avoided, since they give a totally wrong conception of the music. We cannot study an edifice by looking at the bricks of which it is built. Lectures with musical illustrations, provided they are really well done, by a competent pianist, are valuable, and it is also of use to study selected scenes at the piano with text and music, the scene on the stage being always kept before the mind, and the voice part being sung as far as possible. For those who are quick of musical apprehension such studies are not necessary, but the careful reading of the text is indispensable for all. In all studies at the piano the arrangement of Hans von Bülow should be used, even by those who are unable to master all its difficulties, since the simplified arrangements are very imperfect. As a help to those who study the text at home, I have recounted the general course of the action and dialogue just in sufficient outline to enable the reader to follow what is going on, adding here and there a literal translation, where it seemed desirable, especially where the meaning of the original is difficult to grasp.

Some introductory matter must first be told. Marke, King of Cornwall, has lately been involved in a war with the King of Ireland, whose general, Morold, has invaded the country to compel tribute. Tristan, King Marke's nephew, has defeated the army and killed Morold, but himself been wounded in the fight. His wound refusing to heal, he has sought the advice of the renowned Irish princess and medicine-woman, Isolde. She had been the betrothed bride of Morold, and in his head, sent back to Ireland in derision, as "tribute," by the conqueror, she has found a splinter from the sword which slew him, and has kept it. While Tristan is lying sick under her care she notices a gap in his sword, into which the splinter fits, and she knows that he is the slayer of her lover. She approaches him with sword upraised to slay him; he looks up at her; their eyes meet; she lets the sword fall, and bids him begone and trouble her no more. Tristan returns to Cornwall cured. His uncle is childless, and wishes to leave the kingdom to Tristan when he dies. But there are cabals in the state; a party has been formed, under Tristan's friend Melot, to induce King Marke to marry and beget a direct heir to the throne. Tristan joins them, and with great difficulty persuades his uncle to despatch him to Ireland to bring the Princess Isolde to be Marke's wife. The curtain rises when they are on board the ship on the voyage to Cornwall, just approaching the land.

The Prelude is a condensed picture of the entire drama. As an instrumental piece it is unable to render the definite actions, but it can give with great distinctness a tone or an atmosphere out of which these acts will shape themselves in the sequel, a presentiment of what is to be. The subject of our work is Love trying to raise itself out of the contamination of human life into a higher and purer sphere, but failing so long as it is clogged with the conditions of bodily existence. The text of the Prelude may be taken from the words of Tristan in the third act:

Sehnen! Sehnen!
Im Sterben mich zu sehnen,
Vor Sehnsucht nicht zu sterben.

This theme is enunciated with almost realistic eloquence in the very first phrase, in the two contrasting strains, the love-motive striving upwards in the oboe, and its variant fading downwards in the 'cello. The union of the two produces a harmony of extraordinary expressiveness, which I have already referred to in the last chapter as the "soul of the *Tristan* music." Every hearer must be struck with its mysterious beauty, and it has been the subject of many theoretical discussions. It is best understood as the chord on the second degree of the scale of A minor, with inflections:

[Music]

G sharp being a suspension or appoggiatura resolved upwards on to A while the D sharp (more properly E flat) is explained by the melody of the violoncelli, which, instead of moving at once to D, pass through a step of a semitone. There is, however, one thing to be noticed in this melody. The dissonant D sharp (or E flat) is not resolved in its own instrument, the violoncelli, but is taken up by the English horn, and by it resolved in the next bar. This instrument therefore has a distinct melody of its own, consisting only of two notes, but still heard as a kind of sigh, and quite different from the merely filling-in part of the clarinets and bassoons. There are really three melodies combined:

[Music: Oboi. V' celli. Eng. Horn]

It will not be necessary for us to anatomize any more chords in this way. I did so in this case in order to show the intimate connection between the harmony and the melody, and how the explanation of the harmonies must be sought through the melodies by which they are brought about.

The entire Prelude is made up of various forms of the love-motive. The key is A minor, to which it pretty closely adheres, the transient modulations into a'+, c'+, etc., only serving to enforce the feeling of tonality. The reason for this close adherence to one key is

not far to seek. Wagner never modulates without a reason; the Prelude presents one simple feeling, and there is no cause for or possibility of modulation.[36] At the 78th bar the music begins to modulate, and seems tending to the distant key of E flat minor, the love-motive is taken up *forte* and *più forte* by the trumpets, but in bar 84 the modulation abruptly comes to an end, the soaring violins fall to the earth, and the piece ends as it began, with a reminiscence of the first part in A minor. An expressive recitative of the violoncelli and basses then leads to C minor, the key of the first scene.

[Footnote 36: See the remarks on modulation at the end of his essay *Ueber die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama*, Ges. Schr. x. pp. 248 seq., where he gives the advice to young students of composition: "Never leave a key so long as you can say what you have to say in it."]

ACT I., SCENE I.—The scene opens in a pavilion on the deck of the

ship. Isolde is reclining on a couch, her face buried in the pillows. Brangäne's listless attitude as she gazes across the water, the young sailor's ditty to his Irish girl as he keeps watch on the mast, reflect the calmness of the sea as the ship glides before the westerly breeze, and contrast with the tempest raging in Isolde's breast. Suddenly she starts up in alarm, but Brangäne tries to soothe her, and tells her, to the soft undulating accompaniment of two bassoons in thirds, how she already sees the loom of the land, and that they will reach it by the evening. At present Brangäne has no suspicion of anything disturbing her mistress, whose feelings are indicated by an agitated passage in the strings (No. 6). She starts from her reverie. "What land?" she asks. "Cornwall? Never." Then follows a terrific outburst:

Is. Degenerate race, unworthy of your fathers!
Whither, oh mother, hast thou bestowed the might
over the sea and the storm? Oh, tame art of the
sorceress, brewing balsam-drinks only! Awake once
more, bold power! arise from the bosom in which thou
hast hidden thyself! Hear my will, ye doubting
winds: Hither to battle and din of the tempest, to
the raging whirl of the roaring storm! Drive the
sleep from this dreaming sea; awake angry greed
from its depths; show it the prey which I offer; let
it shatter this haughty ship, gorge itself upon the
shivered fragments! What lives thereon, the breathing
life, I give to you winds as your guerdon.

Both the words and the music of this wonderful invocation are worthy of attention. Especially the words of the original German with their drastic alliteration may be commended to those who still doubt Wagner's powers as a poet. The music is mostly taken from the sailor's song (No. 5), but quite changed in character; the rapid staccato movement with the strongly marked figure of the bass have transformed the peaceful ditty into a dance of furies. The entry of the trombones at the words *„Heran zu Kampfe_* is characteristic of Wagner's employment of the brass throughout the work. Their slow swelling chords add volume and solemnity to the orchestral tone. They continue for a few bars only, and the voice distantly hints at the love-motive (*„zu tobender Stürme wüthendem Wirbel_*), but for a moment only; it goes no further.

The terrified Brangäne tries to calm her, and at the same time to learn what is the cause of her anger. She recalls Isolde's strange and cold behaviour on parting from her parents in Ireland, and on the voyage; why is she thus? A peculiar imploring tenderness is imparted to her appeal at the end by the falling sevenths, an interval which we have already met with in the Prelude and which is characteristic of this act.

Her efforts are vain; Isolde starts up hastily crying "Air! air! throw open the curtains!"

