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Collected volume: The Case of Wagner and Nietzsche contra Wagner

Nietzsche contra Wagner

Friedrich Nietzsche

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The Case of Wagner and Nietzsche contra Wagner

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Plain modern English

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Friedrich Nietzsche

Part I: The Case of Wagner

Part II: Nietzsche Against Wagner

Part III: Selected Short Sayings

Translated by

Anthony M. Ludovici

Third Edition

T. N. Foulis

13 and 15 Frederick Street

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Contents

The Translator's Preface. Preface to the Third Edition. The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem. Nietzsche Against Wagner. Selected Short Sayings from Nietzsche's Look Back at His Years of Friendship with Wagner. Footnotes.

The Translator's Preface

Nietzsche wrote the first rough version of "The Case of Wagner" in the city of Turin, in May 1888. He finished it in the village of Sils Maria near the end of June that same year, and it was published that autumn. "Nietzsche Against Wagner" was written around the middle of December 1888. It was printed and corrected before the New Year. But it was not published until much later, because Nietzsche suffered a complete mental collapse in the first days of 1889.

When we read these two essays, their fierce and forceful tone can easily fool us. We may start to believe that the whole thing is just a cover for some hidden anger. We may think the talk about art is only a mask, hiding a deep personal feud that cannot be settled and that wants revenge. Even though many people have argued against this idea, plenty of readers still see these two little books that way. The real facts are not available to everyone, and rumours are easier to believe than to check. So it seems to be quite a common mistake to think that these short works came from personal hatred, or even from Nietzsche's jealousy of Wagner's fame. Another very common mistake is to think that the real argument here is not about music at all, but about religion. People take it for granted that an art like music is completely separate from the culture it fits into. They assume that music's goals, its special character, its influence, and its methods have nothing to do with the values and conditions of that culture. So, they say, no matter how many Christian ideas you can find in the words of Wagner's operas, Nietzsche had no right to object on artistic grounds. In their view, he simply held the strange opinion that these Christian ideas had also crept into Wagner's music itself.

There is only one answer to both of these views: they are completely wrong.

In Ecce Homo, his life story, Nietzsche tells us what Wagner really meant to him. That book is completely honest, from the first page to the last and in every single line. On pages 41, 44, 84, 122, 129, and others, we cannot doubt that Nietzsche is speaking from his heart. And what does he say? With deep feeling, he admits how much he owed to the great musician. He speaks of his love for Wagner and his gratitude to him. He says Wagner was the only German who had ever really mattered to him. He says his friendship with Wagner was the happiest and most precious experience of his life. And he says that breaking with Wagner almost killed him. We should also remember

that Wagner, for his part, said he felt "alone" after he had lost "that man," meaning Nietzsche. Once we know this, we start to see that personal bitterness and hatred have nothing to do with it. We feel we are dealing with something on a higher level. We must not judge these two men as if they were a pair of small shopkeepers who had had a petty neighbourhood quarrel.

Nietzsche says, in Ecce Homo, his life story, on page 24, that he never attacked people just for who they were. If he used someone's name at all, it was only as a tool to make a point. It was like using a magnifying glass to make a general truth clearer and easier to see, when that truth was slippery and complicated. For example, he used the name of David Strauss to stand for the narrow-minded, smug kind of person who thinks he is cultured. He did this without any bitterness or spite, since he did not even know the man. In the same way, he used Wagner's name to stand for the general decline of modern ideas, values, goals, and art.

All through his life, Nietzsche's great ambition was to bring European culture back to life. In the early part of his friendship with Wagner, he thought he had found the man who was ready to lead the way. For a long time he saw his master as the Saviour of Germany. He saw him as the bold reformer who would stop the declining current of his time and lead people back to a greatness that had died out with the ancient world. He took his role as a follower so seriously, and was so completely devoted to this cause, that for a long time people saw him as nothing more than Wagner's "writing servant." This was true especially in the circles where the up-and-coming musician was most disliked. And this happened even though Nietzsche had undeniable talents of his own and had already produced excellent original work.

Little by little, though, the young Nietzsche grew and started to form his own independent view of life and of people. Then it began to seem

very doubtful to him that Wagner was really pulling in the same direction as he was. Until then, he had treated Wagner's ideals as if they were his own. Now it slowly became clear to him that bringing German culture, and European culture, back to life did not lie along Wagner's path. Neither did the rethinking of all values that such a rebirth would need. He saw that he had given Wagner credit for many things that really belonged to himself, not to Wagner. Out of love, he had made his friend seem grander than he was. The man who wrote the opera Parsifal and the man Nietzsche had imagined were not the same person. He realised this step by step. One disappointment after another, one discovery after another, finally made him see it. At first his best instincts fought against it. But in the end his change of feeling became too strong to brush aside, and Nietzsche fell into the deepest despair. If he had followed his own personal feelings, he would probably have stayed Wagner's friend to the end. But instead he stayed loyal to his cause, and that meant speaking out against the man he had once worshipped.

"The Joyful Wisdom," "Thus Spake Zarathustra," "Beyond Good and Evil," "The Genealogy of Morals," "The Twilight of the Idols," "The Antichrist": all these books were really just so many calls to humanity to step off the road that Europeans were now walking. And what happened? Wagner began to write some harsh things about Nietzsche. The world assumed that the two men had gotten into a petty personal fight in the newspapers. And the true importance of the real issue was buried under all the all too human explanations that people piled on top of it.

Nietzsche was a very skilled musician. When he was young, his teachers spent a long time unsure whether he should be trained for a career in music, because he was so gifted at it. If his mother had not been offered a six-year scholarship for him at the famous school of Pforta, Nietzsche, who became a scholar of ancient languages, would prob-

ably have become a talented composer instead. So when he talks about music, he knows what he is talking about. And when he talks about Wagner's music in particular, the plain fact that he was a close friend of Wagner for years, during the time at Tribschen, is enough to prove that he understood the subject deeply. Nietzsche was one of the first people to see that the rules of art are tightly tied up with the laws of life. He saw that an idea about what makes art good can either boost or drain all the energy of life. He saw that a painting, a symphony, a poem or a statue can be just as gloomy, lawless, Christian or revolutionary as a philosophy or a science can be. So for Nietzsche, it made perfect sense to say that a certain kind of music goes hand in hand with the decline of a culture. That is why, all through his philosophy, he puts so much weight on questions about art and beauty.

In England and America, Nietzsche's attack on Wagner's art may still seem a bit hard to understand. But remember that people in mainland Europe have known for a long time that Nietzsche was actually right. Every year, thousands more people join the big group over there who no longer believe in the great musical rebel of the 1870s. In well-informed circles in both France and Germany, it has long been accepted as fact that Wagner belonged with the French Romantics and rebels. If we in England still cling to Wagner, and if we still treat Nietzsche as a heretic when he says that "Wagner was a musician for unmusical people," it is only because we are more cut off than we think from all the great movements, in ideas and in other things, that happen in mainland Europe.

In Wagner's music, in his teachings, and in his whole idea of art, Nietzsche saw something that supported, spread, and even encouraged the decline and decay that is now running wild in Europe. To the end of his life, Nietzsche still loved Wagner as a man and as a friend. Even so, for this reason, we find him, right on the eve of his mental

collapse, urging us to turn our backs on Wagner the musician and the artist.

Anthony M. Ludovici.

Preface to the Third Edition (1)

Since the summer of last year, many reviewers have criticized the preface above. Even so, after thinking it over carefully, I do not feel I would be right to change a single word or sentence of it. If I wanted to make any changes at all, they would be long additions, and they would back up its main argument rather than soften it. But anything I may have left out the first time has since been fully made up for. This is thanks to the English translations of two books: Daniel Halévy's "The Life of Friedrich Nietzsche" (2) and Henri Lichtenberger's "The Gospel of Superman" (3). In fact, I would not have added any new remarks of my own to this Third Edition at all, if it were not that the truth about this matter cannot be repeated too often.

In the books I just mentioned (from page 129 onward in Halévy's book, and from page 78 onward in Lichtenberger's book), you will find full proof of something I said in my preface to the first volume of "Thoughts out of Season." I did not think I needed to repeat that point in my first preface to these short works.

What I said was this. Many long years before these short works were even planned, Nietzsche's apparent sudden about-turn on his hero Wagner had already been hinted at. More than that, it had been stated in plain words in two works he wrote while he was still Wagner's friend. These two works were "The Birth of Tragedy" (1872) and "Wagner in Bayreuth" (1875). About the second one, Houston Stuart Chamberlain says not only that it has "lasting classic value," but also that "anyone who wants to follow the question [of Wagner] down to its roots must read it." (4)

One idea runs all through this work like a recurring musical theme: the idea that Wagner, deep down, was more of a play-actor than a mu-

sician. This thought was with Nietzsche so constantly that it is impossible to find out when he first put it into words.

In Nietzsche's wonderful life story, Ecce Homo, his life story (page 88), in the part about the early works I just mentioned, we find this passage. Nietzsche writes: "In the second of the two essays [Wagner in Bayreuth], with a deep and sure instinct, I already described the basic element in Wagner's nature as a talent for the theatre, a talent that pushes everything he does and everything he aims for to its final end." And as early as 1874, Nietzsche wrote in his diary: "Wagner is a born actor. Goethe was a painter who never made it, and Schiller was a public speaker who never made it. In the same way, Wagner was a theatre genius who never made it. He treats music the way an actor does. He knows how to sing and speak as if from different souls and from completely different worlds (as in Tristan and the Meistersinger)."

But there is no need to pile up more examples. As I have said, the translations of Halévy's and Lichtenberger's books give readers all the outside evidence they could possibly want. That evidence proves wrong the common belief, held even by scholars, that these two short works show Nietzsche making a complete, seemingly unexplainable, and therefore "crazy" about-turn. Still, in case some people had doubts left about this point, and to make these essays more interesting, the Editor decided to add something to the Second Edition. He added a number of passages from Nietzsche's diary from 1878. That was ten years before "The Case of Wagner" and "Nietzsche contra Wagner" were written. The point was to show how far those scholarly critics had missed even the plain facts when they rushed to their far too hasty conclusions. These are the critics who complain about Nietzsche's "sick and uncontrollable reversals and sudden changes of feeling." You will find these passages at the end of "Nietzsche contra Wagner." But while reading them, you should remember two things.

First, Nietzsche himself never meant them to be published, which is why they are rough and sketchy. Second, they were first published in volume eleven of the first German Library Edition (pages 99 to 129) only in 1897, when he was already a helpless invalid. Since then they have been reprinted twice: in 1901 in the large German Library Edition (volume eleven, pages 181 to 202), and in 1906 in the German Pocket Edition, as an appendix to Part Two of "Human, All Too Human."

These short works are now especially interesting, for two reasons. First, we finally have Wagner's own story of how he developed, his art, his goals and his struggles, in the astonishing book about himself called My Life. (5) Second, we now have Ecce Homo, his life story, Nietzsche's autobiography. In it we learn for the first time, in Nietzsche's own words, how much his life was a story of two loyalties: on one side to Wagner, and on the other side to his own life's work, the rethinking of all values.

Readers interested in the quarrel between Nietzsche and Wagner will naturally turn to these books, hoping they will finally clear up every difficulty in the problem. But they should not be too hopeful. From start to finish, this problem cannot be settled by "facts." Here you need a good deal of gut feeling: knowing by instinct what to choose, what to dislike, and what to distrust. For example, Wagner's My Life should be read with a bit more suspicion. This is especially true in England, where critics are not nearly suspicious enough about what artists from mainland Europe say about themselves. And when English critics are suspicious at all, they too often point their suspicion at the wrong thing.

One example of this lack of fine judgment about foreign writers is Lord Morley's book on Rousseau. That book innocently believes everything a writer like Rousseau chooses to say about himself. It

never stops for a moment to think that Rousseau might have been putting on a show of honesty. We could easily make the same mistake about Wagner's life. That is, we could take seriously everything he says about himself and his family matters.

We should watch out for this. We should not even believe Wagner when he says bad things about himself. Nobody says bad things about himself without a reason, and here the question is to work out what that reason is. Wagner believed that a genius was always immoral. So did he want to look like a selfish, immoral man, to make us believe in his genius? Deep down, he himself was not very sure of that genius. Did Wagner want to seem "honest" in his life story, so that we would believe his music was honest too? He doubted that as well, but he wanted the world to accept his music as "true." Or did he want people to think badly of him over things that were not true, and so did not really touch him? That way he could throw us off the trail of the true things, the things he was ashamed of and wanted the world to overlook. This would be just like Rousseau, and the likeness between the two men goes deeper than the surface. Rousseau cruelly claimed that he had sent his children to the orphanage, so that nobody would think he had been unable to have children at all. In short, where is the bluff in Wagner's life story? So let us be careful with it, and all the more because Wagner himself promises in his opening note that it is true. Besides, if we were too trusting here, we would be going directly against Nietzsche's own advice, given in the following short sayings (Numbers 19 and 20, page 89):

Nietzsche writes: "It is very hard to follow the path of Wagner's growth. We must not trust his own account of what went on in his soul. He writes propaganda leaflets for his followers.

"It is highly doubtful whether Wagner can be trusted to give evidence about himself."

And on page 37, in the note, we read: "He, Wagner, was not proud enough to be able to put up with the truth about himself. Nobody had less pride than he did. Like Victor Hugo, he stayed true to himself even in his life story. In other words, he stayed an actor."

Still, as a famous English judge once said, "The truth will come out, even in the witness box." And in this case we may add: even in a life story written by the man himself. There is one statement in Wagner's book My Life that sounds true, at least to my ears. In my view it matters, and Wagner himself seems to give it a mysterious importance. I mean the passage on page 93 of the first volume, where Wagner says: "Because my nature was unusually lively and sensitive from birth … I slowly became aware that I had a certain power to carry away or confuse my lazier companions."

This seems harmless enough. But read it alongside Nietzsche's sharp criticism, especially on pages 14 to 18 of this book, and with some knowledge of Wagner's music, and it becomes one of the most striking passages in Wagner's life story. That is because it shows how early he became aware of his strongest instinct and talent.

I know very well that Wagner fans will not be moved by these remarks. They are far too grateful to Wagner for that. He has given them a precious shiny coat of paint to cover up the dull ugliness of our civilisation. There are souls who despair over how money-minded and material this world is. There are souls who despair of themselves and long to get away from themselves. To them he has given the drugs they cannot do without, like hashish and morphine, to numb the conflicts inside them. These inner conflicts can be seen everywhere these days. So Wagner meets a common need; he is everyone's helper. Because of that, he is sure to be worshipped and adored, no matter how selfish and theatrical his life stories are.

Even so, there are signs, at least among his English-speaking worshippers, who need romantic feeling even more than their fellow fans in Europe, that people are now starting to separate the man from the artist, so that they can keep defending Wagner. They brush off the man as "all too human," but they still insist that there is something godlike in his music. It is an unpleasant job to wake up these beginners in understanding the mind. But they should be told that you cannot split a man into two parts like this. The only place where that is allowed is in Christianity, with its body and soul. Outside of religion, there is no basis for it at all. A flower cannot be so strangely cut off from the plant it grows on. And has a black woman ever been known to give birth to a white child?

As Nietzsche tells us on page 19, Wagner "was something complete. He was a typical person in decline, in whom there was no sign of 'free will,' and in whom every feature had to be exactly as it was." Let me add that Wagner was a typical example of the nineteenth century. That was the century of values that clashed, of instincts that pulled in opposite directions, and of every kind of inner conflict. The real, classical artists of that time, men like Heine, Goethe, Stendhal and Gobineau, overcame their inner battles. Each of them managed to make himself into a balanced whole, though not without a hard fight, because every one of them suffered from being a product of his time, that is, a person in decline. The only difference between them and the Romantics is this. The classical artists knew what was wrong with them, and they had the will and the strength to beat their sickness. The Romantics, on the other hand, took the easier way: they closed their eyes to what they were.

Nietzsche says: "I am just as much a product of my time as Wagner. That is, I am a person in decline. The only difference is that I saw this, and that I fought against it."(6)

What Wagner did was typical of all the Romantics and of the artists of his day. He drowned out and shouted over his inner conflict with overflowing emotion and wild excitement. I am not going to judge Wagner's music in full here; this is hardly the right place for that. But I think it could well be shown, purely by looking at the mind, how impossible it was for a man like Wagner to create real art. After all, how can balance, order, symmetry and mastery come out of uncontrolled conflict, disorder, falling apart and chaos? It cannot be denied that art which grows from such swampy ground may be "wonderful," "splendid" and "overwhelming," like certain plants that grow in marshes. But it is not true art. It is no more true art than Gothic architecture is. In trying to escape the tragic conflict at its medieval heart, that style screamed its hysterical cry up to heaven. It even melted the stones of its buildings into something like a trembling, flowing fountain, to properly express the painful and miserable struggle going on at that time between the body and the soul.