SCENE II.—The curtain thrown back discloses the deck of the ship with

the crew grouped around Tristan, who is steering,[37] his man Kurwenal reclining near him. The refrain of the sailors' song is again heard. Isolde's eyes are fixed upon Tristan as she begins to the strain of the love-motive accompanied by muted strings:

Chosen for me!—lost to me!

.

Death-devoted head! Death-devoted heart!

enunciating with these words the death-motive (No. 2).

[Footnote 37: A curious mistake in the stage-management may be noticed. The scene is obviously laid in the fore-castle; one glance at the stage is enough to show this, and the sails are set that way. Nor can it be altered, for it would never do to have them looking among the audience for the land ahead. So that Tristan's ship has her rudder in the bow! Rarely is Wagner at fault in trifles of this kind; in all

other respects the deck-scene is admirably truthful. The sailors hauling, the song in the rigging, the obvious time of day—in the "dogwatches"—are little touches of realism which will be appreciated by all who know board-ship life.]

She turns to Brangäne, and with a look of the utmost scorn, indicating Tristan, she asks:

What thinkst thou of the slave? ... Him there who shirks my gaze, and looks on the ground in shame and fear?

Isolde here strikes the tone which she maintains throughout the act until all is changed by the philtre. Never has such blighting sarcasm before been represented in the drama as that which Isolde pours out upon Tristan. She is by far the stronger character of the two. Her rage is volcanic, and uses here its most effective weapon. Tristan writhes under her taunts, but cannot escape. The music unites inseparably with the words; even the rime adds its point as in mockery she continues Brangäne's praise of the hero:

Br. Dost thou ask of Tristan, beloved lady? the wonder of all lands, the much-belauded man, the hero without rival, the guard and ban of glory?

Is. (_interrupting and repeating the phrase in mockery-). Who shrinking from the battle takes refuge where he can, because he has gained a corpse as bride for his master!

She commands Brangäne to go to Tristan and deliver a message; she is to remind him that he has not yet attended upon her as his duty requires.

Br. Shall I request him to wait upon you?

Is. [Tell him that] I, Isolde, _command_ [my] presumptuous [servant] fear for his _mistress_.

While Brangäne is making her way through the sailors to where Tristan is standing at the helm, an interlude made of the sailors' song phrase is played on four horns and two bassoons over a pedal bass, the strings coming in in strongly marked rhythm on the last beat of each bar, marking the hauling of the ropes to clear the anchor. Tristan is in a reverie, scarcely conscious of what is going on around him; the love-motive once in the oboe shows how his thoughts are occupied. He starts at the word Isolde, but collects himself, and tries to conceal his evident distress under a manner of supercilious indifference. Brangäne becomes more urgent; he pleads his inability to come now because he cannot leave the helm. Then Brangäne delivers Isolde's message in the same peremptory words in which she has received it.

Kurwenal suddenly starts up and, with or without permission, sends his answer to Isolde. Tristan, he says, is no servant of hers, for he is giving her the crown of Cornwall and the heritage of England. "Let her mark that, though it anger a thousand Mistress Isoldes." Brangäne hurriedly withdraws to the pavilion; he sings an insulting song after her in derision of Morold and his expedition for tribute:

"His head now hangs in Ireland,
As tribute sent from England!"

As she closes the curtains the sailors are heard outside singing the refrain of his song, which is a masterpiece of popular music. One can imagine it to be the national song of the Cornish-men after the expedition. With regard to its very remarkable instrumentation, I cannot do better than quote the remarks of that admirable musician, Heinrich Porges: "The augmented chord at the words auf ödem Meere, the humorous middle part of the horns, the unison of the trombones which, with the sharp entry of the violas, effect the modulation from B flat to D major, impart the most living colour to each moment."

SCENE III.—(The interior of the pavilion, the curtains

closed..) Isolde has heard the interview, and makes Brangäne repeat everything as it happened. Inexpressibly pathetic is the turn which she gives to the words of the song as she repeats the phrase of Brangäne:

Is. (bitterly). "How should he safely steer the ship to King Marke's land..." (with sudden emphasis, quickly) to hand him the tribute which he brings from Ireland!

—the last sentence being to the refrain of the song.

Upward scale passages of the violins are suggestive of a sudden impulse, and there now begins (K.A. 25'1) a movement of great musical interest in which Isolde tells Brangäne of Tristan's previous visit to her as "Tantris," recounting how she discovered him by the splinter of the sword, the words: "Er sah mir in die Augen," bringing the characteristic form of the love-motive with the falling seventh (1.b.). Brangäne cries out in astonishment at her own blindness. Isolde continues to relate "how a hero keeps his oaths": "Tantris returned as Tristan to carry her off "for Cornwall's weary king"

(K.A. 29'5):

Is.. When Morold lived, who would have dared to offer us such an insult?... Woe, woe to me! Unwitting I brought all this shame on myself. Instead of wielding the avenging sword, helpless I let it fall, and now I serve my vassal!

Again rage overcomes her at the thought of Tristan's treachery. Her inflamed imagination conjures up his report of her to King Marke:

Is.. "That were a prize indeed, my lord and uncle! how seems she to thee as a bride? The dainty Irish maid I'll bring. I know the ways and paths. One sign from thee to Ireland I'll fly; Isolde, she is yours! The adventure delights me!" Curse on the infamous villain! Curse on thy head! Vengeance! Death! Death to us both!

She subsides exhausted amidst a stormy tutti of the orchestra with the trombones *ff.*

Br.. (*with impetuous tenderness.*). Oh, sweet, dear, beloved, gracious, golden mistress! darling Isolde! hear me! come, rest thee here (*she gently draws her to the couch.*).

The music presents no special difficulties in this scene. It is so complete in itself that, as has been truly remarked, it might well be performed as an instrumental piece without the voice. It would be impossible to follow here the endless subtleties of the working out, nor is it necessary, since they will reveal themselves to every musical hearer who is familiar with the methods of Beethoven. The whole movement is in E minor, and is built on a motive which has grown out of the love-motive by contrary movement, with a characteristic triplet accompaniment. Throughout it follows the expression of the words closely, using the previous motives, and is a model of Wagner's musical style in the more lyric portions. Wagner has remarked in one of his essays how Beethoven will sometimes break up his motives and, taking one fragment, often consisting of not more than two notes, develop it into something entirely new. The following scene is built on motives developed out of the last two notes of the love-motive, either with or without the falling seventh:

[Music]

It must here be noted how entirely Brangäne misunderstands the situation. Wagner has intentionally represented her as a complete contrast to Isolde, as one of those soft, pliable natures who are capable of the most tender self-sacrificing devotion, but are utterly

wanting in judgment. Woman-like, she thinks that it is only a passing storm which she can lull with caressing words. Her scarcely veiled suggestion that, though Isolde may marry King Marke, she need not cease to love Tristan, shows the enormous gulf which separates her from her terrible mistress. She suggests administering the philtre which her mother has prepared for Marke to Tristan. The music, in which, so long as Brangäne is speaking, gaiety and tenderness are mingled, is permeated with the love-motive. Isolde thinks of her mother's spells with very different feelings; the music becomes more gloomy, and with the words, "Vengeance for treachery—rest for my heart in its need," the death-motive, with its solemn trombone-chords, betrays the thought in her mind. She orders Brangäne to bring the casket. Brangäne obeys, and innocently recounts all the wonderful remedies which it contains:

Br. For woe and wounds is balsam; for evil poisons
antidotes. The best of all I hold it here (_holding up
the love-potion_).