There is no doubt that Wagner, too, suffered greatly. But he did not suffer from too much strength, the way a true artist does. He suffered from weakness, the weakness of the times he lived in, and he never got the better of it. That is why we should feel sorry for him rather than judge him the way his German and English critics are judging him now. These critics have turned against him with a sudden, very nervous jump, and they have admitted their change of heart a little too harshly.

The philosopher Spinoza said: "I have tried hard not to mock, or grieve over, or hate… but to understand." These words should guide us, not only when we think about Wagner, but in everything.

Being at war with yourself on the inside is a terrible illness. Nothing is more sure to cause the kind of nervous, touchy temper that is hard on the sufferer and hard on everyone around them than this so-called

sickness of the spirit. Nietzsche was probably quite right when he said that the only real, true music Wagner ever wrote was not in his fancy, complicated songs and overtures. Instead, it was in ten or fifteen bars of music, scattered here and there, which showed the composer's deep and honest sadness. But this sadness had to be beaten somehow. And Wagner, who had the blood of a cheap stage performer in his veins, grabbed the cure that was closest at hand: the skill of confusing and dazzling other people, and himself too. So he stayed in the dark about himself his whole life. As Nietzsche rightly points out (page 37, note), the man did not have enough pride to want to know the truth about what he really was, or to accept that truth gladly. Being an actor, the passion that ruled him was vanity. But in his case this vanity went along with a half-aware feeling that something was wrong with him and with his art. It was this feeling that made him suffer. The way he was so wrapped up in himself, and the way he feared and mistrusted other people almost as much as the writer Rousseau did, were only the outside signs of the clashes going on inside him. But, to say again what I have already said, these unhealthy signs do not clash at all with Wagner's music. In fact, they are the very cause of it, the root it grows out of.

So in reality, Wagner the man and Wagner the artist were surely one and the same, and together they made a splendid romantic dreamer. Both his music and the story of his life that he wrote himself prove how wonderfully gifted he was in this way. He was a success in his own day, as he is in ours, because the modern world longs for actors, magicians, people who dazzle and confuse, and dreamers of ideals. Such people can hide the sickness and weakness that are everywhere, and they please us by making us drunk with excitement and lifting us up. But if that is so, the world should not be let down when the hero of one age blows up and falls apart in the next. It should not be surprised to find a gap between the hero's private life and his "uplifting"

art or his romantic, idealistic message. As long as people admire heroic dramatic poses more than real heroism, this kind of disappointment is bound to be the price they pay for their mistake. In a truly great man, the way he thinks life should be lived and the way he actually lives it always match, if you look from a high enough point of view. They must match, and they do. But in an actor, a romantic, a dreamer of ideals, or a Christian, there is always a huge gap between the two. And no matter what well-meaning critics try to do, that gap cannot be bridged after the man's death with clever psychological tricks and acrobatics.

Let anyone look at Nietzsche's life and ideas in this same way. Let anyone turn his life inside out, not only as he tells it to us in Ecce Homo, his life story, but as all the people who wrote about him tell it, both his friends and his enemies. What will they find? Even if we leave aside his books, which were like flowers that bloomed from his life now and then, we simply cannot deny how great the man was in the way he actually lived his private life. And if we fully understand and value that, we would have to be strangely lacking in instinct and in a nose for these things not to suspect that some of this greatness shows up in his life's work too.

ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

London, July 1911.

The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem

A Letter from Turin, May 1888

"Saying Serious Things with a Laugh..."

Preface

I am writing this to take a weight off my mind. It is not just spite that makes me praise Bizet and put down Wagner in this essay. There is a lot of joking here, but I want to make one point clear, and that point is no joke. Turning my back on Wagner was, for me, a matter of fate. Managing to like anything at all after that was, for me, a victory. Maybe nobody was ever more dangerously caught up in the Wagner craze than I was. Nobody fought against it more stubbornly. And nobody was ever so overjoyed to be free of it. It is a long story! Should I give it a name? If I were a preacher of morals, who knows what I might call it! Maybe a case of self-control. But the philosopher does not like the preacher of morals, and he does not like grand, puffed-up words either…

What is the first and last thing a philosopher asks of himself? To rise above his own time, inside himself, and to become "timeless." So what does the philosopher have to fight hardest against? Against everything in him that makes him a product of his time. Very well, then! I am just as much a product of my time as Wagner. In other words, I am a person in decline. The only difference is that I saw it, and I fought against it. The philosopher in me fought against it.

Until now, the problem that has occupied me most has been the problem of decline, and I had my reasons. "Good and evil" are only a playful side-branch of this problem. Once you have trained your eye to spot the signs of decline, you also understand morality. You understand what is hiding underneath its holiest names and its lists of values. For example: weakened life, the wish for nothingness, deep exhaustion. Morality says no to life… To take on a task like this, I had to discipline myself. I had to take sides against everything sick in myself.

That included Wagner, it included Schopenhauer, and it included the whole of modern humanity. I needed a deep distance, a coldness and a clear head toward everything that belongs to my time, everything happening around me. And my highest wish was to have Zarathustra's eye: an eye that looks at the whole thing called mankind from a huge distance, an eye that looks down on it. For a goal like that, what sacrifice would not have been worth it? What "self-control"! What "giving things up"!

The greatest event of my life was getting well again. Wagner belongs only to my illnesses.

That does not mean I want to seem ungrateful to this illness. In this essay I argue that Wagner is harmful. Even so, I want to point out who still needs him, in spite of everything: the philosopher. Anyone else might be able to manage without Wagner. But the philosopher is not free to just walk past him. The philosopher has to be the guilty conscience of his time, the voice that tells it what is wrong. But to do that, he has to know his time better than anyone. And what better guide could there be through the maze of the modern mind than Wagner? Who could reveal the soul more thoroughly? Through Wagner, the modern age speaks its most private language. It hides neither its good nor its evil. It has thrown away all shame. And the other way round: once you are clear about what is good and what is evil in Wagner, you have almost worked out the whole value of the modern age. I can fully understand a musician of today who says, "I hate Wagner, but I can't stand any other music." But I would also understand a philosopher who said, "Wagner is the modern age boiled down." There is no way around it: first, we have to be Wagner fans…

1.

Yesterday—would you believe it?—I heard Bizet's masterpiece for the twentieth time. Once again I sat through it with the same quiet respect. Once again I did not run away. I am surprised that I beat my own impatience like this. A work like this makes you feel whole! Through it, you almost become a "masterpiece" yourself. And in fact, every time I heard Carmen, I felt that I was more of a philosopher, and a better one, than at other times. I became so patient, so happy, so calm, like a wise man from India, so settled.… Sitting still for five hours: that is the first step to becoming a saint! May I say that Bizet's way of writing for the orchestra is the only one I can stand now? The other kind of orchestra writing that everyone loves right now—Wagner's kind—is harsh and fake, and on top of that "simple-minded." That is why it appeals to all three senses of the modern soul at the same time. Wagner's orchestra writing affects me terribly! I call it the hot, sticky desert wind. An unpleasant sweat breaks out all over me. All my good weather disappears.

To me, Bizet's music seems perfect. It comes forward lightly, gracefully, with style. It is lovable. It does not sweat. "Everything good is easy; everything divine runs on light feet": this is the first rule of my ideas about beauty and art. This music is wicked, refined, and accepting of fate, and yet it stays popular with ordinary people. Its refinement belongs to a whole people, not just to one person. It is rich. It is clear and certain. It builds, it organizes, it finishes what it starts. In this way it is the opposite of the shapeless octopus in music, the "never-ending melody." Have more painful, more tragic sounds ever been heard on a stage before? And how does it get them? Without pulling faces! Without faking anything at all! Free from the lie of the grand style! In short: this music assumes that the listener is intelligent, even as a musician. That makes it the opposite of Wagner. Apart

from everything else, Wagner was in any case the rudest genius on earth. (Wagner treats us as if … , he repeats something so many times that we get desperate, until in the end we believe it.)

And let me say it again: I become a better man when Bizet speaks to me. I also become a better musician, a better listener. Is it even possible to listen any better? I even dig behind this music with my ears. I hear what causes it. I feel as if I am there when it is born. I tremble at the risks this bold music takes. I am thrilled by the lucky accidents in it, which even Bizet himself may not be responsible for. And, oddly enough, deep down I do not think about it at all, or I do not notice how much I really am thinking about it. Because, all the while, completely different ideas are running through my head.… Has anyone ever noticed that music sets the mind free? That it gives wings to thought? And that the more of a musician you become, the more of a philosopher you also become? The grey sky of abstract thinking seems to come alive with flashes of lightning. The light is strong enough to show every detail of things, strong enough to let you take on hard problems. And you look out over the world as if from the top of a mountain. With this I have described the deep feeling of the philosopher. And then, out of nowhere, answers drop into my lap, like a little hailstorm of ice and wisdom, of problems solved. Where am I? Bizet makes me creative. Everything that is good makes me creative. I feel grateful for nothing else, and I have no other test for deciding what is good.

2.

Bizet's work saves people too. Wagner is not the only "Saviour." With this work you say goodbye to the damp north and to all the fog of Wagner's ideal. Even the story itself frees us from these things. From Mérimée, who wrote the original tale, it gets this logic even inside passion. From him it gets the straight line, the necessity that nothing

can stop. But above all, it has something that belongs to the warm southern lands: that dryness in the air, that clearness of the air. Here the climate is different in every way. Here a different kind of sensuality, a different kind of sensitivity, and a different kind of cheerfulness call out to us. This music is cheerful, but not in a French or German way. Its cheerfulness is African. Fate hangs over it. Its happiness is short, sudden, and without mercy. I envy Bizet for having the courage to show this kind of feeling, which until now has found no way to express itself in the educated music of Europe—this southern, tanned, sunburnt sensitivity.… What a joy the golden afternoon of its happiness is to us! When we look out, with this music in our heads, we wonder if we have ever seen the sea so calm. And how soothing this Moorish dancing is! For once, even our endless hunger is satisfied by its sensual sadness! And finally, love—love turned back into Nature! Not the love of a "well-educated girl"! No sentimental heroine like Senta in Wagner's opera. Instead, love as fate, as a doom, cold, innocent, cruel—and exactly in this way, Nature! A love whose weapon is war, and whose very heart is the deadly hatred between men and women! I know of no other case where the tragic irony at the center of love is expressed so harshly, or in such a terrible phrase, as in the last cry of Don José, which ends the work:

"Yes, I am the one who killed her, I—my beloved Carmen!"

Such an idea of love (the only one worthy of a philosopher) is rare. It sets one work of art apart from a thousand others. Because, as a rule, artists are no better than the rest of the world. They are even worse: they misunderstand love. Even Wagner misunderstood it. They think they are unselfish in love, because they seem to be looking out for another person, often at a cost to themselves. But in return, they want to own that other person.… Even God is no exception to this rule. He is very far from thinking, "What does it matter to you whether I love you or not?" He becomes terrible if he is not loved back. As the writer

Benjamin Constant put it: "Love"—and with this rule you win against gods and people alike—"is of all feelings the most selfish, and so, when it is hurt, the least generous."

3.

Maybe you are starting to see how much this music makes me better? Music must be made Mediterranean. I have my reasons for this rule (see "Beyond Good and Evil," page 216 and after). It means going back to Nature, to health, to good spirits, to Germanness, to real goodness! And yet I was once one of the most spoiled Wagner fans of all. I was able to take Wagner seriously. Oh, the old wizard! What tricks he played on us! The first thing his art puts in our hands is a magnifying glass. We look through it, and we stop trusting our own eyes. Everything looks bigger. Even Wagner himself looks bigger. What a clever rattlesnake he was! All his life he kept rattling words like "giving up," "loyalty," and "purity" in our ears. And he stepped back from this rotten world singing a song in praise of sexual purity! And we believed every bit of it.

But you won't listen to me? You would even rather deal with the puzzle of Wagner than with the puzzle of Bizet? Well, I don't think little of it either. It has its charm. The question of being saved is even a very old and respected question. Wagner thought about nothing as deeply as he thought about being saved. His opera is the opera of being saved. In his operas, someone always wants to be saved. Sometimes it's a young man, sometimes it's a young woman. This is his big question. And how richly he plays with his recurring musical theme! What rare and sad changes of key! If it weren't for Wagner, who would teach us that innocent people like best to save interesting sinners? (That's what happens in "Tannhäuser.") Or that even the wandering Jew gets saved and settles down once he gets married? (That's what happens in "The Flying Dutchman.") Or that spoiled old women like

best to be saved by pure young men? (That's the case of Kundry.) Or that young women with nervous fits like to be saved by their doctor? (That's what happens in "Lohengrin.") Or that beautiful girls love most of all to be saved by a knight who also happens to be a Wagner fan? (That's what happens in "The Mastersingers.") Or that even married women like to be saved by a knight? (That's the case of Isolde.) Or that the respected Almighty God, after disgracing himself morally in all sorts of ways, is finally rescued by a free thinker and a man who rejects morality? (That's what happens in the Ring operas.) Admire this last bit of wisdom most of all! Do you understand it? I am very careful not to understand it. I would much sooner prove than argue against the idea that you can learn still other lessons from these works. For example: that a Wagner ballet can drive you to despair, and also to goodness! (Again, that's "Tannhäuser.") That not going to bed at the right time can lead to terrible results. (Again, that's "Lohengrin.") That you can never be too sure who you are really marrying. (For the third time, that's "Lohengrin.") "Tristan and Isolde" praises the perfect husband, who in a certain situation can ask only one question: "But why didn't you tell me this before? Nothing could have been simpler!" The answer is:

"That I cannot tell you. And what you are asking, you will never find out."

"Lohengrin" sets a serious ban on all looking into things and all asking of questions. In this way Wagner stood up for the Christian idea: "You must and you will believe." Being scientific becomes a crime against what is highest and holiest. "The Flying Dutchman" preaches the grand teaching that a woman can anchor even the most restless, wandering soul. Or, to say it in Wagner's terms, she can "save" him. Here we dare to ask a question. Suppose this were actually true. Would that make it a good thing? What happens to the "wandering Jew" once a woman worships him and ties him down? He simply stops being

eternal. He gets married. That is to say, he no longer matters to us. Now bring this into real life. The danger for the artist and for the genius, who are of course the real "wandering Jews," lies in women. Women who worship them are their downfall. Hardly anyone has a strong enough character not to be spoiled, or "saved," when he finds himself treated like a god. He right away lowers himself to the woman's level. A man is a coward when facing anything of the 'eternal woman,' and girls know this. In many cases of a woman's love, and maybe exactly in the most famous ones, the love is nothing more than a fancy kind of living off someone else. It is like building your nest inside another person's soul, and sometimes even inside another person's body. Ah! And how often it is at the expense of the one who is being lived off!

We know what happened to Goethe in Germany, a country like a fussy old maid, eaten away by moral poison. Germans always found him offensive. The only people who honestly admired him were Jewish women. Schiller, "noble" Schiller, who shouted flowery words into people's ears, was the kind of man Germans liked. What did they blame Goethe for? For writing about the Mount of Venus, the place of love and pleasure, and for writing certain short poems from Venice. Even the poet Klopstock gave him a moral lecture. There was a time when the writer Herder liked to call Goethe "Priapus," after the ancient god of sex. Even Goethe's novel "Wilhelm Meister" seemed to them just a sign of decline, of morals "going to the dogs." The historian Niebuhr was disgusted by what he called the "zoo of tame cattle" in that book and by how worthless its hero was. In the end he burst out with a complaint that Biterolf, the stiff moral singer from "Tannhäuser," could well have sung: "Nothing makes such a painful impression as when a great mind strips off its own wings and tries to become an expert at something far beneath it, while giving up its higher goals." But the most outraged of all was the educated lady. All

the small royal courts in Germany, and every kind of strict, prudish group, made the sign of the cross when they saw Goethe, when they thought of the "unclean spirit" in him. This story is what Wagner put to music. Of course he saves Goethe. But he does it in such a clever way that he also takes the side of the educated lady. Goethe gets saved: a prayer saves him, and an educated lady pulls him up out of the mud.