Is. Thou errst. I know it better (_seizing the black
bottle containing the death-drink and holding it aloft_).
This is the drink I need!

A motive already heard in the Prelude (bar 29, bassoons and bass clarinet) now becomes very prominent in the brass:

[Music]

The falling seventh here carries an air of profound gloom appropriate to the deadly purpose of Isolde.

At this moment a diversion occurs outside. The ship is nearing the port, and the crew are heard taking in the sails preparatory to anchoring. Kurwenal enters abruptly.

SCENE IV.—I have already remarked how happily Wagner has contrived to

hit off the character of the board-ship life. Here it is the clatter and bustle of coming into port that is represented; people hurrying about the deck, the young sailors' motive joyously ringing from the violins and wood, sailors hauling, and the colours fluttering in the breeze (semiquaver motives in clarinets and bassoons), all are preparing for the shore. Kurwenal enters and roughly orders the "women" to get themselves ready to land. Isolde is to prepare herself at once to appear before King Marke escorted by Tristan. Isolde,

startled at first by Kurwenal's insolence, collects herself and replies with dignity:

Take my greetings to Sir Tristan and deliver him my message. If I am to go at his side to stand before King Marke, I cannot do so with propriety unless I first receive expiation for guilt yet unatoned. Therefore, let him seek my grace. (On Kurwenal making an impatient gesture, she continues with more emphasis.) Mark me well and deliver it rightly: I will not prepare to land with him; I will not walk at his side to stand before King Marke unless he first ask of me in due form to forgive and forget his yet unatoned guilt. This grace I offer him.

Kurwenal, completely subdued, promises to deliver her message and retires.

The orchestral accompaniment during Isolde's speech has a very solemn character imparted to it by slow chords of the trombones, *piano*, with somewhat feverish semiquaver triplets on the strings, snatches of the love-motive and other motives being heard in the wood-wind; while in the pauses, runs on the violins mark Kurwenal's impatience. The death-motive will be noted at the words "für ungesühnte Schuld."

SCENE V.—This is a scene of great pathos. Like Elektra[38] when she

recognizes Orestes, so Isolde, when left alone with the only friend who is true to her, throws aside all her haughty manner, forgets her wild thirst for revenge, and for a moment gives way to all the tenderness which is hidden under that fierce exterior. Death is just before her; she throws herself into Brangäne's arms, and delivers her last messages to the world. The unhappy girl, still quite in the dark as to her mistress's intentions, only vaguely feeling the presage of some impending calamity, is told to bring the casket and take out the death-potion, Isolde significantly repeating the words in the previous scene. Brangäne, almost out of her senses, obeys instinctively, and in the midst of her entreaties Kurwenal throws back the curtain and announces Sir Tristan.

[Footnote 38: Soph., *Elektra*., 1205 seq.]

SCENE VI.—My purpose in these notes is to explain what may at first

seem difficult; it is no part of my plan to expound the obvious. The following scene, where for the first time the two principal personages stand face to face, though the most important that we have met with so far, is perfectly clear, both in the music and the words. No one could mistake the force of the blasts of the wind instruments with which it opens (No. 8). The device of repeating a motive in rising thirds was adopted by Wagner from Liszt, and is very common in *Tristan*. We first met with it in the opening bars of the Prelude, where the love-motive is so repeated.

The first part of the scene is a trial of wits between Isolde and Tristan, in which the latter is helpless as a bird in the claws of a cat. The dialogue as such is a masterpiece, unrivalled in the works of any dramatic poet except Shakespeare. At last, crushed by her taunts, Tristan hands her his sword, asking her to pierce him through, only to be answered with scorn still more scathing than before. "No," she says. "What would King Marke say were I to slay *his best servant?*" There is not a trace of love in the scene; nothing but anger and contempt. In other parts of the act there are indications of smouldering fire which threatens to break out upon occasion, but there is nothing of the kind when they are together. If once, when he lay helpless and in her power, she was touched with pity for so noble a hero, that has long ago been overcome, or only remains as a distant memory of something long past and gone. It has been truly observed that Tristan and Isolde are not like Romeo and Juliet, two children scarcely conscious of what they are doing. Both are in the full maturity of life and in the vigour of their intellectual powers.

In keeping with the dialectic, argumentative character of the dialogue, the music is generally dry and formal, but broken through occasionally with rending cries of agony, and interpolated with moments of tender emotional beauty. The orchestra generally gives the tone to the situation, only occasionally departing from that rôle to enter at critical moments to support and enforce specific words or actions. The leading motive throughout is the one which I have quoted: "vengeance for Morold."

After some preliminary *persiflage*, in which she laughs to scorn the excuse which he offers for having kept away from her from a sense of propriety, she at once comes to the point:

Is. There is blood-feud between us!

Tr. That was expiated.

Is. Not between us!

Tr. In open field before all the host a solemn peace was sworn.

Is. Not there it was that I concealed Tantris, that Tristan fell before me. There he stood noble and strong; but I swore not what he swore; I had learned to be silent. When he lay sick in the silent room speechless I stood before him with the sword. My lips were silent, my hand I restrained, but the vow passed by my hand and my lips, I silently swore to keep. Now I will perform my oath.

Tr. What didst thou vow, oh woman?

Is. Vengeance for Morold.

Tr. Is that what is troubling you?

Once, and once only, does the victim turn to retort upon her with her own weapon of irony. The attempt is disastrous. At once changing her tone she assumes the air of an injured woman. Tristan has taken her lover from her, and does he now dare to mock her? As her thoughts wander back to past days of happiness she continues in strains of surpassing tenderness, mingled with hints of warlike music in the trumpets:

Is. Betrothed he was to me, the proud Irish hero;
his arms I had hallowed; for me he went to battle.
When he fell, my honour fell. In the heaviness of my
heart I swore that if no man would avenge the murder,
I, a maiden, would take it upon me. Sick and weary
in my power, why did I not then smite thee?

She states the reason why she did not slay him when he was in her power in language so strange that I can only give a literal translation:

I nursed the wounded man that, when restored
to health, the man who won him from Isolde should
smite him in vengeance.

Such is the German; what it means I must confess myself unable to explain, and can only suspect some corruption in the text.

There is a solemn pause in the music; the love-motive is uttered by the bass clarinet. Nothing is left for the vanquished and humbled hero but to offer her what atonement he can. He hands her his sword, bidding her this time wield it surely and not let it fall from her

hand. But she has not yet finished with him:

Is. How badly I should serve thy lord! What would King Marke say if I were to slay his best servant who has preserved for him crown and realm? ... Keep thy sword! I swung it once when vengeance was rife in my bosom, while thy measuring glance was stealing my image to know whether I should be a fit bride for King Marke. I let the sword fall. Now let us drink atonement.

The motive of the drink of death is here heard in trombones and tuba. It recurs constantly in the following portion.

She then signs to Brangäne to bring the drink. The noise of the sailors furling the sails outside becomes louder.

Tr. (_starting from a reverie_). Where are we?

Is. CLOSE TO THE PORT! (_death-motive_). Tristan, shall I have atonement? What hast thou to answer?

Tr. (_darkly_). The mistress of silence commands me silence. I grasp what she conceals, and am silent upon what she cannot grasp.

Another dark saying, of which, however, we fortunately have the explanation from Wagner himself. "What she conceals" is her love for Tristan; "what she cannot grasp" is that his honour forbids him from declaring his love for her.[39]

[Footnote 39: Glasenapp's Biography, v. 241 (footnote).]

Even now, on the brink of dissolution, while actually holding the cup which is to launch them both into eternity, Isolde cannot bridle her sarcasm:

Is. We have reached the goal; soon we shall stand ... (_with light scorn_) before King Marke! (_death-motive_).

With dreadful irony she repeats the words with which she supposes Tristan will introduce her:

"My lord and uncle! look now at her! A softer wife thou ne'er could'st find. I slew her lover and sent her his head; my wound the kindly maid has healed. My life was in her power, but the gentle maiden gave it to me; her country's shame and dishonour—that she gave as well; all that she might become thy wedded bride. Such thanks for kindly deeds I earned

by a sweet draught of atonement offered to me by her favour in expiation of my guilt.”

Sailors (_outside_). Stand by the cable! Let go the anchor!

Tr. (_starting wildly_). Let go the anchor! Veer her round to the tide! (_he tears the cup from Isolde’s hand_). Well know I Ireland’s queen, and the wondrous might of her arts. I took the balsam she once gave to me; now I take the cup that quite I may recover. Mark well the oath of peace in which I say my thanks:

To Tristan’s honour—highest faith!
To Tristan’s woe—bold defiance![40]

Delusion of the heart; dream of presage; sole comfort of eternal sorrow; kind drink of forgetfulness I drink thee without flinching (_he puts the cup to his lips and drinks_).

Is. (_tearing the cup from him_). Treachery again. Half is mine! Traitor, I drink to thee! (_she drinks and dashes the cup to the earth_).

[Footnote 40: "Ehre" and "Elend" are dative.]

Instead of falling dead, the lovers stand transfixed gazing at each other. Brangäne has changed the drinks, and they have drunk the draught of love for that of death. Wagner sometimes expects his artists to possess powers beyond those which are allotted to man. The actors have here to express by gesture the change of feeling which gradually comes over them. They start, tremble, the love-motive steals into and at last dominates the orchestra, and they fly into one another’s arms.

The increasing commotion outside and the cheers of the men indicate that King Marke has put out from the shore and is nearing the ship. An aside of Brangäne at this moment is not without significance. She has been sitting apart in suspense and confusion; now, as she begins to realize the consequences of what she has done, she gives way to despair. How much better would a short death have been than the prospect of the life that is now before them! The fact of her courage giving way so soon shows that she was only acting under a momentary impulse.

Little more need be said of the rest of the scene. The lovers raise their voices in a jubilant duet. Almost unconscious of their surroundings they are dragged apart. The royal garments are hastily laid over them, and the curtain falls to the joyful shouts of the

people as King Marke steps on board.

CHAPTER XII

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT AND MUSIC CONTINUED

Tu sentiras alors que toi-même tu environnes tout ce que tu connais des choses qui existent, et que les existantes que tu connais existent en quelque sorte dans toi-même.—*Avicebron*—*(MUNK)*.

ACT II.—If the essence of the drama lies in contrast and surprises,

then *Tristan und Isolde* may be called the most dramatic of Wagner's works. In the first act we had the picture of a woman of volcanic temperament goaded to fury by cruelty and insult; in the second we have the same woman gentle, light-hearted, caressing, with nothing left of her past self except the irresistible force of her will. Isolde is not restrained by any scruples about honour, nor need she have any; in full possession of the man she loves, she can abandon herself to the moment. The music almost shows the flush upon her cheek, and she seems twenty years younger. She is quite conscious of the inevitable end, and quite prepared to meet it, but that is as nothing in the fulness of the present moment. Her words and her actions are characterized by a playful recklessness, an *abandon* which finds admirable expression in a characteristic motive (No. 9). Thematically related to this is another motive which we shall meet with very frequently in the sequel (No. 10). It is not directly connected with any definite dramatic event except generally with the first scene. The halting fourth quaver in each half-bar imparts a nervous restless character which at the meeting of the lovers becomes a delirium of joy.

The events of the second act seem to take place on the evening of the day after the landing, or at least very soon after—exact chronology is not necessary. The lovers have arranged a meeting in the palace garden in front of Isolde's quarters after the night has set in. A burning torch is fixed to the door; its lowering is to be the signal to Tristan to approach. King Marke and the court are out on a hunt, and the signal cannot be given until they are out of the way.

The Prelude opens with an emphatic announcement of the principal motive of the act (the "daylight"—No. 3) in the full orchestra without brass. A cantabile strain in the bass wood-wind continued in the violoncelli with a broken triplet accompaniment in the strings seems to tell of the expected meeting. The new motive (No. 9) is heard in its proper instrument, the flute, but gives way to No. 10, which is worked in conjunction with the love-motive, settling again in B flat as the curtain rises. It is a clear summer night; the horns of the hunting-party grow fainter in the distance. Brangäne, with anxiety in her expression, is listening attentively and waiting for them to cease when Isolde enters.

A word must be said about the music of the hunting motive. The key is, as has already been said, B flat major. In the bass a pedal F is sustained by two deep horns or by the violoncelli, while six horns (or more) on the stage play a fanfare on the chord of C minor alternating with that of F major. A very peculiar colouring is imparted to the first chord, partly by the very dissonant G (afterwards G flat), partly by the minor third of the chord. This is a completely new effect obtained from the valve horn, fanfares on horns and trumpets having before always been in the major, since the natural scale contains no minor chord. Brangäne and Isolde listen intently: Isolde thinks the horns are gone, and what they hear is only the murmuring of the stream and the rustling of the leaves. The fanfare is taken up by wood-wind (K.A. 85'2(1)), and at last melts into a new sound, with clarinets in 6-8 time against muted violins and violas in 8-8, beautifully suggestive of the rustling of leaves. Then the horns are heard no more. Brangäne, who has been on the alert, suspects a trap behind this hunting-party, which has been arranged by Tristan's friend Melot, but she doubts his good faith. Isolde gaily laughs at her cares; her heart is bursting and she reckons of nothing but the approach of Tristan. The music is almost entirely made up of her joyful motive, and there begins a first indication of that wonderful lyric outpouring which continues until it culminates in the Nocturne, and which has placed the second act of *Tristan* on an eminence of its own, apart and unapproached. She throws open the flood-gates of her heart as in words recalling Lucretius:

Te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
 Adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
 Summittit floras, tibi rident sequora ponti.

She tells of the all-ruling, all-subduing might of "Frau Minne..." The ode is full of lyric inspiration, and is generally recalled in the sequel by the motive No. 11, which consists of two parts, the melody in the first and second violins, and that in the bass—strictly a horn passage, but here in the lower strings. The accompaniment of the ode is throughout in keeping with the rhapsodical character of the words and melody: note the long, persistent A of the first and second violins in octaves at the words "des kühnsten

Muthes Königin, des Weltenwerdens Waltering-,” followed by their joyous upward flight; the broken chords of the harp; the swelling upward semitones of flute, oboe, and clarinet bringing forth the germ of No. 11.b.; the trombone chords at the words ”_Leben und Tod sind unterthan ihr-”; the arpeggio accompaniment of the violas, and the wonderfully poetic climax at the end, ”_des Todes Werk ... Frau Minne hat es meiner Macht entwandt.-” Brangäne’s entreaties are vain; again she cannot feel what Isolde feels—notice the difference between her melody and the soaring freedom of Isolde’s. A little later (K.A. 99’4 seq.) Isolde’s immovable resolution is admirably expressed by her persistence on one note. At last she seizes the torch and hurls it to the ground to a terrific downward rush of the strings and the yell of the death-motive in the trumpets, the entire orchestra with drums being heard together for the first time.