And what would Goethe have thought of Wagner? Goethe once asked himself: "What danger hangs over all Romantic artists? What is their fate?" His answer was: "To choke while chewing over and over on moral and religious nonsense." In short: Parsifal. The philosopher adds a closing note to this: Holiness. It is the only higher value that the crowd, or women, can still see. It is the farthest view of the ideal for everyone who is naturally short-sighted. But to philosophers, this horizon, like every other horizon, is just a misunderstanding. It is like a door slammed in the face of where their own world really begins: their danger, their ideal, the thing they long for. To say it more politely: "Philosophy is not enough for the great majority. It needs holiness."

4.

I will tell the story of the Ring operas once more. This is the right place for it. It is also the story of someone being saved, except that this time it is Wagner himself who is saved. For half his life Wagner believed in the Revolution, the way only a Frenchman could have believed in it. He looked for it in the ancient carved writings of myths, and he thought he had found the perfect revolutionary in Siegfried. "Where does all the evil in this world come from?" Wagner asked himself. And he answered, as every revolutionary thinker has answered: from "old contracts." In plain words: from customs, laws, morals and institutions, from everything that the ancient world and ancient soci-

ety are built on. "How can we get rid of the evil in this world? How can we get rid of ancient society?" Only by declaring war on these "contracts," meaning traditions and morality. And that is exactly what Siegfried does. He starts the game early, very early. Even his birth is already a declaration of war on morality: he is the child of adultery and incest. It was not the old legend but Wagner himself who invented this extreme detail. On this point he "corrected" the legend. Siegfried carries on the way he began. He follows only his first impulse. He throws all tradition, all respect and all fear to the winds. Whatever he doesn't like, he knocks down. He charges disrespectfully at the old gods. But his main task is to set woman free, "to rescue Brunnhilda." Siegfried and Brunnhilda stand for the holy ceremony of free love, the dawn of a golden age, the sunset of the gods of the old morality. Evil has been got rid of. For a long time Wagner's ship sailed happily along this route. There is no doubt that this was the way Wagner was heading toward his highest goal. Then what happened? A disaster. The ship crashed into a reef. Wagner ran aground. The reef was Schopenhauer's philosophy. Wagner had got stuck on a view of the world that was the exact opposite of his own. What had he set to music? Optimism? Wagner was ashamed. On top of that, it was a kind of optimism that Schopenhauer had given a nasty name: "shameless" optimism. Now he was even more ashamed. He thought it over for a while, and his situation seemed hopeless. At last a way out seemed slowly to open up in front of him. What if the reef he had crashed on could be explained as the goal, as the hidden reason, as the real purpose of his whole voyage? Being shipwrecked here could also be a goal. As the old Latin saying goes: "I sailed well when I was shipwrecked." And so he translated the Ring operas into Schopenhauer's language. Everything goes wrong, everything falls into ruin, and the new world is just as bad as the old one. Nothingness, like Circe, the enchantress, from India, waves him over. Under the old plan, Brunnhilda was supposed to exit with a song praising free love,

comforting the world with the hope of a socialist paradise where "all will be well." Now she is given a different job. First she has to study Schopenhauer. First she has to turn the fourth book of "The World as Will and Idea" into verse. Wagner was saved. Joking aside, this really was a case of being saved. What Wagner owes to Schopenhauer is beyond measure. It was the philosopher of decline who allowed the artist of decline to find himself.

5.

The artist of decline. That is the right word. And here I begin to be serious. I could never just stand by and approve while this person in decline ruins our health, and ruins music as well. Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn't he really a disease? Everything he touches, he infects. He has made music sick.

He is a typical person in decline. With his spoiled taste, he thinks the world needs him. He claims that his taste is a higher taste. He tries to make his own corruption into a law, to call it progress, to call it the completion of something.

And nobody protects themselves against it. His power to seduce grows to monstrous size. Holy incense floats around him. The mistaken idea people have of him is called the Gospel. And he has certainly not won over only the simple-minded to his side!

I would like to open the window a little. Air! More air!

It doesn't surprise me that people in Germany fool themselves about Wagner. The opposite would surprise me. The Germans have shaped a Wagner of their own that they can worship. They have never been good at understanding the human mind. They are grateful that they misunderstand. But that people in Paris should also fool themselves about Wagner! In Paris, where people are hardly anything but experts

on the human mind. And in Saint Petersburg! Where people sense things that even Paris has no idea about. Wagner must be very closely connected to the whole decline of Europe, if Europe could not feel that he was in decline! He belongs to it. He is its leading character, its greatest name. We honor ourselves when we raise him up to the clouds. Because the simple fact that nobody protects themselves against him is already a sign of decline. Instinct has grown weak. What people should avoid now attracts them. People actually kiss the very thing that drags them faster into the pit. Do I need to give an example? Just think of the diets that people with weak blood, or gout, or diabetes choose for themselves. Here is what a vegetarian is: a creature who needs a strengthening diet. To recognize what is harmful as harmful, and to be able to refuse what is harmful, is a sign of Germanness, of being full of life. What is harmful tempts the exhausted: cabbage tempts the vegetarian. Illness itself can push you to live more strongly, but you have to be healthy enough to handle that kind of push! Wagner makes exhaustion worse, and that is exactly why he draws the weak and the exhausted to him. Oh, the joy of the old Master, the joy of a rattlesnake, precisely because he always saw "the little children" coming to him!

I put this point of view first and above everything else: Wagner's art is sick. The problems he puts on stage all have to do with hysteria. Think of his twitching, fit-like emotions, his over-excited sensitivity, his taste that always demands stronger and spicier flavors, his unsteadiness, which he dressed up to look like principles, and last but not least, the heroes and heroines he chooses, seen as types of bodies and nerves. It's a hospital ward! All of it together is a picture of sickness, and there is no doubt about that. Wagner is a nervous disorder. Perhaps nothing today is better known, or at least more closely studied, than the shape-shifting nature of degeneration, which has disguised itself here both as an art and as an artist. In Wagner, our

doctors and scientists of the body have a very interesting case, or at least a very complete one. Precisely because nothing is more modern than this total sickness, this slowness and over-sensitivity of the nervous system, Wagner is the modern artist above all others, the great con man of modern times. Everything the world craves most today is combined in his art in the most tempting way: the three great stimulants of exhausted people, which are brutality, artificiality and innocence, meaning plain idiocy.

Wagner is a great spoiler of music. He found in music a way to stir up tired nerves, and by doing that he made music sick. He is very clever at kicking worn-out creatures back into action and at bringing half-dead people back to life. His talent for this is far from small. He is a master of hypnotic tricks, and he knocks down even the strongest people like cattle. Wagner's success, his success with people's nerves, and so with women, turned the whole crowd of ambitious musicians into followers of his secret art. And not only the ambitious ones, but the clever, money-minded ones too. Today you can only make money with sick music. Our big theatres live off Wagner.

6.

Once again I am going to allow myself a little joke. Imagine that Wagner's success could take on a body and become a real person. Imagine it dressed up as a friendly, learned music expert, walking around among young artists who are just starting out. What do you think it would say to them?

"My friends," it would say, "let's have a quiet word in private. It is easier to write bad music than good music. But what if, on top of that, bad music also paid better? What if it worked better, convinced people more, lifted them up more, was safer, and was more Wagner-like? There is an old Latin saying: 'Beauty belongs to the few.' That's

bad enough, honestly! We understand Latin, and maybe we also understand what's good for us. Beauty has its downsides, we know that. So why bother with beauty? Why not aim for size instead, for the grand, the gigantic, the things that move the crowds? And let me say it again: it is easier to be huge than to be beautiful. We know that."

"We know the crowds, and we know the theatre. The best of the people who gather there are young Germans, Siegfrieds in horned helmets, and other Wagner fans. They want the grand, the deep, and the overwhelming. That much we can still give them. And as for the rest of the people who gather there, the educated idiots, the bored little nobodies, the 'eternal woman,' the people who are happy as long as their stomachs are full, in short, the general public, they want the grand, the deep, and the overwhelming too. All these people think the same way. They say: 'Whoever knocks us over is strong. Whoever lifts us up is godlike. Whoever makes us feel a vague sense of wonder is deep.' So let's make up our minds, my musical friends. Yes, we want to knock them over. Yes, we want to lift them up. Yes, we want to fill them with vague wonder. That much we can still do."

"Now, about making them wonder. This is where our idea of 'style' begins. Above all, no thoughts! Nothing gives you away more than a thought! Instead, give them the state of mind that comes before thinking: the struggle of a thought that hasn't been born yet, the promise of thoughts to come, the world as it was before God made it, a return of chaos. Chaos makes people wonder."

"As the master himself put it: endlessness, but without melody."

"Second, about knocking people over. This belongs, at least partly, to the study of the body. First, let's look at the instruments. Some of them could convince even our guts. They 'throw open doors,' as Handel would say. Others cast a spell right down into our bones. What matters most here is the colour, the sound quality of the melody. The

melody itself doesn't matter at all. Let's be clear about that. Why should we waste our energy on anything else? Let's make our sounds full of character, even to the point of silliness! If our sounds leave people lots of room to guess what they mean, they will think we are very intelligent. Let's irritate the nerves, let's beat them to death. Let's play with thunder and lightning. That is what knocks people over."

"But what knocks people over best of all is passion. We need to get this matter of passion straight. Nothing is cheaper than passion! You can do without all the fine skills of counterpoint, the art of weaving melodies together. You don't need to have learned anything at all. But passion is always within reach! Beauty is hard, so let's watch out for beauty! And for melody too! However serious we may be about high ideals in other ways, let's speak badly of it, my friends, let's speak badly of it, let's run melody down! Nothing is more dangerous than a beautiful melody! Nothing is more sure to ruin people's taste! My friends, if people start loving beautiful melodies again, we are finished!"

"First rule: melody is immoral. Proof: Palestrina. How to use it: Parsifal. Having no melody makes something holy all by itself."

"And here is what passion means. Passion is ugliness doing acrobatic tricks on the tightrope of tricky key changes. My friends, let's be brave enough to be ugly! Wagner was brave enough! Let's boldly shovel the mud of the most disgusting harmonies out in front of us. We mustn't even worry about getting our hands dirty! Only this way will we become 'natural.'"

"And now one last piece of advice. Maybe it covers everything: let's be dreamers of ideals! It may not be the cleverest thing we can do, but it is the wisest. To lift people up, we must be lifted up ourselves. Let's wander around in the clouds, let's give speeches to eternity, let's make sure we surround ourselves with great symbols! 'Upward! Boom-

boom!' There is no better advice. The 'heaving chest' will be our argument, and 'beautiful feelings' will be our lawyers. Virtue still wins out over counterpoint. People have always thought: 'How could someone who makes us better not be better than we are?' So let's make mankind better! That way we will become good. That way we will even become 'classics,' just as Schiller became a 'classic.' Chasing after cheap thrills for the senses, after so-called beauty, wrecked the nerves of the Italians. So let's stay German! Even Mozart's attitude to music, and Wagner told us this to comfort us, was basically shallow and silly."

"Let's never admit that music 'may be a way to relax,' that it may 'cheer people up,' that it may 'give pleasure.' Let's never give pleasure! We will be finished if people start thinking of music as something to enjoy again. That belongs to the bad eighteenth century. On the other hand, between ourselves, nothing would be wiser than a dose of fake holiness, if you'll excuse the word. It makes you look dignified. And let's be careful to pick exactly the right moment to look gloomy, to sigh openly, to sigh in a holy way, to show off great Christian pity in front of everyone. 'Man is rotten. Who will save him? What will save him?' Let's not answer that. We have to be careful. We must hold back our ambition, which would tell us to start new religions. But no one must ever doubt that it is we who save him, that being saved can be found only in our music." (See Wagner's essay "Religion and Art.")

7.

Enough! Enough! I'm afraid that, underneath all my cheerful jokes, you are starting to see the dark truth far too clearly. It is the picture of the decline of art, and of the decline of the artist. The decline of the artist is really a decline of character. For now, we might describe it like this: the musician is turning into an actor, and his art is growing more and more into a talent for telling lies. In one chapter of my main

work, which is called "On the Physiology of Art," I will get a chance to show this more fully. I will show that turning all of art into acting is a sign that the body is breaking down, or more exactly a kind of hysteria. It is just as much a sign of this as every other single flaw and weakness that belongs to the art Wagner started. One example is how restless it is to look at: it forces you to change your dramatic pose toward it every second. People who see Wagner as just a freak of nature, a random mood, or a string of accidents understand nothing about him. He was not the "flawed," "unlucky," "self-contradicting" genius that people have called him. Wagner was something complete. He was a typical person in decline, in whom there was no sign at all of "free will," and in whom every feature had to be exactly as it was. If there is anything interesting about Wagner at all, it is this: how steadily an unhealthy bodily condition can turn itself, step by step and conclusion by conclusion, into a method, a way of working, a reform of all principles, and a crisis in taste.

Here I will only stop to look at the question of style. How can you tell decline in writing? You can tell because life no longer flows through the whole thing. Single words take over and jump right out of the sentence they belong to. The sentences themselves push past their limits and blur the meaning of the whole page. Then the page, in turn, becomes strong at the expense of the whole work, so that the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the pattern of every style in decline. There is always chaos among the tiny parts, and the will falls apart. In moral terms, this is called "freedom of the individual." Stretched into a political idea, it becomes "equal rights for all." Life, equal energy, all the buzz and overflowing richness of life, gets pushed back into the smallest pieces, and everything else is left almost dead. Everywhere you find paralysis, suffering, and numbness, or else hostility and chaos. And both of these hit you harder and harder the higher you climb into the larger, more organized forms.

The whole no longer lives at all. It is put together, added up, artificial, a fake.

With Wagner, the first thing we notice is that he imagines things vividly, almost like hallucinations. But what he imagines are not sounds; they are dramatic poses. Only after he has the poses does he start looking for musical signs to express them. If we want to admire him, we should watch him at work here. Look at how he separates and sorts things, how he arrives at small units, and how he brings them to life with a jolt, stresses them, and pushes them to the front. But doing this uses up all his strength, and the rest is worthless. How poor, clumsy, and amateur is his way of "developing" his music, his attempt to join together parts that don't fit. In this respect his way of working reminds you of two people who are like him in style in other ways too: the Goncourt brothers. You almost feel sorry for so much weakness. Wagner could not create forms that grow naturally as a living whole, and he hid this behind the cover of a principle. He built a "dramatic style" out of what we would call a complete inability to create any style at all. This fits perfectly with a bold habit he kept his whole life: whenever his ability failed him, he set up a principle in its place. (In this he was very different from old Kant, who enjoyed a different kind of boldness. Whenever a principle failed Kant, he gave human beings a "capacity" to take its place…) Let me say it once more: Wagner really deserves admiration and love only for his inventiveness in small things, in how he works out details. Here you are completely right to call him a master of the highest rank, our greatest musical miniaturist, a painter of tiny pictures in sound, who packs endless meaning and sweetness into the smallest space. His richness of color, of light and shadow, of the mystery of fading light, spoils our senses so much that afterwards almost every other musician seems too coarse to us. If people would believe me, they would not base their highest opinion of Wagner on the things they like in him today.

All of that was only made up to win over the crowds. People like us pull back from it, just as you would pull back from a wall painting that is too loud and gaudy. What do we care about the irritating brutality of the overture to "Tannhäuser"? Or about the circus of "The Valkyrie"? Everything in Wagner's art that has become popular, even what has become popular outside the theatre, is in bad taste and ruins taste. The "Tannhäuser" March seems to me to smell of the narrow-minded middle class. The overture to "The Flying Dutchman" is a lot of fuss about nothing. The prelude to "Lohengrin" was the first example, far too sneaky and far too successful, of how you can hypnotize people with music. (I dislike all music that aims at nothing higher than winning over the nerves.) But apart from the Wagner who paints huge wall pictures and casts a hypnotic spell, there is yet another Wagner, one who collects small treasures. This Wagner is our greatest musician of sadness, full of sideways glances, loving words, and words of comfort, in which no one ever got there before him. He is the master of music for sadness and sleepy happiness.… Imagine a dictionary of Wagner's most private phrases: a crowd of short pieces, each from five to fifteen bars long, of music that nobody knows.… Wagner had the virtue of people in decline: pity.…

8.