SCENE II.—Isolde signals to her lover with her white scarf to music

redolent of Weber’s *Oberon*-, and of the transition to the final movement of Beethoven’s sonata *Les Adieux*-. From the moment when he enters, neither words nor music come to full articulation; all is swept away in the whirlwind of the dominant rhythm

[Music]

a variant of the motive No. 10, in still more rapid tempo. For a great part of the time the entire orchestra is occupied, and until far into the scene the voices are quite unable to pierce the volume of sound from the orchestra.[41]

[Footnote 41: I convinced myself in 1906 that this is not the case in Bayreuth theatre, the acoustic qualities of which are unique.]

We take up the scene again when the storm has in some measure subsided at the words ”_wie lange fern, wie fern so lang_-” on p. 109 of the piano score. To make anything like a detailed analysis of the elaborate working out of the daylight motive with other subsidiary motives which now follows would be impossible here, and would only be of use to the student of composition. The music wanders through many keys, but C major is generally discernible as the centre round which the tonality oscillates. The words demand closer attention, and I must invite those of my readers who have been driven back by the difficulties of the road to accompany me along the dull path of literal translation and comment.

The keynote of the dialogue is the opposition of day and night,

typifying delusion and reality, avidyâ and Atman. In the words of Aeschylus:

[Greek: eudousa gap phraen ommasin lamprunetai.
e'n haemera de moir aproskopos broton.]

The dialogue cannot be understood by the light of the rationalist theory that love and marriage are things to be contracted for the sake of the benefits which they bring to both parties. Those who approach it from this standpoint must be content with the explanation sometimes heard that "lovers are to be excused if they behave like lunatics, since it is part of their condition." This is not quite the poet's intention. With Wagner love is a *sacrifice*—or for those who so prefer it, a *sacrament*.. Hence the deep mystery of the kinship of love, the vivifying principle, with death, typified in the Hindu emblem of the *ling*.. In the present scene it is often difficult to tell whether the strains denote the languishing of love or the fading away of life. The best preparation would be to read the opening portion of the seventh book of Plato's *Republic*.. It is difficult to think that this passage was not in Wagner's mind when he composed the scene; although the imagery is rather different, the thought is similar. Plato is speaking of the roots of knowledge; Wagner conceives of Love as Plato does of knowledge, and in the minds of both love and knowledge are the same, as are also music and philosophy. The idea comes at once to the front in Isolde's enigmatical

Im Dunkel du, im Lichte ich.

We remember that according to Plato there are two kinds of blindness: one is from living in the dark, the blindness of ignorance; the other from having gazed too steadfastly at the sun when the eyes were not strong enough to bear it. Tristan was dazzled with the light of the sun, and therefore unable to see the truth. For with Wagner the sun is not, as with Plato, the source of all light and truth, but rather the enemy of love and truth. To put it more shortly, the meaning of the line which I have quoted is: "You were blinded by ambition; I saw more clearly." Tristan understands her as meaning the light of the torch for the extinction of which he was so long waiting. Then follows a discussion in which she urges that it was through her act, in pulling down the torch, that he was led from the light of day to the darkness of love. Porges here makes the true remark that the mainspring of Tristan's life is ambition; that love is naturally foreign to him, but that he is at last drawn to it by Isolde.

We resume at p. 114 of the piano arrangement. The German construction is exceedingly difficult and confusing. I translate literally:

—Tr.— The day, the day that glossed thee o'er, that
carried Isolde away from me thither where she resembled

the sun in the gleam and light of highest
glory. What so enchanted my eye depressed my heart
deep down to the ground. How could Isolde be
mine in the bright light of day?

Is. Was she not thine who chose thee? What did
the wicked day lie to thee that thou shouldst betray
thy beloved who was destined for thee?

Tr. That which glossed thee o'er with transcendent
splendour, the radiance of honour, the force of glory,
the dream of hanging my heart upon these held me
in bonds. The day-sun of worldly honours, which,
with the clear refulgence of its shimmer, shone bright
upon my head with the vain delight of its rays, penetrated
through my head into the deepest recess of
my heart. That which there watched darkly sealed
in the chaste night, that which unconscious I received
there as it dawned, an image which my eyes did not
trust themselves to look at, when touched by the
light of day, lay open gleaming before me.

In these mysterious words Tristan indicates the impression which
Isolde had made upon him at their first meeting. He regarded her
through the spectacles of his political ambition, with its vain
delight of personal glory, which had penetrated from his head to his
heart. It illumined the image of Isolde slumbering yet unconscious
(_ohne Wiss' und Wahn_) in his breast, and revealed it to the
day—namely, as a prize in the political game which he was playing:

That which seemed to me so glorious and so noble,
I glorified before the whole assembly; before all
people I loudly extolled the most lovely royal bride
of the earth. The envy which the day had awakened
against me, the jealousy which became alarmed at
my good fortune, the misfavour which began to
weigh down my honour and my glory, I defied them
all, and faithfully determined, in order to uphold my
honour and my glory, to go to Ireland.

Is. Oh vain slave of the day.

Here (K.A. 119'3 at the words ”_Getäuscht von ihm...._”) there
begins a new development of the same motive which has occupied us
hitherto (No. 3) with the first indications of the syncopated
accompaniment which forms so prominent a feature of the following
part. Explanations are now finished. The words begin to find wings.
For moments it seems as if all consciousness of earthly things were
lost and the lovers were dissolved into dreamland:

Wo des Trugs geahnter Wahn zerrinne.

K.A. 122. The modulation into the key of the death-motive, A flat, is effected through the chord of the augmented sixth. The violins keep up a broken triplet accompaniment, trombones entering on the A major chord, oboe lightly breathing the principal motive (No. 3), while the voice follows its independent melody, to us a simile of Wagner's like a boat designed to move exactly upon that sea, and under those conditions. The whole passage is a vision of the death which they are awaiting, but without its bitterness, only as the portal of eternity.

On p. 123 the voice brings the intervals of the chord which throws an atmosphere over the whole of the rest of the scene, and which has already been mentioned as "the soul of the Tristan music." The intervals are enharmonically the same as those of the chord in the first bar of Prelude—F, A flat, C flat, E flat,=F, G sharp, B, D sharp—but the treatment and surroundings are very different.

A reference to the draught occasions a joyful outburst on the part of Tristan, which is of importance as explaining its real significance:

Tr. Oh hail to the drink.... Through the door
of death whence it flowed it divulged to me wide and
open the joyful kingdom of night, wherein before I
had only dreamed as one awake.

The words are accompanied by a violin figure in very rapid tempo, which was already prominent in the early part of the scene at the meeting. The exultant episode soon ends, the stormy tempo continuing, and by degrees all subsides into the discordant motive which I have quoted as the fourth of the fundamental dramatic-musical motives, and seeming to indicate the agony of death (No. 4).