Someone objects: "Very well! But how can this person in decline ruin your taste if you happen not to be a musician, and if you happen not to be in decline yourself?" I answer: It's the other way around! How could you possibly avoid it? Just you try it! You don't know what Wagner is: he is a truly great actor! Is there any deeper, any heavier influence on the stage? Just look at these young fans, all numb, pale, and out of breath! They are Wagner fans. They know nothing about music, and yet Wagner takes control of them. Wagner's art presses down on you with the weight of a hundred atmospheres. Just give in;

there's nothing else you can do.… Wagner the actor is a tyrant. His heavy emotion throws all taste and all resistance to the winds.

Who else has such persuasive power in his dramatic poses? Who else sees the poses so clearly before anything else? Think of the way Wagner's emotion holds its breath, the way it refuses to let go of a strong feeling, the terrifying habit of lingering on a situation where every moment almost chokes you.——

Was Wagner even a musician at all? Whatever the answer, he was something else to a much greater degree. He was a showman without equal, the greatest play-actor, the most amazing theatre genius the Germans have ever had, our stage artist above all others. He belongs to some other world than the history of music, and he must not be confused with the truly great and genuine figures of that history. Putting Wagner and Beethoven side by side is an insult to something sacred, and above all, it is not even fair to Wagner. As a musician he was nothing more than what he was as a man. He became a musician, and he became a poet, because the tyrant inside him, his genius as an actor, forced him to be both. You know nothing about Wagner until you have guessed what his ruling instinct was.

Wagner was not a musician by instinct. He proved this by the way he threw away all the laws and rules of music, or, to put it more exactly, all style in music. He did this so he could turn music into whatever he wanted: a tool of persuasive speech for the stage, a way of expressing things, a way of underlining a dramatic pose, a means of suggestion and of painting the inner life of characters. In this field Wagner may well count as a first-class inventor and pioneer. He made music able to 'speak' far more powerfully than anyone could measure. He is the Victor Hugo of music as a language, as long as we accept that, in certain cases, music can be something that is not music at all, but speech, a tool, a servant of drama. If you take Wagner's music away

from the gentle care of theatre taste, which forgives a great deal, it is simply bad music, maybe the worst ever written. When a musician can no longer count to three, he turns 'dramatic,' he turns 'Wagnerian.'

Wagner nearly discovered the magic that can still be worked today with music that is both jumbled and basic. He became hugely aware of this, and he also had a huge instinct to do without any higher law and style altogether. The basic ingredients, sound, movement, colour, in short, everything in music that works on the senses, are enough. Wagner never plans his music as a musician with a musician's conscience. All he strives for is effect, nothing but effect. And he knows exactly who he has to make an effect on! In this he is as bold and sure as Schiller was, as every man of the theatre has to be. Like such a man, he also looks down on the audience he brings to its knees before him. A person is an actor when he knows one thing before the rest of humanity does: anything that must seem true to people must not actually be true. The French actor Talma put this rule into words. It holds the whole mind of the actor, and it also holds, we need not doubt it, his whole morality. Wagner's music is never true.

But it is supposed to seem true, and so everything is just as it should be. While we are young, and Wagner fans on top of that, we see Wagner as rich, even as the perfect example of a generous giver, like a great lord owning vast lands of sound. We admire him in much the same way young Frenchmen admire Victor Hugo, that is, for his 'kingly generosity.' Later on we admire both of them for the opposite reason: as masters and models of thrift, as careful hosts. Nobody can match them at laying out a feast fit for a prince while spending so little. The Wagner fan, with his trusting stomach, even feels full from the meal his master magically puts in front of him. But the rest of us, who want real substance above all, in books as in music, and who are hardly satisfied by just a picture of a banquet, are much worse off. To

put it plainly, Wagner does not give us enough to chew on. His recitative, the sung speech in his operas, has very little meat, more bones, and lots of broth. I nicknamed it 'Genoa-style,' after a thin soup. I did not mean this as a compliment to the people of Genoa, but rather to the older recitative, the plain 'dry' recitative of earlier opera. And as for Wagner's recurring musical theme, I am afraid I do not have the cooking knowledge needed to understand it. If someone pushed me, I might say I see it perhaps as a perfect toothpick, a chance to clean out the leftovers of one's meal. That still leaves Wagner's 'arias,' his songs. But now I will keep my mouth shut.

9.

Even when he sketches out the basic story, Wagner is first and foremost an actor. The first thing that comes to his mind is a scene that is sure to make a strong impression, a real piece of action, with dramatic poses standing out like figures carved on a wall. It is an overwhelming scene. He then works on this scene in more depth, and he builds his characters out of it. Everything else that needs doing follows on its own, in line with a practical, cost-saving method that has no reason to be subtle. Wagner does not have to please the audience of Corneille, the great French playwright. He only has to please the nineteenth century. When it comes to "what the stage really needs," Wagner would think about the same as any other actor today: a string of powerful scenes, each stronger than the one before it, and, in between, all sorts of clever nonsense. His first worry is to make sure his work has an effect. He starts with the third act. He judges whether his work is good by how strong its final effect is. If you understand the stage in this way, there is not much danger that you will accidentally write a real drama. Drama demands logic that never gives way. But what did Wagner care about logic? I say it again: he did not have to please Corneille's audience, only Germans! Everyone knows the

practical problems a playwright faces, problems that often make him gather all his strength and sweat blood. The hard part is making the plot seem necessary, and the ending too, so that both can only be imagined in one particular way, and yet each still feels free and natural (the rule of using the least possible effort). Now, the very last thing Wagner does is sweat blood over the plot. On the plot and the ending he certainly spends as little effort as possible. Let anyone put one of Wagner's "plots" under a microscope, and I bet he will have to laugh. Nothing is more amusing than the tangle in "Tristan," except perhaps the one in "The Mastersingers." Wagner is no playwright; let no one be fooled about this. All he did was love the word "drama." He always loved fine-sounding words. Still, in his writings the word "drama" is just a misunderstanding. (It is also a clever trick: Wagner always acted as if he were above the word "opera.") It is a misunderstanding in the same way that the word "spirit" is a misunderstanding in the New Testament. He did not understand the human mind well enough to write drama. By instinct he steered clear of a plot driven by the characters' inner lives. But how did he do that? By always putting odd personal quirks in its place. Very modern, isn't it? Very Parisian! Very much a sign of decline! By the way, the plots that Wagner does know how to untangle with his dramatic tricks are of a completely different kind. For example, let's say Wagner needs a female voice. A whole act without a woman's voice would be impossible! But in this case, none of the heroines happens to be available. What does Wagner do? He sets free the oldest woman on earth, the earth goddess Erda. "Come up here, old granny! You have to sing!" And Erda sings. Wagner has got what he wanted. Then he sends the old lady away at once. "Why on earth did you come? Off you go! Please go back to sleep!" In short, it is a scene full of mythical awe, and in front of it the Wagner fan imagines all sorts of deep things.

"But what about the content of Wagner's texts! Their mythical content, their timeless content!" Here is a question: how do you test this content, this timeless content? The chemist gives the answer: translate Wagner into real life, into the modern age. Let's be even crueler and say: into ordinary middle-class life! What becomes of him then? Between you and me, I have tried this experiment. Nothing is more fun, nothing is better to suggest at a picnic, than talking about Wagner dressed up in modern clothes. For example, picture Parsifal as a student training to be a priest, with a public-school education. (That kind of schooling is absolutely necessary for being a pure fool.) What surprises you will find! Would you believe that all of Wagner's heroines, once you strip off their heroic outer shells, can hardly be told apart from Madame Bovary, the bored, restless wife in Flaubert's novel! And the other way round, you can easily imagine Flaubert turning all his heroines into Scandinavian or Carthaginian women and then offering them to Wagner, dressed up as myths, to use as an opera script. In fact, generally speaking, Wagner does not seem to have cared about any problems except the ones that fill the minds of today's little Parisian people in decline. Always just five steps away from the hospital! All very modern problems, all problems that belong in big cities! Have no doubt about it! Have you noticed (it fits with this line of thought) that Wagner's heroines never have any children? They cannot have them. The despair with which Wagner struggled to arrange somehow for Siegfried to be born shows how modern his feelings on this point really were. Siegfried "set woman free," but not with any hope of children. And now here is a fact that leaves us speechless: Parsifal is Lohengrin's father! How on earth did he manage that? Should we remember at this point that "chastity works miracles"?

Wagner has spoken, the highest authority on chastity.

10.

And now just a quick word in passing about Wagner's writings. Among other things, they are a school of cunning. The set of methods Wagner uses could be applied to a hundred other cases. Whoever can understand, let them understand. Perhaps I deserve some public thanks if I put three of the most valuable of these methods into clear words.

Everything that Wagner cannot do is bad.

Wagner could do much more than he does, but his strong principles hold him back.

Everything that Wagner can do, no one will ever be able to do after him, no one has ever done before him, and no one is allowed to do after him. Wagner is divine.

These three statements are the very essence of Wagner's writings. All the rest is just "literature."

Not every kind of music up to now has needed books and writing to explain it. It would be worth trying to find out the real reason for this. Is it maybe that Wagner's music is too hard to understand? Or was he afraid of exactly the opposite: that it was too easy, and that people would not find it hard enough to understand? In fact, his whole life long, he did nothing but repeat one claim: that his music did not mean just music! But something more! Something far, far more!… "Not just music": no real musician would ever talk like that. I say it again: Wagner could not create things as a whole. He had no choice. He had to create things in bits and pieces, with "motives," dramatic poses, set formulas, doublings, and hundreds of repetitions. He stayed a speech-maker in music, someone trying to persuade rather than to make music. And that is why, deep down, he was forced to push the idea that "this means something" into the front. "Music can

never be anything more than a means to an end": that was his theory. But above all, it was the only way of working that was open to him. No musician, however, thinks like that. Wagner needed writing to convince the whole world to take his music seriously and deeply, "because it meant an endless number of things." All his life he was the explainer of the "Idea." What does Elsa stand for? Why, without a doubt, Elsa is "the unconscious mind of the people." (And Wagner adds: "When I realised this, I naturally became a complete revolutionary.")

Let us not forget that when the philosophers Hegel and Schelling were leading German minds astray, Wagner was still young. He guessed, or rather fully understood, that the only thing Germans take seriously is "the idea": that is, something dark, uncertain, and wonderful. He understood that among Germans, being clear counts against you, and logic counts as proof that you are wrong. The philosopher Schopenhauer harshly pointed out how dishonest the age of Hegel and Schelling was. He was harsh, but he was also unfair, because he himself, that gloomy old faker, was in no way more "honest" than his more famous rivals. But let us leave morality out of it. Hegel is a matter of taste.… And not only German taste, but European taste!… It was a taste Wagner understood! A taste he felt able to match! A taste he made last forever! All he did was apply it to music. He invented a style for himself that could mean "an endless number of things." He was Hegel's heir.… Music as "Idea."

And how well Wagner was understood! The same kind of person who used to gush over Hegel now gushes over Wagner. In Wagner's circle they even write like Hegel. (11) But the one who understood Wagner best was the young German fan. The two words "endless" and "meaning" were enough for this. At the sound of them, the young fan at once began to feel extremely happy. Wagner did not win over these boys with music, but with the "idea." It is the mysterious vagueness

of his art, its game of hide-and-seek among a hundred symbols, its many-coloured display of ideals, that leads and lures these lads. It is Wagner's talent for making clouds, his swoops and dives through the air, the way he is everywhere and nowhere at once. These are exactly the same qualities with which Hegel led and lured people in his day! What's more, faced with Wagner's endless variety, richness, and willfulness, these young people feel that they themselves are justified, even "saved." Trembling, they listen while the great symbols in his art seem to speak to them from the misty distance, with a gentle roll of thunder. And they don't mind at all if things get a bit grey, grim, and cold now and then. Aren't they all, like Wagner himself, very close friends with bad weather, with German weather? Wotan is their God, but Wotan is the God of bad weather.… And they are right. How could these young Germans, in the state they are in now, miss what the rest of us, we calm, sunny spirits, miss in Wagner? That is: the joyful wisdom; light feet, wit, fire, serious and grand logic, dancing among the stars, playful and daring thinking, the shimmering light of the South, the calm sea: in short, perfection.…

11.

I have named the field Wagner belongs to, and it is certainly not the history of music. So what does he mean in history? He means the rise of the actor in music. This is a hugely important event, and it makes me not only think, but also afraid.

In short: "Wagner and Liszt." Never before have the "honesty" and "genuineness" of musicians been put to such a dangerous test. It is painfully obvious: big success, success with the masses, no longer goes to the genuine artist. To get it, a man has to be an actor! Victor Hugo and Richard Wagner both prove the very same thing. In civilisations that are going downhill, wherever the masses get to decide, being genuine becomes unnecessary, even harmful, a disadvantage.

Only the actor can still stir up great enthusiasm. And so his golden age is now beginning. It is his age, and the age of everyone who is in any way related to him. With drums and flutes, Wagner marches at the front of all the artists of grand speech-making, of showing off and of dazzling technical skill. He started by winning over the orchestra conductors, the stagehands and the opera singers, and of course the orchestra too. He "set them free" from boredom and sameness. The movement Wagner started has spread even into the world of learning. Whole fields of musical study are slowly rising up out of centuries of dry, rule-bound scholarship. To give an example of what I mean, let me point especially to Riemann's work on rhythm. He was the first to draw attention to the key idea of punctuation, even in music, although sadly he used a bad word for it: he called it "phrasing." All these people, and I say this with thanks, are the best and most respectable of Wagner's admirers. They have every right to honour Wagner. The same instinct binds them together. In him they see the highest example of their own kind, and because he has fired them up with his own passion, they feel themselves turned into power, even into great power. Here, if anywhere, Wagner's influence has truly done good. Never before has there been so much thinking, so much drive and so much hard work in this area. Wagner gave all these artists a new conscience. What they now demand of themselves, and actually achieve, they had never demanded before Wagner's time. Before then they had been too modest. A different spirit rules the stage since Wagner took charge of it. The hardest things are expected, criticism is harsh, praise is very rare, and the good and the excellent have become normal. Taste is no longer needed, not even a good voice. Wagner is sung only with ruined voices, because that has a more "dramatic" effect. Even talent is beside the point. Expressiveness at any price, which is what the Wagnerian ideal demands, the ideal of decline, hardly goes together with talent. All it takes is virtue, which means training, working like a machine, and "giving up yourself." Not taste,

not voices, not gifts: Wagner's stage needs only one thing, Germans! Here is the definition of a German: an obedient man with long legs. It means a great deal that Wagner's rise happened at the same time as the rise of the German "Empire." Both prove the very same thing: obedience and long legs. Never have people been more obedient, never have they been so well bossed around. The conductors of Wagner's orchestras, in particular, are fit for an age that future generations will one day call, with nervous awe, the classical age of war.

Wagner knew how to give orders. In this way too he was a great teacher. He gave orders like a man who had used an unbending will on himself, like someone who had disciplined himself his whole life long. Wagner was perhaps the greatest example in the whole history of art of a man forcing himself by violence. He outdoes even Alfieri, who is otherwise his closest relative in spirit. That is the remark of someone from Turin.

12.

I think our actors have earned more respect than they had before. But that does not mean I think they have become any less dangerous.… And is anyone still unsure what I want? Is anyone unsure what the three demands are that my anger, my worry, and my love of art have pushed me to speak out about this time?

First: the stage must not become the boss of all the arts.

Second: the actor must not become the one who spoils what is genuine and real.

Third: music must not become an art of lying.

Friedrich Nietzsche.

Postscript

Those last words are serious. Because of that, I can now add a few sentences from an essay I have not published yet. They will at least leave no doubt about how seriously I take this question. The essay is called: "What Wagner has cost us."

Following Wagner costs you dearly. Even today, people still have a vague feeling that this is true. Even Wagner's success, even his triumph, did not completely pull this feeling up by the roots. But in the past this feeling was strong. It was terrible. For almost three-quarters of Wagner's life, it was a dark, gloomy hatred. The resistance he met among us Germans deserves the highest value and the highest honour. People protected themselves against him the way you protect yourself against a disease. They did not use arguments, because you cannot argue a disease away. Instead they used blocking, distrust, disgust, loathing, and a grim seriousness, as if he were a great danger spreading out of control. The art experts showed how foolish they were when, from three different schools of German philosophy, they fought a silly war against Wagner's principles with "ifs" and "becauses." What did Wagner care about principles, even his own! The ordinary Germans had enough good sense by instinct to skip all the "ifs" and "becauses" on this matter. An instinct grows weaker when it becomes conscious, because by becoming conscious it makes itself feeble. Across Europe, everything is in decline. But suppose there were signs that, in spite of this, the German soul still held a small amount of health, still had an instinctive warning sense of what is harmful and dangerous. Then this blunt resistance to Wagner is exactly the thing I would least want people to underrate. It does us honour. It gives us some reason to hope. France no longer has that much health left. History shows that the Germans are the champion slowpokes. Today they are the most backward of all the civilised nations of Europe. This has its advantages, because it means that, compared with the others, they are the youngest.

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Following Wagner costs you dearly. Only quite recently have the Germans gotten over a kind of dread of him. Again and again, they found themselves wishing to be rid of him. Does anyone remember a very strange event, near the very end, when this old feeling unexpectedly showed itself once more? It happened at Wagner's funeral. The first Wagner Society, the one in Munich, put a wreath on his grave with a message that instantly became famous: "Salvation to the Saviour!" Everyone admired the high-minded inspiration behind those words, and also the good taste that Wagner's followers seemed to have all to themselves. But many people, oddly enough, made a small change to it: "Salvation from the Saviour"—meaning, "We are saved from him at last." People began to breathe again.

Following Wagner costs you dearly. Let us try to measure what this worship has done to culture. Whom did this movement push to the front? What did it make more and more important? First of all, the arrogance of the amateur, the arrogance of the art-obsessed fan. These people are now forming clubs. They want their taste to win out. They even want to act as judges on everything to do with music and musicians. Second: a growing lack of interest in hard, noble, careful training in the service of art. In its place came the belief in genius, or in plain English, cheeky amateurism. (The recipe for this can be found in Wagner's opera The Mastersingers.) Third, and worst of all: the rule of the theatre. That is the crazy belief that the theatre comes first, that the theatre has the right to rule over all the arts, over art itself.… But this should be shouted a hundred times into the faces of Wagner fans: the theatre is lower than art. It is second-rate. It is something made coarse. Above all, it is something twisted and faked to suit the crowd. Wagner changed nothing about this. Bayreuth is grand opera, and not even good opera.… In matters of taste, the stage is a kind of worship of the common crowd. The stage is a rebellion of the mob, a public vote against good taste.… The case of Wagner proves it. He

won over the masses. He corrupted taste. He even ruined our taste for opera!

Following Wagner costs you dearly. What has the worship of Wagner done to the mind? Does Wagner set the mind free? What belongs to him is double meaning and slippery vagueness, and every other quality that can win over unsure people without letting them realise why they were won over. In this sense Wagner is a seducer on a huge scale. In the world of the mind, there is nothing worn out, nothing feeble, nothing dangerous to life, nothing that speaks badly of the world, that has not secretly found a hiding place in his art. He hides the darkest hatred of clear thinking inside the shining globes of the ideal. He flatters every instinct that says life is worthless (the Buddhist kind) and dresses it up in music. He flatters every form of Christianity, every religious way of expressing decline. Whoever can understand, let them understand: everything that has ever grown out of the soil of weakened life, all the fake money of the 'higher world' and of a life 'beyond', found its most noble defender in Wagner's art. It did this not through slogans (Wagner is too clever to use slogans), but by persuading the senses, and the senses in turn make the mind tired and sick. Music acting like Circe, the enchantress, who turned men into beasts … in this respect his last work is his greatest masterpiece. In the art of seduction, 'Parsifal' will always keep its place as a stroke of genius.… I admire this work. I would gladly have written it myself. Wagner was never more inspired than near the end. The skill with which beauty and sickness are joined together here is so great that it throws a kind of shadow over everything Wagner did before. His earlier work seems too bright, too healthy. Do you understand this? Health and brightness acting like a shadow? Almost like a fault?… That is how far we have already become innocent fools.… There was never a greater master of heavy, priestly perfumes. Never on earth has there been such an expert in petty little 'infinities', in everything that

gives you thrills, in wild excesses, in all the soft, womanish words from the language of happiness! My friends, just drink the love potions of this art! Nowhere will you find a more pleasant way of weakening your mind, of forgetting that you are a man, lying in the shade of a rosebush.… Ah, this old wizard, the mightiest Klingsor, the evil wizard, of them all! How he makes war on us with his art, on us free thinkers! How he appeals to every kind of cowardice in the modern soul with his sweet, girlish notes! There has never been such a deadly hatred of knowledge! You have to be a real cynic, someone who mocks and bites back, to resist the temptation here. You have to be able to bite to keep from worshipping at this shrine. Very well, old seducer! The cynic gives you a warning: 'beware of the dog'.…

Following Wagner costs you dearly. I look at the young fans who have been exposed to his infection for a long time. The first effect, which is fairly harmless, is that their taste gets spoiled. Wagner works like a habit of reaching for the bottle. He dulls the mind, and he ruins the stomach. His special effect is that people lose their feeling for rhythm. What the Wagner fan calls rhythmic, I call, to borrow a Greek image, 'stirring up a swamp'. But much more dangerous than all this is the way ideas get spoiled. The young fan turns into a dreamy fool, a 'dreamer of ideals'. He thinks he is above science, and in this he has reached the level of his master. On top of that, he acts like a philosopher. He writes for the Bayreuth Journal. He solves every problem in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Master. But the most horrible thing of all is the damage to the nerves. Let anyone walk through a big city at night: everywhere he will hear people attacking musical instruments with solemn rage and fury, and every so often a wild racket breaks out. What is going on? It is Wagner's followers worshipping him.… Bayreuth is just another word for a health spa for the sick. A typical telegram from Bayreuth would say 'bereits bereut', which means 'I already regret it'. Wagner is bad for young men; for

women he is deadly. Medically speaking, what is a woman Wagner fan? It seems to me that a doctor could not be serious enough when he puts this choice of conscience to young women: it is either one thing or the other. But they have already chosen. You cannot serve two masters when one of them is Wagner. Wagner 'saved' woman, and in return women built Bayreuth for him. Every sacrifice, every giving up of themselves: there was nothing they were not ready to give him. Woman makes herself poor for the sake of the Master. She becomes quite touching. She stands naked before him. The woman Wagner fan is the most attractive two-faced thing that exists today. She is Wagner's cause in human form: his cause wins with her as its symbol.… Ah, this old robber! He robs us of our young men, he even robs us of our women too, and drags them off to his den.… Ah, this old Minotaur, the monster! What has he not already cost us? Every year, lines of the finest young men and young women are led into his maze so that he can swallow them up. And every year the whole of Europe cries out, 'Off to Crete! Off to Crete!'.…

Second Postscript

It seems to me that my letter could be misunderstood. On some faces I see a look of gratitude. I even hear quiet but cheerful laughter. Here, as in other matters, I would rather be understood. But ever since a certain creature, the worm of the German Empire, the famous 'Rhinoxera', settled into the vineyards of the German mind, nobody understands a word I say anymore. The newspaper called the Kreuz-Zeitung has made this clear to me, and so has the Literary Central Journal, to say nothing more. I have given the Germans the deepest books they have ever had. That alone is enough reason for them not to understand a word of them. In this essay I declare war on Wagner, and along the way on a certain kind of German taste. I may seem to use harsh words about the stupidity of Bayreuth. But no one should think that I am at all eager to praise some other musician instead.

Other musicians are not even worth comparing with Wagner. Things are bad in general. Decay is everywhere. Sickness lies at the very root of things. Wagner's name stands for the ruin of music, just as the name of Bernini stands for the ruin of sculpture. But that does not make Wagner the cause of it. All he did was speed up the fall. We are quite ready to admit, though, that he did it in a way that makes you pull back in horror from this almost instant drop into the depths. He had the honest innocence of decline. That was what made him better than the others. He believed in it. He did not stop short of any of the things it led to. The others hesitated. That is what sets them apart. They have nothing else to set them apart. What Wagner and 'the others' have in common is this. The power to organize a work as a whole is fading. Traditional methods are being misused, without the talent or the purpose that would make that misuse worth it. There is fake copying of grand forms, even though nobody today is strong, proud, self-confident and healthy enough for them. There is too much energy spent on small details. There is passion at any price. There is refinement as a sign of weakened life. More and more nerves are taking the place of muscle. I know of only one musician today who could write an overture as one living, connected whole. And nobody else knows him. The composer who is famous now does not write better music than Wagner. He only writes music that has less character and is less clear. It is less clear because doing things halfway, even in decline, cannot compare with doing them completely. But Wagner was complete. Wagner stood for total corruption. Wagner had the courage, the will, and the firm belief needed for corruption. What does Johannes Brahms matter? He was lucky enough to be misunderstood by Germany. People took him to be Wagner's opponent. People needed an opponent! But he did not write music that had to exist. Above all, he wrote far too much music! When you are not rich, you should at least be proud enough to be poor! For a long time I could not understand the sympathy that some people showed Brahms, apart from the sym-

pathy that came from taking sides and from the confusion that taking sides causes. Then one day, almost by accident, I found out that he appealed to a particular type of person. He has the sadness of someone who lacks power. His works do not come from a feeling of having plenty. He is thirsty for plenty. Take away what he steals, and what he borrows from old styles or from foreign modern ones, for he is a master at copying. What is left, as his most personal quality, is longing. And this is what dissatisfied people of every kind, and all those who yearn, sense in him. He is far too little of a strong personality, too little of a central figure. The 'impersonal' people, those who do not put themselves at the center, love him for this. Above all he is the musician of a certain kind of dissatisfied woman. Go fifty steps further, and you find the woman Wagner fan, just as you find Wagner himself fifty steps ahead of Brahms. The woman Wagner fan is a clearer, more interesting, and above all a more attractive type. Brahms is touching as long as he dreams, or feels sorry for himself in private. In that way he is modern. But he becomes cold, and we no longer feel close to him, when he puts on the pose of being the child of the great classical composers. People like to call Brahms Beethoven's heir. I know of no more careful way of saying something nice to hide the truth. Everything today that claims to be the grand style in music is, for exactly that reason, either lying to us or lying to itself. This choice of two is suspicious enough. It already contains a tricky question about which of the two cases is worth more. The instinct of most people rejects this choice. They say 'lying to us' is worse, because they do not want to be cheated. And I myself would certainly always prefer that type to the other one, the one that is 'lying to itself'. That is my taste. To put it more plainly, for the sake of the simple-minded, it comes down to this: Brahms or Wagner. Brahms is not an actor. A very large share of other musicians can be summed up under the idea of Brahms. I do not want to say anything about Wagner's clever copycats, like Goldmark, for example. When you have 'The Queen of

Sheba' to your name, you belong in a zoo. You ought to put yourself on display. Today, all the things that can be done well, even done like a master, are small things. Only in that area is honesty still possible. But nothing can cure music as a whole of its main fault, its fate. That fate is to express the general conflict inside our bodies. In other words, its fate is to be modern.

The best teaching, the most careful training, the deepest knowledge of the Old Masters, yes, even shutting yourself away with them, all of this only eases the problem. Or, to be more exact, it only seems to help, because the first thing needed for the real thing is no longer in our bodies. That first thing might be the strong breed of a Handel, or the overflowing animal energy of a Rossini. Not everyone has the right to learn from every teacher. And that is true of whole ages too. In itself, it is not impossible that somewhere in Europe there are still some leftover stronger natures, people of a type that has not adjusted to the times. From them we might still hope for a somewhat late arrival of beauty and perfection, even in music. But the most we can expect to see are rare exceptions. As for the general rule, which is that corruption rules over everything and that corruption is fate, not even a God can save music from it.

Epilogue

And now let's catch our breath and step away for a moment from this small world. It has to be small, because we have been asking questions about the worth of particular *people*. A philosopher feels he needs to wash his hands after spending so long on "The Case of Wagner." Now I will give my idea of what *modern* means. Every age has a certain amount of energy, and that amount sets a standard for which virtues are allowed and which are forbidden. Either an age has the virtues of *rising*, healthy life, and then it fights the virtues of decay with all its deepest instincts. Or the age is itself an age of decay, and then it needs the virtues of a life that is going downhill. In that case it hates everything whose only excuse for existing is that it comes from fullness, from an overflow of strength. Ideas about art and beauty are tied up tightly with these facts of biology. There is an art of decline, and there is a *classical* art. "Beauty in itself" is just as much a fantasy as any other kind of idealism.—Inside the small area of so-called moral values, you could not find a bigger opposite than the morality of the strong set against the morality of *Christian* values. Christian values grew out of thoroughly sick soil. (The gospels show us the same physical types of people as the novels of Dostoevsky do.) The morality of the strong—call it "Roman," "pagan," "classical," or "Renaissance"—is on the other hand the symbolic language of being well made, of *rising*, healthy life, and of the will to power as the basic force of life. The morality of the strong says *yes* by instinct, just as Christian morality says *no* by instinct. ("God," "the world beyond," "self-denial"—all of these are ways of saying no.) The first kind pours its own fullness onto things. It transforms the world, makes it more beautiful, and *makes sense* of it. The second kind makes things poorer, drains their color, and spoils their value. It *pushes the world down*. In Christian

speech, "the world" is an insult. These two opposite ways of seeing value are *both* necessary. They are different points of view, and you cannot get around them with arguments or counter-arguments. You cannot disprove Christianity, just as you cannot disprove diseased eyesight. When people fought against pessimism as if it were a philosophy, that was the peak of learned stupidity. To me, the ideas of "true" and "untrue" don't seem to make any sense when it comes to how we see things.—The only thing we must guard against is falseness: the instinctive two-facedness that *would like* to treat this opposite as no opposite at all. That is exactly what Wagner did, and he was no small master at this kind of falseness. He would glance sideways with longing at the morality of the strong, at *noble* morality —the Icelandic sagas are perhaps the greatest written record of those values—while at the same time speaking the opposite teaching: the "gospel of the humble," the doctrine that we *need* to be saved!… By the way, I admire how modest the Christians are who go to Bayreuth. As for me, I could *not* stand hearing certain words come out of Wagner's mouth. Some ideas are too good for Bayreuth… What? Christianity made to suit women Wagner fans, maybe even made *by* women Wagner fans? Because in his later years Wagner was thoroughly *of the feminine sort*? I say it again: today's Christians are too modest for my taste… If Wagner was a Christian, then maybe Liszt was a Father of the Church!—The need to be *saved* is the very heart of all Christian needs, and it has nothing in common with clowns like these. It is the most honest expression of decline. It is the most convincing and most painful way of saying yes to decline, using grand symbols and rituals. The Christian wants *to get rid* of himself. As the French saying goes, "The self is always hateful." Noble morality, the morality of the strong, on the other hand, is rooted in a triumphant *yes* said to *oneself*. It is life saying yes to itself and celebrating itself. It also needs grand symbols and rituals, but only "because its heart is too full." All beautiful art and all great art belong here. What they share at their

core is gratitude. But we have to grant this noble morality a certain instinctive disgust *for people in decline*, and a scorn and horror for their symbols. Such feelings almost prove that it is noble. The noble Romans saw Christianity as a *filthy superstition*. Let me remind you how the last German with noble taste—Goethe—felt about the cross. It is pointless to look for more valuable, more *necessary* opposites than these.(14)

But the kind of falseness that marks the Bayreuth crowd is nothing unusual today. We all know the mixed-up idea of the "Christian gentleman." This *innocence* about contradicting yourself, this "clean conscience" while living a lie, is modern through and through. You could almost define the modern age by it. In terms of biology, modern man is a *contradiction of values*. He sits between two chairs. He says yes and no in the same breath. No wonder it is in our very own age that falseness itself took on flesh and blood, and even became genius! No wonder *Wagner* lived among us! I had good reason to call Wagner the great con man of modern times… But all of us, without knowing it and without choosing it, carry values, words, formulas, and morals inside our bodies that come from completely *opposite* sources. Seen from the point of view of the body, we are *false*… So how would you start to *diagnose the modern soul*? With a firm cut into this lump of conflicting instincts. By completely removing its opposing values. By cutting open, while it is still alive, its most *revealing* case. For philosophers, "The Case of Wagner" is a *lucky gift*—and this essay, as you can see, was written out of gratitude.