Already there have been indications of a characteristic accompanying rhythmic figure consisting of one note repeated in triplets, and now as the lovers sink on a bank of flowers in half-conscious embrace, its nervous character is enhanced by a complex syncopation. The passage beginning 131'4 is in the mystic mood of Beethoven's last sonatas and quartets. The triplet movement seems inspired by the similar movement in the sonata Op. 110 from the beginning of the slow movement *Adagio ma non troppo* to the end. In both the feverish pulsation indicates a morbid condition, leading in Beethoven to a calmly triumphant end. The second movement of the quartet Op. 127, *Adagio ma non troppo*, with which Porges compares the scene, gives a different side, from which the morbid element is absent. The rhythm which dominates this scene is a development of the preceding triplet rhythm and must be taken quite strictly—3-4 time, the first two crotchets being divided into triplet quavers, the last into two. The syncopated chords are on the four strings, all muted, and each divided into two parts. In the tenth bar (counting from the double bar

mässig langsam 3-4) the woodwind (Cl. Hr. Fag.) enter, sustaining the chord ”_sehr weich_,” the first clarinet having the upper note, quite soft, like a sigh, forming a cadence after each phrase of the voice part. The extreme nervous tension is emphasized almost beyond endurance by the incessant syncopated triplets of the strings. The lovers are raised entirely away from the external world; it is the sleep of approaching death into which they sink; rather dissolution into eternity. The words begin to lose coherence and meaning, and are often purely interjectional.

One passage may be noted for its interesting modulations, the alternating duet with the words ”_Barg im Busen uns sich die Sonne_.” It is in phrases of three bars in rising semitones, A flat–A natural–A natural–B flat, ending in the beautiful strain No. 13 as they fall asleep in one another’s arms.

We have now in Brangäne’s watch-song, and the instrumental nocturne that accompanies it, reached the highest point of the musical expression, not of the Tristan drama alone, but of all music since Palestrina. Before such music silence is the only thing possible. It scoffs at our words; it is not of this earth. Many will now prefer to draw the veil, to pass over the little that I have to say, and resign themselves to the aesthetic impression. For those who feel curiosity to know the mechanism by which its wondrous effect is brought about, I will analyse the instrumentation. The thematic material employed is very slight; only here and there a motive from the preceding is indicated as if in a dream.

The syncopated pulsations are resumed in one-half the full number of strings muted, and continue to the end, as do the broken chords of the harp. The wood-wind generally sustain soft chords, clarinet, oboe, flute, and horn succeeding each other with the sighs from No. 12.

[Music]

Brangäne’s voice on the watch-tower behind the scene enters at once in 3-2 rhythm against 3-4 in the orchestra. At bar 11 (counting from first entry of the harp) four pairs of unmuted violins detach themselves from the body of the strings, and play a quartet independently, with free polyphonic imitation, afterwards joined by soli violin, viola, and ’cello, in such close score and intercrossing as to make the whole resemble a very closely woven pattern of exquisite beauty, but of which the single threads are hardly distinguishable.[42] Half the violas, joined later by half the ’cellos, maintain an accompaniment of broken chords. They are the voices of the night through which are heard the long-sustained notes of Brangäne’s watch-song, wood instruments here and there uttering motives like passing dreams from the lovers’ melodies:

Realms where the air we breathe is love,

Which in the winds on the waves doth move,
Harmonizing this earth with what we feel above.

[Footnote 42: For the independent string parts, see the Appendix.]

At the end three trombones enter, sustaining slow chords. The whole body of the strings, now united, soar once more and subside to rest.

The dialogue which follows is the most difficult in the whole work. It will be necessary to take it sentence by sentence. Tristan, as the cooler and more self-possessed of the two, sees more clearly than Isolde whither they are tending. He has sunk into a state of almost complete oblivion, from which Isolde wishes to rouse him. He replies (139'1(6)): "Let me die, never to awake." Isolde, scarcely yet realizing that this is indeed the only possible ending, asks (139'4): "Must then daylight and death together end our love?" He replies: "Our love? How can death ever destroy that? Were mighty death standing before me threatening body and life—that life which so gladly I resign to my love—how could its stroke reach our love? Were I to die for that [love] for which I gladly would die, yet that love itself is immortal and cannot end with me. So Tristan is himself immortal through his love." Now (141'3(8)) she grasps his meaning: "Our love is the love of *both*—Tristan *and* Isolde." Then there follows a little conceit on the virtue of the word "and," i.e. the bond which unites them both together. The notion is according to Kufferath taken from a couplet of Gottfried von Strassburg:

Zwei vil kleinin Wortelin, Min und Din,
Diu briuwent michel Wunder uf der Erde.

Tristan continues: "What would die in death (namely, this bodily and worldly life) is only that which comes between us and prevents us from loving and living." Isolde returns to her play with the word "and." "What is true for you is also true for me. Tristan can only die through Isolde's death." The final conclusion is reached in the great duet beginning p. 143'1, "We die but to be united for ever in a more perfect love." with the motive No. 14.

The duet ends with a reminiscence of the nocturne, Brangäne's voice entering with beautiful effect warning the lovers in the midst of their rhapsody. I resume at 146'1. The previous dialogue began with Isolde's rousing of Tristan with the words "*Lausch' geliebter*." Now *he* turns to her smiling and asks: "*Soll ich lauschen?*" and *she* replies: "*Lass mich sterben*." She has now attained full insight, and when he finally and seriously puts the question to her: "Shall I return once more to the day?" she replies with enthusiasm ("*begeistert*"), "Let the day yield to death," and the piercing harmonies of No. 4 indicate the wrench of the parting. Her mind is now quite resolved. To another decisive question she replies: "Eternal be our night!" It is this that Tristan has been waiting for; until he knew

that Isolde was ready to accompany him he could not form his own resolve. Herein we have the key of the whole of this complex and difficult scene. Wagner's aim was not, as might appear on a superficial view, to prolong a rhapsodical love-scene, but a dramatic one, to bring the two characters, each being such as he had conceived it, to a full understanding of each other before they could be united in death.

An introductory passage made of the love-motive simultaneously in direct and contrary movement—the union of opposites—leads to a duet which opens with the harmonies of No. 4 (K.A. 117). Its character throughout is triumphant joy, well supported by a running violin accompaniment which continues to the end. In the course of it there appears another important motive (No. 15), first in the clarinet. All ends in a crash of the entire orchestra; Kurwenal rushes in crying, "Save yourself, Tristan," and in the next moment Marke and his court enter conducted by Melot. "The wretched day for the last time."

SCENE III.—Words and music of the next scene need little comment. It

may be noted that a great part of Marke's address is in strophic form, with four lines of two accents followed by one of three accents. Tristan stands before Isolde screening her as well as he can, crushed to earth by Marke's calm dispassionate reproaches, with short interludes on the bass clarinet. The music is of great beauty, but, as I have observed in an earlier chapter, the explanatory parts are too much extended. The King calls upon Tristan to say what is the deep, mysterious cause of such a falling off in his honour. Tristan cannot answer, but the love-motive in its most complete form, as in the opening of the Prelude, replies more clearly than words.

Tristan now turns full round to Isolde, and in impressive words asks her whether she is prepared to follow him to the land to which he is now going; it is the land where no sun shines, the dark land of night. The voice takes up the melody No. 12 from an earlier part of the act. Her reply is if possible even more sublime. When Tristan carried her to a stranger's country, she had to follow. Now he calls her to his own, to show her his possession and heritage; how should she refuse? "Let Tristan lead the way; Isolde will follow."

He then calls upon Melot to fight with him, but first lets fall a significant remark:

My friend he [Melot] was ... it was he who urged me on to wed thee to the King. Thy glance, Isolde, has dazzled him too; out of jealousy he betrayed me

to the King, whom I betrayed.

From these enigmatical words Wagner leaves us to conjecture what we can. They fight; at the first pass Tristan lets the sword drop from his hand and falls wounded to the earth.