Nietzsche Against Wagner

A Psychologist's Case File

Preface

I picked the following chapters from books I wrote in the past, and I chose them carefully. Some of them go back as far as 1877. Here and there, of course, I have made them a little easier to understand, but above all, I have made them shorter. If you read them one after another, nobody can be left in any doubt, either about me or about Wagner: we are complete opposites. The reader will reach other conclusions too while going through these pages: for example, that this is an essay for psychologists and not for Germans.… I have readers everywhere, in Vienna, St Petersburg, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Paris, and New York—but I have none in Europe's flat, dull land—Germany.… And I might even have something to say to the Italians, whom I love just as much as I … 'How long, Crispi, will you go on like this?' … The Triple Alliance: when a people makes a deal with the German 'Empire,' it can only be a bad match, a marriage beneath itself.…

Friedrich Nietzsche.

Turin, Christmas 1888.

Where I Admire Wagner.

I believe that artists very often don't know what they do best. They are far too vain. Their minds are set on something grander than just looking like little plants, which know how to sprout from their soil fresh, rare, and beautiful, and truly perfect. They look down on the real worth of their own garden and vineyard and rate it too low, and what they love does not match what they truly understand. Here is a musician who is better than anyone else at finding the sounds that belong to suffering, crushed, and tortured souls, a musician who can give a voice even to silent misery. Nobody comes close to him in

painting the colours of late autumn, in the deeply moving joy of a last, a very last, and far too short moment of happiness. He knows a chord that expresses those secret, strange midnight hours of the soul, when cause and effect seem to have come apart, and at any moment something might leap out of nothing. He is happiest of all when he creates from the very lowest depths of human happiness, and, you could say, from a person's drained cup, where the most bitter and disgusting drops have finally mixed with the sweetest ones, for better or worse. He knows how a tired soul drags itself along when it can no longer jump or fly, and in fact can no longer even walk. He has the quiet look of hidden suffering, of understanding without any comfort, of saying goodbye without a word or a sign. Truly, like an Orpheus of all secret misery, singing of hidden pain, he is greater than anyone. And many things came into art for the first time through him, things that had never been expressed before, that had not even been thought good enough for art—for example, the bitter, mocking rebellions that only the greatest sufferer is capable of, and also many small, almost microscopic features of the soul, like the scales on its half-fish, half-land-animal skin—yes indeed, he is the master of everything very small. But this is exactly what he refuses to be! His tastes are much more in love with huge walls and bold, giant wall paintings!… He doesn't see that his spirit has a different desire and leaning—a totally different way of seeing—that it prefers to sit quietly in the corners of run-down houses. Hidden away like this, hidden even from himself, he paints his truly great masterpieces, all of which are very short, often only one bar of music long. Only there does he become really good, great, and perfect, maybe only there.—Wagner is someone who has suffered a lot—and this lifts him above other musicians.—I admire Wagner whenever he turns himself into music—

Where I Raise Objections.

By saying all this, I don't mean that I think this music is healthy. I think it least healthy in the places where it talks about Wagner himself. My objections to Wagner's music are objections of the body. So why should I start by dressing them up in fancy words about art and beauty? The study of beauty is really nothing more than the study of the body, put to use. Here is the fact I offer, my "small true fact": when this music begins to work on me, I can no longer breathe easily. My foot at once gets angry at it and rebels. What my foot needs is a beat, dancing, marching. Even the young German Emperor could not march to Wagner's Imperial March. What my foot wants from music, first of all, is the joyful thrill you find in good walking, stepping and dancing. But don't my stomach, my heart and my blood flow complain too? Aren't my guts upset as well? And don't I go hoarse without noticing? To listen to Wagner, I need throat lozenges. And then I ask myself: what does my whole body actually need from music in general? I say body, because there is no such thing as a soul. I believe it needs relief. It needs to feel as if all its animal workings were sped up by light, bold, free, confident rhythms. It needs to feel as if life, heavy as brass and lead, could lose its weight through gentle, smooth melodies. My sadness would love to rest its head in the hidden corners and deep places of perfection. That is why I need music. But Wagner makes you sick. What do I care about the theatre? What do I care about its fits of moral excitement, which the mob enjoys so much? And who isn't part of the mob today? What do I care about all the mimed hocus-pocus of the actor? You can start to see that, deep down, I am against the theatre. The stage is the art of the mob above all others, and I feel for it the deepest scorn that every true artist feels today. If a man has a success on the stage, he sinks so low in my respect that I lose sight of him. If he fails there, my ears perk up and I start to pay attention. But it was not like that with Wagner. Next to the Wagner who created the most unique music that has ever existed, there was another Wagner. That Wagner was, at heart, a man of the stage, an actor, perhaps the

most passionate play-acting maniac who ever lived on earth, and he was this even as a musician. And let me say, just in passing: Wagner's theory was "drama is the goal, music is only a tool." But what he actually did, from start to finish, was this: "the dramatic pose is the goal, and drama and even music can never be anything but tools." To him, music was a way of stressing, strengthening and deepening dramatic poses and everything that pleases an actor's senses. And Wagner's drama was just a chance to show off a crowd of interesting dramatic poses! Along with all his other instincts, he had the bossy instinct of a great actor in everything he did, and, as I said before, as a musician too. Once, and not without effort, I made this clear to a pure-blooded Wagner fan. Clear thinking and a Wagner fan! I won't say another word about that. I had reasons to add: "For heaven's sake, be a bit more honest with yourself! We aren't in Bayreuth now. In Bayreuth people are only honest as a crowd. Each single person lies, and even lies to himself. You leave yourself at home when you go to Bayreuth. You give up every right to your own voice and your own choices, to your own taste and even to your own courage. You no longer have these things the way you usually have them and use them in front of God and the world, and inside your own four walls. Nobody brings the finest sense of his art with him into the theatre, least of all the artist who works for the theatre. That is because there is no being alone there, and nothing perfect can bear to be watched while it happens. In the theatre you turn into the mob, the herd, a woman, a hypocrite, a voting cow, a patron, an idiot: a Wagner fan. There, even your most personal conscience has to give in to the flattening spell of the huge crowd. There, the person next to you is in charge. There, you yourself just become the person next to someone else."

Wagner as a Danger

1.

Newer music is aiming at something. People now give it a strong but unclear name: "never-ending melody." You can understand clearly what it's after if you compare it to how it feels to walk into the sea. Little by little you lose your footing, and in the end you give yourself up to the waves, whether they are kind or wild: you have to swim. Older music was different. It moved in a swinging way, sometimes solemn, sometimes fiery, first slow and then fast, and with that music you had to do something completely different: you had to dance. Dancing needed a steady beat, and it needed you to control certain balanced amounts of time and energy. Because of this, the listener's mind was forced to stay clear-headed the whole time. The charm of all good music came from the play between two things: the cooler breeze of that clear-headedness and the warmer breath of excitement. Richard Wagner wanted a different kind of movement. He threw out the basic physical rule that all music before him had followed. It was no longer about walking or dancing. Now we have to swim, we have to float in the air. Maybe this settles the whole question. "Never-ending melody" really wants to break up all the balance of time and strength. It actually looks down on these things. Its rich new ideas lie exactly in what an older ear would hear as rhythm turned upside down and rhythm being mistreated. If this taste were copied, or if it took over, it would be a danger to music, and we can't imagine a bigger one: the feeling for rhythm would rot away completely, and there would be chaos where rhythm used to be. The danger is at its worst when this kind of music clings more and more tightly to realistic play-acting and miming, which follow no rules of form and aim only at making an im-

pression and nothing else. Being expressive no matter what it costs, with music turned into a servant, a slave to dramatic poses: this is the end.

2.

What? Is the most important thing in a performance really to make everything stand out as boldly as possible, in every situation, so that nothing could stand out more? That is what performing musicians seem to believe these days. But if you did that with Mozart, for example, wouldn't it be a real crime against Mozart's spirit? His spirit was cheerful, full of excitement, delightful, and loving. Luckily, he was not German. His seriousness is a charming, golden seriousness, not at all the seriousness of a clumsy German farmhand. And that's not even mentioning the heavy seriousness of the "marble statue" in his opera. But you seem to think that all music is like the music of the "marble statue"? That all music should, so to speak, leap out of the wall and shake the listener right down to his gut? As if that were the only way music could have any effect! But who would it be having that effect on? On people a noble artist should never stoop to work on: on the mob, on the immature, on the bored and jaded, on the sick, on idiots, on Wagner fans!

A Music Without a Future

A culture is like soil, and many arts grow out of it. Of all these arts, music is the last plant to come up. Maybe that's because music depends most on our deepest feelings, so it's the last to reach the surface. It shows up when the culture it belongs to is in its autumn and starting to fade. The spirit of Christianity in the Middle Ages only found its voice in the music of the Dutch masters. Their way of building with sound is the youngest sister of Gothic architecture, but a true and rightful one. The best in Luther, and in people like him, only

found its voice in Handel's music. That was the heroic, Jewish-like quality that gave the Reformation a touch of greatness: the Old Testament, not the New, turned into music. It took Mozart to pour out the age of King Louis the Fourteenth, and the art of the playwright Racine and the painter Claude Lorrain, in ringing gold. Only in the music of Beethoven and Rossini did the eighteenth century sing its last song. That was the century of excitement, of broken ideals, and of happiness that didn't last. All real, original music is a swan song, the last beautiful song before dying. Even our latest kind of music, though it is everywhere and wants to rule everywhere, may not have long to live. It grew out of soil that was quickly sinking, out of a culture that will soon be underwater. Its first requirement was a kind of all-embracing, churchy feeling, along with a fondness for certain ancient homegrown ideals and odd habits, the so-called national ones. Wagner took over old legends and songs. Scholars, with their biases, taught us to see these as the most German thing of all. Now we laugh at all of it: bringing these Scandinavian monsters back to life, thirsty for wild pleasure of the senses and for spiritual uplift. All this taking and giving that Wagner did, with his subjects, his characters, his passions, and his nerves, would also clearly show the spirit of his music. That is, it would, if his music, like all music, could speak about itself in any way except a double-meaning one. Because music is a woman. We must not be fooled about this by the fact that right now we are living through a backlash, right in the very heart of a backlash. This is an age of wars between nations, of Catholics suffering for loyalty to the Pope. In fact, the whole of Europe today feels like an in-between moment, an interval between acts. All this may help an art like Wagner's become famous all of a sudden. But it does nothing at all to guarantee that it will do well in the future. The Germans themselves have no future.

We Complete Opposites

Maybe a few people, or at least my friends, will remember this about me. When I first threw myself into life, I carried some mistakes and some exaggerations with me. But in any case, I started out with *hope* in my heart. In the gloomy, pessimistic philosophy of the nineteenth century, I saw something hopeful. Who knows what side paths of my own experience led me there, but I took it as a sign of a higher power of thinking, a fuller and more victorious kind of life, than had ever shown itself before in the philosophies of Hume, Kant and Hegel! I thought of *tragic* knowledge, the knowledge that faces the dark side of life, as the most beautiful luxury our culture had. I saw it as our most precious, most noble, and most dangerous way of spending freely. And yet, since our culture seemed so overflowing with riches, I thought it was a *luxury* we had every right to. In the same way, I first took Wagner's music to be the voice of a wildly life-affirming strength of soul. In it I thought I heard an earthquake. I thought it was the sound of an ancient life-force, held down for ages, finally trying to break its chains, and not caring at all how much of what calls itself culture today would be shaken to ruins in the process. You can see how badly I misread things. You can also see what I *gave* to Wagner and Schopenhauer: I gave them myself. … Every art and every philosophy can be seen either as a medicine or as a boost, for life that is rising or life that is in decline. They always assume that there is suffering and people who suffer. But there are two kinds of sufferers. First, there are those who suffer from *too much life*, from overflowing energy. They need wildly life-affirming art, and they need a tragic way of seeing and looking at life as a whole. Second, there are those who suffer from *weakened* energy. They long for rest, quiet, calm seas, or else for the drunkenness, the fits, and the dazed confusion that art and philosophy can give them. Taking revenge on life itself is the most delicious kind of drunkenness for such poor, needy souls! … Now Wagner, just as much as Schopenhauer, answers both of these people's cravings. Both of them say no to life. Both of them speak badly of it.

And that is exactly why they are my complete opposites. The richest being, overflowing with life, the wildly life-affirming god and man, can not only allow himself to look straight at what is horrible and doubtful. He can also take part in a terrible deed, and he can enjoy all the luxury of destroying, breaking apart, and saying no. In him, evil, pointlessness and ugliness seem just as acceptable as they are in nature. That is because he is bursting with so much power to create and renew that he can turn any desert into a rich land full of plenty. On the other hand, it is the person who suffers most and is poorest in life who most needs gentleness, peace and kindness, in thinking as well as in acting. Today this is called being humane. Such a person may also need a God whose special job is to be a God of the sick, a Saviour. And he needs logic too, an explanation of existence so simple that even idiots can understand it. (The typical so-called 'free thinkers', like the dreamers of ideals and the 'beautiful souls', are people in decline.) In short, he needs a warm, safe, narrow little room, closed in by cheerful horizons, where he is allowed to grow dull and stupid. … And so, very slowly, I began to understand Epicurus, who was the opposite of a wildly life-affirming Greek. I also began to understand the Christian, who is really just a kind of follower of Epicurus. With his belief that 'faith saves', the Christian takes the idea that pleasure and comfort are the highest good *as far as it can go*, far beyond all honest thinking. … If I am ahead of all other students of the human mind in anything, it is this: my eyes are sharper at following the hardest and trickiest kind of reasoning, the kind where people have made the most mistakes. I mean the reasoning that works backward: from a work to the person who made it, from a deed to the person who did it, from an ideal to the need that created it in the dreamer of ideals, and to the powerful *craving* that stands behind all thinking and all judging of what is good or bad. From now on, with every artist of any kind, I will use this basic test: does the creative power here come from disgust with life, or from having *too much* life?

In Goethe, for example, it was an overflow of life that made him creative. In Flaubert it was hate. Flaubert was a new version of Pascal, but as an artist, with this belief deep in his instincts: 'Flaubert is always hateful, the man is nothing, the work is everything.' … He tortured himself when he wrote, just as Pascal tortured himself when he thought. Both of them tended to have 'unselfish' feelings. … 'Unselfishness' is the basic rule of decline. It is the wish for nothingness, in art just as in morality.

Where Wagner Feels at Home.

Even today, France is still the safe home of the most thoughtful and refined culture in Europe. It is still the top school of good taste. But you have to know where to look for this France of good taste. Take the newspaper called the *North-German Gazette*, for example. Whoever writes their opinions in that paper thinks the French are "barbarians." As for me, if I had to find the *darkest* place on earth, where slaves still needed to be set free, I would look toward Northern Germany.… But the people who belong to *that special* France are very careful to *keep themselves hidden*. They are a small group. Some of them may not be very steady on their feet. A few may believe everything is fixed by fate, some may always worry about being sick, and some really are sick. Others may be weak and fake, the kind who would love to be artists. And yet all the greatness and fine feeling still left in this world belongs to them. In this France of the mind, which is also the France of gloomy thinking, Schopenhauer already feels much more at home than he ever did in Germany. His main book has already been translated twice, and the second time so well that I now prefer to read Schopenhauer in French. (He was a *fluke* among Germans, just like me. The Germans have no fingers to get a hold on people like us. They don't have any fingers at all, only claws.) And I won't even talk about Heine, "*the lovable Heine*," as they call him in Paris. He long ago became part of the very flesh and blood of the deepest and most

heartfelt French poets. How could the dumb, horned cattle of Germany know what to do with the *delicate qualities* of a man like that! And as for Richard Wagner, it is obvious, painfully obvious, that Paris is exactly the right *soil* for him to grow in. The more French music shapes itself to fit the needs of "*the modern soul*," the more like Wagner it will become, and it has already gone quite far in that direction. On this point, you shouldn't let Wagner himself fool you. It was simply shameful of Wagner to make fun of Paris the way he did, while the city was suffering terribly in 1871.... Even so, in Germany Wagner is just a misunderstanding. Who could be less able to understand anything about Wagner than, say, the Kaiser? But anyone who knows how European culture has developed is sure of this fact: French romanticism and Richard Wagner are very closely related. They are all ruled by literature, right up to their eyes and ears. They were the first European artists with a *broad, worldwide literary* education. Most of them were writers and poets, people who carried things between the senses and the arts and blended them together. They were all obsessed with *expression*. They were great explorers in the land of the grand and noble, but also of the ugly and the horrifying. They were even greater explorers of passion, of creating effects, of the art of putting on a flashy display, like dressing up a shop window. All of them had much more talent than true genius. They were show-off performers down to their bones. They knew the secret paths to everything that tempts, lures, forces, or knocks you over. They were born enemies of logic and of straight lines. They were thirsty for the foreign, the strange, and the monstrous, and for every drug that numbs the senses and the mind. All in all, they were a bold, reckless, wonderfully wild group of artists who soared and leaped high. They were the ones who first had to teach their own century, the century of the mob, what the word "artist" really meant. But they were *sick*....

Wagner as the Preacher of Chastity

1.

Is this the German way? Does this weak, sheep-like bleating come from German hearts? Should Germans, sorry for their sins, whip themselves? Or spread out their hands with the oily smoothness of priests? Should they stir up their feelings with the smoke of church incense, and crouch and shake and bend their trembling knees, and beg in prayer with a sickly sweetness? Should they then make eyes at nuns, ring the bell for the Hail Mary, and so, with an unhealthy passion, try to outdo heaven itself? Is this the German way? Watch out, you are still free, you are still your own masters. What is tempting you over there is Rome: it is Rome's faith, sung without words.

2.

Sensuality, meaning bodily desire, and chastity, meaning holding back from it, do not have to be opposites. Every good marriage and every real love affair rises above this conflict. And even in the cases where the conflict does exist, it is far from having to be a tragic one. At least, this should be true of all healthy, cheerful people. Such people are not at all inclined to count their shaky balance between being an angel and being a 'little beast' as a reason to object to life, without thinking twice. The more refined and clever ones, like the Persian poet Hafiz and Goethe, even saw this balance as an extra charm. In fact, it is exactly contradictions like this that draw us into life and make it attractive.… On the other hand, it must be clear what happens when the poor animals of Circe, the enchantress, are talked into worshipping chastity. Those people have been turned into beasts by their desires, so all they see in chastity, and all they worship in it, is their

own opposite. And you can easily imagine with what tragic groaning and passion they do it! It is that same painful and completely unnecessary conflict which Richard Wagner, near the end of his life, clearly wanted to set to music and put on the stage. And we may fairly ask: what for?

3.

And yet there is another question we certainly cannot dodge. What did Wagner actually want with that manly (sadly, so unmanly) 'simple country innocence'? What did he want with that poor devil and child of nature, Parsifal, whom in the end he turns into a Catholic by such sneaky means? What? Was Wagner serious about Parsifal? Because I cannot deny that people laughed at it, and neither can the writer Gottfried Keller.… We would like to believe that Parsifal was meant as a bit of light-hearted fun. We would like to think of it as the closing act, the kind of comic play the ancient Greeks put on after a tragedy. In that case, Wagner the tragic writer would be using it to say goodbye to us, to himself, and above all to tragedy, in a way that suited him and his dignity. That is, he would be doing it with a wild, grand and very wicked mockery of tragedy itself. He would be mocking all the terrible seriousness and sorrow of this world that lies behind us, and mocking the most ridiculous form of the unnatural ideal of self-denial, now finally defeated. For Parsifal is the perfect subject for a comic opera.… Is Wagner's Parsifal his secret laugh at himself from above, the victory of his last and highest freedom as an artist, the moment he rises above his own art? Is it Wagner being able to laugh at himself? Once again, we only wish that were so. For what could Parsifal be if it were meant seriously? Must we say about it, as I have heard people say, that Parsifal is 'the product of a mad hatred of knowledge, of the mind, and of the senses'? Is it a curse on the body and the mind, both in one breath and in one fit of hatred? Is it an act

of abandoning his beliefs, and a return to sick, Christian ideals that keep people in the dark? And finally, is it even a denial of himself, a wiping out of himself, by an artist who until then had worked with all the power of his will for the opposite cause, for making his art both more spiritual and more sensual? And not only his art, but his life as well? Let us remember how eagerly Wagner once followed in the footsteps of the philosopher Feuerbach. In the 1830s and 1840s, Feuerbach's words 'healthy sensuality' struck Wagner just as they struck many other Germans, who called themselves the 'Young Germans': they heard them as words of being saved. Did he in the end change his mind about this? It seems that, towards the end, he at least wanted to change what he taught.… Had hatred of life taken over in him, as it did in the writer Flaubert? For Parsifal is a work of bitterness and revenge. It is a secretly brewed mix of poisons meant to destroy the most basic conditions of life. It is a bad work. Preaching chastity is still a push towards what is unnatural. I despise anyone who does not see Parsifal as an attack on morality.

How I Got Rid of Wagner

1.

As early as the summer of 1876, when the first festival at Bayreuth was in full swing, I said goodbye to Wagner in my heart. I can't stand anything two-faced. Ever since Wagner had come back to Germany, he had lowered himself, step by step, to everything I despise, even to hatred of Jews. In fact, it was high time to say goodbye to him then, and the proof of this came all too soon. Richard Wagner seemed to be the most victorious person alive. But in truth he was a bad-tempered and desperate person in decline, and he suddenly fell to his knees, helpless and broken, in front of the Christian cross. Was there no German at that time with eyes to see, and enough feeling in his heart to sense, how horrible this sight was? Was I the only one who suffered from it? Enough. This surprise, like a flash of lightning, showed me all too clearly what kind of place I had just left. It also made me shudder, the way a man shudders when he realizes he has just escaped a great danger without knowing it. As I went on my way alone, I trembled. Not long after this I fell ill, worse than ill: I was tired. I was tired of being let down again and again by everything we modern people still had left to be excited about. I was tired of seeing energy, hard work, hope, Germanness, and love wasted everywhere. I was worn out by disgust at the whole world of high-minded lies and of soothing people's consciences, which, once again, in Wagner's case, had won a victory over one of the bravest of men. And last but not least, I was tired from the sadness of a merciless suspicion: that from now on I was doomed to grow more and more suspicious, more and more scornful, and more and more deeply alone than I had ever been

before. For I had no one except Richard Wagner. I was always doomed to the company of Germans.

2.

From then on I was alone, and I cruelly distrusted myself. So I took sides, and not without anger: I took sides against myself, and in favour of everything that hurt me and was hard on me. In this way I found the road to that brave kind of pessimism which is the opposite of every high-minded lie. And this road, it seems to me, is also the road to myself, to my life's mission. There is something hidden inside us that rules us. For a long, long time we have no name for it, until at last it shows itself as our mission. This tyrant inside us takes a terrible revenge on us for every attempt we make to dodge it or run away from it. It punishes us for every time we try to make friends with people we don't belong with. It punishes us for every busy job, however worthy, that might lead us away from our main goal. Yes, it even punishes us for every virtue that would like to protect us from the strictness of our deepest sense of duty. Illness is always the answer whenever we dare to doubt our right to our own mission, whenever we start making things too easy for ourselves. How strange, and how terrible at the same time! It is for taking it easy that we have to pay the highest price! And if, after all that, we want to get healthy again, we have no choice: we are forced to load ourselves with an even heavier burden than the one we carried before.

The Psychologist Speaks

1.

Think of a psychologist, someone born to read people's souls, who simply can't help doing it. The more often he looks closely at rare and special people, the greater the danger that he will be smothered by pity for them. He needs to be tougher and more cheerful than anyone else. Why? Because the corruption and ruin of superior people is actually the normal pattern. It is awful to have that pattern always in front of your eyes. The psychologist discovers this ruin once, and then he finds it again and again, almost everywhere in history. He sees that superior people are, deep inside, generally "hopeless," that for them it is always "too late!" in every sense. All the many kinds of pain this causes him may one day lead him to "go to the dogs" himself, to fall apart too. In almost every psychologist you can spot a telling preference: he likes to spend time with ordinary, orderly people. This gives him away. It shows how constantly he needs healing. He needs a kind of escape and forgetting, away from what his sharp insight, what his "job," has put on his conscience. He is typically afraid of his own memory. Other people's opinions easily make him go quiet. He listens with a blank face while people honour, admire, love and celebrate someone, when he himself has opened his eyes and truly seen what that person is. Or he even hides his silence by openly agreeing with some obvious, popular opinion. Maybe the strangeness of his position becomes truly dreadful. In the very place where he has learned great pity mixed with great contempt, educated people have learned great respect. And who knows? Maybe in every great case, exactly this is what happened: the crowd worshipped a god, and the "god" was only a poor animal led to sacrifice! Success has always been the biggest liar.

And the "work" itself, the deed, is a kind of success too. The great statesman, the conqueror, the discoverer: they are hidden inside their creations, disguised so well that no one can recognise them anymore. The "work" of the artist or the philosopher actually invents the person who made it, or who is said to have made it. The "great men" that people honour are poor little made-up stories, written afterwards. In the world of history and its values, fake money is what mostly gets passed around.

2.

Take those great poets, for example: Byron, Musset, Poe, Leopardi, Kleist, Gogol. (I don't dare to name much greater people, but I mean them too.) Look at how they appear now, and how they perhaps had to be. They were people who lived for the moment. They were driven by their senses, ridiculous, changeable, careless, quick to trust and quick to distrust. Their souls usually had some flaw they needed to hide. They often used their works to get revenge for some damage inside them. They often flew high in their art to forget a memory that was far too sharp. They became dreamers of ideals because they lived so close to the mud. What torture these great artists, and so-called superior people in general, are for someone who has once seen through them! We all end up arguing in defence of the ordinary and the average. It's possible that these men learned their outbursts of endless pity from women. A woman can see clearly into the world of suffering. And sadly, she is also eager to help and save, far beyond what she is able to do. The crowd, especially the worshipping crowd, then smothers these outbursts of pity with nosy explanations that flatter itself. This kind of pity always fools itself about how much power it has. A woman would like to believe that love can do anything. That is her own special superstition. But sadly, anyone who truly knows the heart finds out how poor, helpless, showy and clumsy

even the best and deepest love is. He finds out how much more easily it destroys than it saves.…

3.

Every person who has suffered deeply carries a kind of disgust and pride in his mind. In fact, how much a person can suffer almost decides how high he ranks. He is soaked through and coloured by a chilling certainty: because of his suffering, he knows more than even the cleverest and wisest people can ever know. He has been familiar with, and "at home" in, many faraway, terrible worlds that "you know nothing about!" This silent pride of the mind, this pride of those chosen to know, of the "insiders," of those who were almost sacrificed, needs all sorts of disguises. It uses them to protect itself from being touched by gushing, pitying hands, and in general from anything that has not suffered as much as it has. Deep suffering makes a person noble; it sets him apart. One of the most refined disguises is a love of simple pleasures, as the old philosopher Epicurus taught. It often comes with a showy, bold taste that treats suffering lightly and defends itself against everything sad and deep. There are "cheerful people" who use their good mood because it makes others misunderstand them. They want to be misunderstood. There are "scientific minds" who use science because it makes them look cheerful, and because people assume that someone who loves science must be shallow. They want to lead people to the wrong conclusion. There are free, cheeky spirits who would love to hide and deny that, deep down, they are broken hearts that cannot be cured. This is Hamlet's case. And then foolishness itself can be the mask for an unhappy kind of knowledge, a knowledge that is, sadly, all too certain.

Epilogue

1.

I have often asked myself whether I owe much more to the hardest years of my life than to any of the others. My deepest nature tells me this: everything that has to happen, when you look at it from above, as part of a bigger plan, is also useful in itself. You should not just put up with it. You should love it. Love of fate: this is the very heart of who I am. And what about my long illness? Don't I owe much more to it than to my health? I owe it a higher kind of health, a health that grows stronger from everything that does not actually kill it. I even owe it my philosophy. Only great suffering truly sets the mind free in the end. It teaches you a huge suspicion, the kind that makes you think every 'U' you are shown is really an 'X' in disguise, a real, proper X, the third letter from the end of the alphabet. Only great suffering does this. It is the slow kind of suffering, the kind that feels like being roasted over a fire of green wood that burns slowly and takes its time. That suffering forces us philosophers to go down into our very deepest parts. It makes us give up all trust, all good nature, all softening of things, all gentleness, all ordinariness, all the things we used to bet our humanity on. I doubt that this kind of suffering makes a person better. But I know that it makes a person deeper. Suppose we learn to fight pain with our pride, our scorn, and our strength of will. Then we are like the Native American warrior who, no matter how cruelly he is tortured, feels he has paid back his torturer just by the bitter things he says. Or suppose we escape from pain into nothingness, into a deaf, silent, frozen state where we give ourselves up, forget ourselves, and wipe ourselves out. Either way, when you come out of these long and dangerous exercises in self-control, you are a different person.

You have one more question mark inside you. Above all, from then on you want to ask more questions, deeper, stricter, harder, more wicked, and quieter questions than anyone on earth has ever asked before. Your trust in life is gone. Life itself has become a problem. But no one should think that this makes you a gloomy person or a blind owl! You can still love life. But it is a different kind of love. It is like loving a woman you have doubts about.

2.

The rarest thing of all is this: to end up with a different taste, a second taste. A person comes back out of such deep pits, including the pit of great suspicion, as if born again. He has a new skin. He feels things more easily, and he is more full of mischief. He has a finer taste for joy. His tongue is more sensitive to all good things. His senses are more cheerful. He has gained a second innocence in being happy, and this one is more dangerous. He is more childlike too, and a hundred times more clever and sly than he ever was before.

Oh, how much more disgusting he now finds ordinary pleasure! That rough, heavy, dull, brownish-yellow pleasure, the kind enjoyed by our pleasure-seekers, our so-called 'cultured people,' our rich people, and our rulers! How much more mockingly we now listen to all the noise, like the racket at a country fair, that the 'cultured' man and the man about town make as they let themselves be pushed toward 'intellectual enjoyment' through art, books, music, and the help of alcohol. How the fake, stagey cries of passion now hurt our ears. How strange our taste now finds the whole wild romantic uproar and the busy rush of the senses that the cultured crowd love so much, along with their reaching for what is grand, lofty, and twisted. No: if we, who are getting better from illness, need any art at all, it is a different art. It is a mocking, quick, light, playful art, calm like a god and made with a god's skill, an art that flares up like a pure flame into a cloudless sky!

But above all, it is an art for artists, only for artists! After all, we know better what is most needed of all: cheerfulness, every kind of cheerfulness, my friends! We people who seek knowledge now know one thing all too well. Oh, how well we have learned by now, as artists, to forget, and not to know! As for our future: you will hardly find us following those young Egyptians who break into temples at night, hug the statues, and want to uncover, strip bare, and drag into broad daylight everything that there are very good reasons to keep hidden. No, this bad taste disgusts us. We are disgusted by this will to truth, this hunt for truth 'no matter what it costs,' this teenage madness called 'the love of truth.' We are too experienced now, too serious, too joyful, too burned by life, too deep for that. We no longer believe that truth stays truth once you pull the veil off it. We have lived long enough to understand this. Today we think it is good manners not to strip everything naked, not to be there for everything, and not to want to 'know' everything. As the French saying goes, 'To understand everything is to despise everything.' A little girl once asked her mother, 'Is it true that dear God is everywhere? I think that's quite rude!' That is a hint for philosophers. We should respect more the modesty with which Nature has hidden herself behind riddles and puzzles. Maybe truth is a woman who has reasons for not showing her reasons? Maybe her name, to use a Greek word, is Baubo? Oh, those Greeks, they knew the art of living! To live well, you have to bravely stop at the surface, at the fold, at the skin. You have to worship how things look, and believe in shapes, sounds, words, the whole heaven of appearances, like the Greek gods' Mount Olympus! Those Greeks were shallow, and they were shallow because they were so deep. And aren't we coming back to exactly the same thing? We daredevils of the mind, who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peaks of today's thinking, so that we can look around from up there and look down from up there? Aren't we, in exactly this way,

Greeks? Worshippers of shapes, of sounds, of words? And for that very reason, artists?

Selected Short Sayings from Nietzsche Looking Back on His Years of Friendship with Wagner

(Summer 1878)

1.

My mistake was this: I went to Bayreuth carrying an ideal in my heart, and so I was bound to suffer the bitterest disappointment. There was so much ugliness, so much that was grotesque, so much that was like strong pepper, that it completely turned me away.

2.

I completely disagree with the people who were unhappy with the decorations, the scenery and the stage machines at Bayreuth. Far too much hard work and cleverness went into tying down the imagination to things that did not hide their roots in *epic* storytelling. But the so-called naturalness of the dramatic poses and of the singing, compared with the orchestra!! What fake, artificial and corrupted sounds, what a twisting of nature, we were made to listen to!

3.