CHAPTER XIII

OBSERVATIONS ON THE TEXT AND MUSIC CONTINUED

ACT III.—Wagner has described the slow introduction to Beethoven's C

sharp minor quartet as the saddest music ever written. If there is anything sadder, it is the instrumental introduction to the third act of *Tristan und Isolde*. Tristan, after being wounded by Melot, has been carried off by Kurwenal to his own home, Kareol in Brittany, where he is discovered lying asleep on his couch in the castle garden, Kurwenal by his side. Nothing could exceed the desolation of the scene, nor the utter woe expressed in the music which begins with a new transformation of the love-motive (1.a.). Isolde alone can cure the sick man, and word has been sent to her to come from Cornwall. Her ship is just expected, and the shepherd who is on the watch outside plays a sad strain so long as the ship is not seen, to be changed to a joyful one when she appears in sight. The plaintive strain is played on the English horn, an instrument which in the hands of a skilful player is capable of very great expression, and, unlike most of the wood, has a considerable range of soft and loud, a quality of which Wagner has made very happy use.

The melody itself seems to have caused some heartburning to many excellent critics. Even Heinrich Porges describes it as a sequence of tones apparently without rule,[43] and has not a word to say about its enthralling melodic beauty. Really what difficulty there is, is only for the eye, and only in one note, the constantly recurring G flat, which is easily accounted for. In a later part of the scene (p. 200), it will be found fully harmonized.

[Footnote 43: "Eine scheinbar regellose Tonfolge."]

SCENE I.—In the first scene of the third act, Kurwenal attains an

importance far beyond what he had in the first and second acts. He, too, is changed; he is no longer the rough, unmannerly servant, the events which have passed and the responsibility now resting upon his shoulders, have brought out the finer qualities of his nature. There is noticeable in his melody all through the act an air of freedom and lofty devotion quite different from his former self. He is, as it were, transfigured, and there is a refinement in his tenderness which may surprise those who have never observed what delicacy and sensitiveness are often hidden beneath a rough exterior among the lower classes.

After a short conversation between Kurwenal and the shepherd, who looks over the wall to ask how the patient is progressing, Tristan awakes, asking with feeble voice where he is. Kurwenal relates how he has brought him to his own home in Kareol, where he is soon to recover from wounds and death. It is some time before Tristan fully understands, and as memory begins to awaken, he tells of where he has been, speaking as one inspired:

I was there where I have ever been, whither for
ever I go, in the wide realm of the world-night, where
there is but one knowledge—divine utter oblivion,

i.e. in that Brahm, that eternal negation, in which all physical life has its existence. The words are accompanied by *pianissimo* chords of trombones with tuba. It is the first time that the heavy brass has been heard in this act, and the effect is excessively solemn. He continues:

How has this foretaste (of eternal night) departed
from me? Shall I call thee a yearning memory that
has driven me once more to the light of day?

The music of this and the following part is very interesting, but the modulations are too subtle and too evanescent for analysis. The motive, which has throughout been associated with the metaphor of daylight, is united with the languishing love-motive and with No. 4, of which three motives the following part is chiefly made up. The combination is expressed in Tristan's word, "*Todeswonne-Grauen*," — "the awful joy of death." The culminating point is reached at the strongly alliterative words, "*Weh' nun wächst bleich und bang mir des Tages wilder Drang*," — when for the moment there is quite a maze of real parts in wood-wind and strings. Immediately following is a very curious passage, nothing else than a succession of augmented chords in an upward chromatic scale, seemingly

illustrating the words „grell und täuschend sein Gestirn weckt zu Trug und Wahn mein Hirn.“ – For a moment Kurwenal seems overawed by the words and sufferings of his beloved master. His free bounding spirits are gone, and he speaks like a broken man. But he soon recovers his former mood as he tells of Isolde’s expected arrival. The news, scarcely comprehended at first, is the signal for an outburst of joy on the part of Tristan expressed in a new motive, No. 17, p. 193’4. His joy is so violent that it brings on a return of delirious raving. He seems to see the ship, the sails filling to the wind, the colours flying, but at that moment the sad strains of the shepherd’s song tell him that the ship has not yet appeared. He knows the tune, which once bewailed his father’s death and his mother’s fate when she brought him forth and died. And now it tells of his own lot:

to long—and die; to die—and to long. No! Not so! rather to long and long, dying to long, and .not. to die of longing.

He cannot find the death for which he longs.

In the following soliloquy the plaintive melody is woven into the orchestral accompaniment and taken by various instruments in turn. I resume at the words „Der Trank, der Trunk, der furchtbare Trank“ (p. 207’1), where the full orchestra accompanies with brass and drums, the tempo being still rather slow.

The draught! the draught! the terrible draught!
 How it raged from my heart to my head.... Nowhere,
 nowhere may I rest. The night casts me back
 on the day for ever to feed the sun’s rays on my suffering....
 The fearful draught which has consigned me
 to this torment, I, I myself brewed it! Out of [my]
 father’s woe and [my] mother’s anguish, out of tears
 of love ever and aye, out of laughing and weeping,
 joys and wounds, I have gathered its poisons. Thou
 draught which I brewed, which flowed for me, which I
 joyfully quaffed, accursed be thou, accursed he who
 brewed thee.

He sinks once more into unconsciousness. This drink, this fearful draught which has brought him into his present state, is the work of his whole life, the outcome of all his former deeds. The despair which he feels now as his end approaches is expressed in the motive No. 18, in unison in the wood-wind. Both music and words of this soliloquy offer great difficulties and need close study, with special attention to the tempo.[44] It ends with the F sharp minor chord in the 6-4 position with full brass and drums; then sudden silence in the orchestra as the voice sings the words „furchtbarer Trank.“ –

[Footnote 44: This is the passage which perplexed the greatest of all

Wagner singers, Schnorr von Carolsfeld, so much that it hindered him from taking the part of Tristan until light came to him from Wagner himself. See the interesting account in Wagner's *Reminiscences of Schnorr von Carolsfeld* in his collected works, viii. 221.]

As he lies in a swoon the wood-wind in turns continue the malediction. The tone then changes as Kurwenal stands beside him, uncertain whether he is alive or dead. The wood softly sound the chord which we have so often heard before, No. 12, in syncopated triplets, as in the great duet in the second act (pp. 131 seq.). Above there floats a melody of exquisite tenderness, first in the oboe, then in the clarinet, continued later in a solo violin. A horn quartet then begins the soft theme No. 13, Tristan's failing voice telling how he sees the vision of Isolde floating towards him over the sea. It is as if the strains of the garden scene were hovering in his dreams and calming his troubled thoughts. As he reads in Kurwenal's looks that she is not yet in sight, he once more threatens to become violent, when suddenly the joyful tune, the signal of Isolde's approach, is heard.

SCENE II.—The catastrophe which now follows is one of the most

terrible ever conceived by a dramatist. Directly Kurwenal is away, Tristan begins to toss in his bed; he seems almost to rise from the dead. Strange, restless orchestration and 7-4 time seem to show that something is pending. Several motives are hinted at, and at last there breaks out in the lower strings and wood the motive No. 13 from the second act, but now how changed! The tender, dreamy melody, now in distorted 5-4 rhythm, appears like a dance of death, first in C major. A short climax brings it in A major and again in C major with the utmost fury and the force of the entire orchestra. It is as if the very gates of hell had burst and every fiend were dancing around him, shouting: "Live! live! and be for ever damned! false knight! perjured lover!" He springs from his couch, tears the bandages from his body; the blood streams from his wound; he staggers to the middle of the stage as he hears Isolde's voice and sinks into her arms as she enters. The love-motive is heard in the wood-wind like a long dying breath as, breathing the word "Isolde," he expires. The orchestra dies away; one chord is heard alone on the harp, and the violoncello continues the love-motive as he breathes away his life.

Isolde is left alone with Kurwenal, who has followed her. The soliloquy in which she laments the cruel destruction of the plan for saving Tristan is profoundly touching, both in the words and in the melody:

Art thou dead? Tarry but for one hour, one only
hour. Such anxious days longing she watched, to
watch but one more hour with thee. Will Tristan
beguile Isolde of the one last ever-short world-happiness
(No. 4). The wound? where? Let me heal
it, that, joyful and serene, we may share the night
together. Not of the wound—die not of the wound!
Let us both united close our eyes to the light of
heaven....

Sounds are heard without. Another ship has arrived, and with it Marke
in pursuit of the fugitive princess. Hastily the gates of the castle
are barricaded. Brangäne's voice is heard imploring them not to
resist. It is vain; Kurwenal leaves no time for parley, but rushes
upon them and is at once pierced through. He is just able to reach his
master's body and die at his side; when Marke has forced an entry he
finds nothing but death. Brangäne notices that Isolde is still living,
and they now explain. The secret of the love-potion has been told to
King Marke, and he has hurried up to renounce his intention of wedding
Isolde and to unite her to Tristan.[45]

[Footnote 45: Another proof, if any were needed, that he is not united
to her by any indissoluble tie.]

It needed but a few minutes' delay for all to have ended happily. Why
did not the poet take the opportunity offered and spare us the
harrowing scenes at the end? Why could he not have lowered the curtain
on the lovers united with Marke's full approval? Dramatically there
was no reason why he should not have done so, but poetically it was
impossible. The whole of the story is brought about by Tristan's guilt
which had to be expiated; it is not diminished by Marke's generosity.

Isolde now rises to bid the world her last farewell before she departs
with Tristan. The words of her swan-song have been described by an
English writer as "no more poetry than an auctioneer's catalogue." [46]
Of that I must leave my readers to form their own judgment; they must,
of course, be read with their context in the drama. She is speaking in
a trance, with ecstatic visions before her eyes. The voice melody is
mostly built upon the song of union in death in the second act (No.
14), passing into the exultant motive which occurs in the great
love-duet (No. 15). The orchestral accompaniment, beginning quietly,
gradually swells into a torrent of music quite unrivalled among
Wagner's great finales. The end of *„Götterdämmerung“* is
impressive because of the wonderful gathering together of the musical
motives of Siegfried's life, but as a musical composition it cannot
compare with the end of Tristan. As it approaches the end the
love-motive absorbs the whole orchestra, passing into No. 10 from the
prelude of the second act, rising higher and higher. The wonderful
euphony of tone, the harmony and peacefulness which pervade the
surging mass of instruments are due to the consummate art of the

instrumentation, and at last as the music seems to leave this earth in its heavenward flight we feel borne away upon its wings. Isolde does not die; she is carried upwards on the pinions of love, dissolved in the ocean of endless melody.

[Footnote 46: A comparison which, by the way, seems a little severe against auctioneers, if, as I presume, the objection is to the want of clearness of the language!]

Her finish has given occasion to the witticism that the most beautiful thing in the work is the last note. To this I see no reason to demur; it contains nothing more entrancing than the rise to the fifth of the chord at her final cadence

[Music: höch - - - ste Lust.]

Once more the love-motive is softly breathed in the oboi and the whole closes on the chord of B major three times repeated by the orchestra.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

Wagner always looked upon himself as one who had broken a new path in art and done some of the first rough work, not as having completed the road. Those who seek to continue his work must have the same goal before their eyes as he had. It is the fate of a great man who more than others longs for human fellowship and love, to live alone and, after death, to overwhelm his contemporaries and successors; he occupies a space which leaves no room for others. In the thirty years which have elapsed since Wagner died, many great composers have come to the front, all of whom without exception show in their external physiognomy the impress of his personality. How many have inherited his spirit? How many have been actuated by his sincerity, his fearless resolve to follow his inspiration from on high at every cost, regardless of all personal advantage? Future ages alone can answer this question. The German nation is at the present day passing through a severe trial of its inner strength. The true „Sturm und Drang“ began for Germany in 1871, and is now at its height. Her mission is indeed a noble one; it is to maintain the principles of law, good government, and pure religion; her genius lies in sober conservatism and high-minded monarchy; her heroes are Dürer, Luther, Frederic the Great, vom Stein, Richard Wagner. It is scarcely surprising if, in view of the history of Germany during the last hundred years, some of her sons have become intoxicated and in their zeal for German ideals threaten to destroy the very principles by which she has risen; if

while affecting to despise the southern nations for libertinism they should themselves have cast off the bonds of self-restraint. All Europe is infected with the taint of unbridled licence and shamelessness, in every department of life, intellectual and political. On the stage the public revels in cruelty for its own sake, not in the service of justice; it prefers bombast to bravery, lechery to love; "the basest metal makes the loudest din"; while those to whom we look as our leaders for direction only pander to the common vulgarity and grow rich thereon.

There is one ingredient of art mentioned by Aristotle, although it has been little noticed by critics; his word for it is [Greek: aedusma], "sweetening." The poet should never forget that art, however serious, is intended for our pleasure; the hard edge of fate needs to be tempered by a recognition of the reality and beauty of positive life. The aim of the true poet is not to harrow the feelings with the mere picture of suffering or wickedness. We have enough of these in actual life without going to the theatre; the poet has to show them as subservient to a higher order of beauty and righteousness, and will try to mitigate the pain which they inflict. In the tragedies of the greatest dramatists the sweetness is so conspicuous a feature that it might almost be ranked as a third essential of tragedy, along with the awaking of pity and terror. The purpose of art is to show the unity of truth and beauty, and thus to enhance the power of both, not to sacrifice either in favour of the other. It teaches the divine lesson of nature—perfect fitness united with perfect loveliness.

One more word and I have finished. It is easy to hear too much of Wagner, and I think there can be no question that his works are made far too common in Germany. Wagner's characters are not those of everyday life; they are on a higher and more ideal moral level than ordinary men and women; they are semi-divine. Nor are his works for everyday hearing, but only for high festivals when we can enjoy them at our leisure with our minds prepared. For our daily bread we have other composers as great as he, and more nutritious and wholesome for continued diet—Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and how many more of the highest rank! Caviare and champagne are excellent things at a feast, but we do not wish to live upon them.

Every cultured person should hold it a duty to visit the Bayreuth festival at least once in his life. He need not have any musical training; nothing more is needed than "a warm heart and open senses," and, let me add, sincerity of purpose. Those who go expecting perfect performances and ideal surroundings will be disappointed. Immense care is bestowed on the preparation of the performances, and the site and building present incalculable advantages. On the whole the performances are better than elsewhere, but, excepting in the orchestra, there are many shortcomings, and the fashionable audience from Paris, and other capitals of Europe and America, is far indeed from what was contemplated by Wagner. All honour is due to Madame

Cosima Wagner, who has worked unflinchingly against immense difficulties to maintain the honour of her husband's heritage. She is not to blame if she has not fully achieved the impossible; If the tree has partly withered, the fault is not with the gardener; it was too vigorous, too noble, to flourish in the soil of human society.