We are watching the *last Art* in its death struggle: Bayreuth has convinced me of this.

4.

The picture I painted of Wagner went far beyond the real man. I had drawn an *ideal monster*—though maybe one that could still fire up artists with enthusiasm. The real Wagner, Bayreuth as it really is, was only like a poor last print, pressed on cheap paper, from the engraving that I had made. This humiliating experience gave a huge push to my longing to see real people and what really drives them.

5.

This is what I came to realize, and it made me sad; a lot of it even gave me a sudden fright. But in the end I felt that if only I were strong enough to take sides against myself and against what I loved most, I would find the road to truth, and I would get comfort and courage from it. And so I was filled with a joy far greater than the one I was now choosing to turn my back on.

6.

I was in love with art, passionately in love, and in all of life I saw nothing but art—and this at an age when, quite naturally, very different passions usually take hold of a person's soul.

7.

Goethe said: "The longing spirit inside me, which I may have encouraged too seriously when I was younger, and which I fought as hard as I could as I grew older, did not seem fitting for a grown man, and so I had to work hard to reach a fuller freedom." And the conclusion?—I have had to do the same.

8.

Whoever wakes us up always hurts us.

9.

I do not have the gift of being loyal, and what is even worse, I do not even have the vanity to try to look as if I did.

10.

Whoever achieves something that lies beyond what the people around him can see or have experienced stirs up envy and hatred disguised as pity. Prejudice sees the work as decline, as sickness, as a temptation to go astray. Long faces all round.

11.

I openly admit that I had hoped art would make the Germans thoroughly sick of *decaying Christianity*. I saw German mythology as something that would dissolve it, as a way of getting people used to believing in many gods.

What a shock the Catholic comeback gave me!!

12.

A person can be someone who does not suffer from life sharply enough, and who is not so lifeless and emotionally weak, that he *needs* Wagner's art and has to have it as a crutch. This is the main reason people *oppose* it, not some lower motive. Something we are not pushed toward by any personal need, something we do not *require*, we cannot value so highly.

13.

It comes down to this: either you no longer *need* Wagner's art, or you still need it.

Huge forces lie hidden in it: *it pushes you beyond its own territory*.

14.

Goethe said: "Aren't Byron's boldness, liveliness and greatness all creative? We must be careful not to always look for this quality only

in what is perfectly pure and moral. All *greatness* is creative the moment we become aware of it." This should be applied to Wagner's art.

15.

We will always have to give Wagner credit for this: in the second half of the nineteenth century he stamped art on our memory as something important and magnificent. It's true he did it in his own way, and it was not the way of honest, far-sighted people.

16.

Wagner against the careful, the cold and the self-satisfied people of the world—that is where his greatness lies. He is a stranger to his time. He fights the shallow and the overly clever. But he also fights the fair-minded, the moderate, those who take delight in the world (like Goethe), and the gentle, the charming people, the scientific people—this is the other side of the coin.

17.

Our Germanness rose up in revolt against the *dull sensibleness* of the age. It threw itself into the worship of excess, of passion, of ecstasy, and of the darkest and harshest view of the world.

18.

Wagner chases one kind of madness, and the age chases another. Both run their chase at the same speed, and each is just as blind and just as unfair as the other.

19.

It is very hard to follow how Wagner developed inside—you must not trust his own account of what his soul went through. He writes propaganda pamphlets for his followers.

20.

It is highly doubtful that Wagner is able to give honest testimony about himself.

21.

There are people who try, and fail, to turn *themselves* into a general principle. Wagner was one of them.

22.

Wagner is unclear about his final goals; he has a foggy vagueness that is nothing like the clarity of the ancient Greeks.

23.

All of Wagner's ideas instantly turn into obsessions; they *bully* him and rule over him. How can _a man like that let himself be bullied in this __ way_! For example, by his hatred of Jews. He *kills* his musical themes, just as he kills his "ideas," by his fierce love of repeating them. Then there is the problem of everything being too long and too drawn out: he bores us with his raptures.

24.

"*It is the frenzy of wanting to think and feel beyond one's strength*" (Doudan). The Wagner fans.

25.

Wagner, whose ambition goes far beyond his natural talents, has tried countless times to do what was beyond his powers. But it almost makes you shudder to see someone attack so stubbornly something that cannot be conquered—the fate set by his own nature.

26.

In every word, he is always reaching for the most *extreme* way of saying it. But in the end, constant superlatives start to wear thin.

27.

There is something extremely suspicious about Wagner, and that is Wagner's suspiciousness. It is such a strong feature in him that twice I wondered whether he was a musician at all.

28.

The saying, "when faced with perfection, there is no way of being saved except love,"(16) is completely typical of Wagner. He feels deep jealousy toward everything great that he can draw *new* ideas from. And he hates everything he cannot get close to: the Renaissance, and French and Greek art in their style.

29.

Wagner is jealous of every period of history that showed *self-restraint*. He looks down on beauty and grace. He finds only his own *virtues* in the "Germans," and he even blames all his own faults on them.

30.

Wagner does not have the power to open up and set free the souls of the people he spends time with. Wagner is not sure of himself; he is distrustful and arrogant. His *art* has the same effect on artists: it is envious of all rivals.

31.

Plato's Envy. Plato wanted to keep Socrates all to himself. He fills Socrates up with his own ideas. He pretends to be making Socrates look good (he calls him "the beautiful Socrates"). And he tries to push all the other followers of Socrates away, so that he alone looks like the one true disciple. But the way he shows Socrates in history is false, even dangerously false. It is just as false as the way Wagner shows Beethoven and Shakespeare.

32.

When a playwright talks about himself, he is playing a role. He can't help it. When Wagner talks about Bach and Beethoven, he talks like the kind of man he would love people to think he is. But he only impresses people who already believe in him. That is because the mask he puts on and his real nature clash far too sharply.

33.

Wagner fights against the "lightness" in his own nature. For him, a man of low taste, unlike Goethe, that lightness was what made life enjoyable.

34.

Wagner thinks like an ordinary man who likes to explain everything by one single cause. The Jews do the same thing: one goal, and so one Saviour. In this way he makes German culture far too simple. He does it wrongly, but he does it forcefully.

35.

Wagner admitted all this to himself often enough, when he was alone with his own thoughts. I only wish he had admitted it in public too. After all, what makes a person's character great, if not this: that they can take sides even against themselves for the sake of the truth?

Wagner's Germanness

36.

What is not German in Wagner. He lacks the German charm and grace of a Beethoven, a Mozart, or a Weber. He also lacks the flowing, cheerful fire of Beethoven and Weber, the kind of music marked "lively and with spirit." He cannot be relaxed and easygoing without becoming ridiculous. He has no modesty. He loves big drums, and he always tends to overload his effects. He is not the good, dutiful worker that Bach was. And he doesn't have Goethe's calm attitude toward his rivals either.

37.

Wagner's vanity is always at its highest when he talks about the German character. By the way, that is also when he is at his most careless. Think of Frederick the Great's sense of justice, Goethe's nobility and his freedom from envy, Beethoven's noble acceptance of his fate, and Bach's gentle, glowing spiritual life. Think of steady work done

without any thought of fame or success, and without envy. If those are the true German qualities, doesn't it almost look as if Wagner wanted to prove that he is not a German at all?

38.

Terrible wildness, deep misery, emptiness, the shiver of joy, surprise. In short, all the qualities that are typical of the Semitic race! I believe the Jews come to Wagner's art with more understanding than the Aryans do.

39.

Here is a passage about the Jews, taken from the writer Taine. As it happens, I have tricked the reader: the passage has nothing to do with Wagner at all. But could it be that Wagner is a Jew? If so, we could easily understand why he disliked Jews.(17)

40.

Wagner's art is completely the art of our time. A time with real taste for beauty would have rejected it. The more refined people among us actually reject it even now. It makes everything about beauty cruder. Compared with Goethe's ideal, it is far behind. Wagner's characters indulge themselves, and yet they are burningly loyal. This moral contrast works like a spur, like something that irritates you. And Wagner even uses that feeling of irritation to create an effect.

41.

What is it about our time that Wagner's art expresses? It expresses brutality and the most delicate weakness existing side by side. It expresses natural instincts running wild, together with nervous oversensitivity. It expresses a thirst for strong feelings that comes from

tiredness, and from loving that tiredness. Wagner fans understand all of this.

42.

All of Wagner's art comes down to numbing people or making them drunk. On the other hand, I could point to moments where Wagner rises higher, where real joy flows out of him.

43.

The characters in Wagner's art act so wildly because he was terribly afraid that people might doubt they were alive.

44.

Wagner's art speaks to people who have no feeling for art. Any method is welcome if it helps create an effect. It is designed not to have an artistic effect, but an effect on the nerves in general.

45.

At first sight, Wagner seems to offer an art for everyone, because crude methods and refined methods seem to be joined together in it. Yet it may actually require a musical and artistic education, and above all, an indifference to morals.

46.

In Wagner we find the most ambitious mixing together of every possible method, all aimed at getting the strongest effect. Real musicians, by contrast, quietly develop one particular kind of music each.

47.

Playwrights are borrowers. Their main source of wealth is artistic ideas taken from epic poetry. Wagner also borrowed from classical music. Playwrights are geniuses at putting things together, but they are not inventive and original the way epic poets are. Drama ranks lower than epic poetry, because it assumes a cruder, more common audience.

48.

Wagner doesn't fully trust music. He weaves related feelings into it to make it seem great. He measures himself against others. First of all, he gives his listeners strong drinks, so to speak, so that they will believe it was the music that made them drunk.

49.

The same amount of talent and hard work that produces a classic artist will, if it arrives a little too late in history, produce an over-decorated, showy artist like Wagner.

50.

Wagner's art is made to appeal to short-sighted people: you have to get much too close to it, as with a tiny painting. It also appeals to long-sighted people. But it does not appeal to people with normal eye-sight.

What Doesn't Add Up in the Idea of Musical Drama

51.

Just listen to the second act of "Twilight of the Gods" without the drama on stage. It is chaotic music, as wild as a bad dream. And it is

so terribly loud and clear, as if it wanted to make itself understood even by deaf people. All this chatter that has nothing to say is alarming. Next to it, the drama comes as a real relief. The music, heard on its own, is unbearable as a whole, apart from a few parts that were deliberately set apart. Is that supposed to count in its favour? It is enough to say this: without the drama that goes with it, this music constantly breaks all the highest rules of style that belonged to older music. Whoever gets fully used to it loses all feeling for those rules. But has the drama been made better by having this music added? A symbolic meaning has been stuck onto it, a kind of scholar's footnotes. This puts chains on the free, inner understanding of our imagination. It acts like a tyrant. Music becomes the voice of a commentator who talks the whole time and never gives us room to breathe. On top of that, his language is a hard one, and it also needs to be explained. Picture someone who, step by step, has first mastered the words of the libretto, then turned them into action in his mind's eye, then looked for, understood, and got used to the musical symbols that go with it. Yes, and who has fallen in love with all three things. Such a person then feels a great joy. But how demanding it is! It is quite impossible to keep it up except for a few short moments. Such tenfold attention from your eyes, ears, mind, and feelings, such sharp effort in taking things in without doing anything creative in return, is far too exhausting! Only a very few people actually listen this way. So how is it that so many are moved by it? Because most people only pay attention now and then, and sometimes miss whole passages at a time. Because they give their full attention first to the music, later to the drama, and then to the scenery. In other words, they break the work into pieces. But this condemns the kind of work we are talking about. What people get is not the drama, but a moment of it, a random selection. Anyone who creates a new kind of art should think about this! The arts should not always be served up all together on one

plate. We should copy the moderation of the ancient Greeks, which fits human nature better.

52.

Wagner reminds you of lava that blocks its own path by hardening, and suddenly finds itself stopped by walls it has built itself. He never has a truly fiery, fast-moving 'Allegro con fuoco'.

53.

Wagner's music wants to have the same effect as speech. I compare it to a kind of carved relief sculpture that wants to have the same effect as a painting. The highest rules of style are broken, and the greatest heights of art can no longer be reached.

54.

The constant heaving, swelling, and rolling of Wagner's art, like a restless sea.

55.

When we think about how Wagner threw away form, we are reminded of something Goethe said in a conversation with Eckermann: "It's no great art to be brilliant if you respect nothing."

56.

As soon as one theme is finished, Wagner never knows how to go on. That is why there is all that long build-up, all that suspense. His special trick was to turn his weaknesses into what looked like strengths.

57.

Wagner has a lack of melody, and the melody he has is poor. A melody is a whole made up of many beautiful proportions. It is the mirror of a well-ordered soul. Wagner reaches for melody, but when he finds one, he almost smothers it by hugging it too hard.

58.

Wagner is missing the natural nobility of a Bach or a Beethoven, and the beautiful soul that even a Mendelssohn had. He stands one step lower.

59.

Wagner copies himself again and again. These are mannerisms, habits of style. That is why he was the musician who got copied by others the fastest. It is so easy to do.

60.

Mendelssohn did not have the power to shake you to your core. By the way, that was the special talent of the Jews in the Old Testament. But he made up for it with the things that were truly his own: freedom within the rules, and noble feelings kept within the limits of beauty.

61.

Liszt was the leading representative of all musicians, but he was not really a musician himself. He was like the prince, not the statesman who does the real work. He was a mix of a hundred musicians' souls, but he did not have a strong enough personality to cast his own shadow over them.

62.

The healthiest figure is Brahms. There is more German blood in his music than in Wagner's. With these words I mean to say something nice about him, but not entirely nice.

63.

In Wagner's writings there is no greatness and no calm, only arrogance. Why is that?

64.

Wagner's Style. From his earliest days, he got into the habit of giving his opinion on the most important matters without knowing enough about them. That habit has made him the unclear and hard-to-understand writer that he is. On top of that, he tried to copy the clever style of newspaper articles. In the end he picked up the kind of arrogance that goes hand in hand with carelessness, looking at his work and saying, like God in the Bible, "and, behold, it was very good."

65.

It scares me to think how much I could have enjoyed Wagner's writing style, which is so careless that it is unworthy of such an artist.

66.

In Wagner, as in Brahms, there is a blind rejection of what is healthy. In his followers, this rejection is done on purpose and knowingly.

67.

Wagner's art is for people who know they have made a basic mistake in how they have lived their lives. They feel either that they held back

a great nature by taking a low, mean job, or that they wasted it on idle hobbies, a marriage made only for convention, and so on and so on.

For these people, condemning the world comes from condemning themselves.

68.

Wagner fans do not want to change themselves in any way. They live unhappily in dull, conventional, and harsh conditions. Only now and then does art have to lift them, as if by magic, above these things. That is weakness of will.

69.

Wagner's art is for scholars who do not dare to become philosophers. They are unhappy with themselves and usually live in a dull, numb daze. From time to time they take a bath in the exact opposite feelings.

70.

I feel as if I have recovered from an illness. With a joy I cannot put into words, I think of Mozart's Requiem. I can enjoy simple food again.

71.

I understand completely how Sophocles developed as a writer. It came from his disgust at pomp and showy spectacle.

72.

I came to see how unfair idealism is when I noticed that I was taking revenge on Wagner for the hopes I had placed in him, hopes that had let me down.

73.

I am saving my highest duty for last. That duty is to thank Wagner and Schopenhauer in public, and in a way to make them take sides against themselves.

74.

I advise everyone not to shy away from paths like these, the paths of Wagner and Schopenhauer. The completely unphilosophical feeling of regret has become quite foreign to me.

Wagner's Effects

75.

We have to work hard to fight against the false aftereffects of Wagner's art. If, in order to create Parsifal, he has to pump fresh strength out of religious sources, then this is not an example to follow. It is a danger.

76.

I am afraid that, in the end, the effects of Wagner's art will flow into that great rushing river that starts on the other side of the mountains, a river that even knows how to flow over mountains.(18)

Footnotes

1. Please note that the first and second editions of these essays on Wagner came out as small booklets, and the first preface above was written for them.

2. Fisher Unwin, 1911.

3. T. N. Foulis, 1910.

4. See the book Richard Wagner, by Houston Stuart Chamberlain (translated by G. A. Hight), pages 15 and 16.

5. Constable and Company, 1911.

6. See the author's preface to "The Case of Wagner" in this book.

7. Senta is the heroine of the opera "The Flying Dutchman." This note is from the translator.

8. A character in the opera "Tannhäuser." This note is from the translator.

9. See "The Will to Power," volume two, in the authorised English edition. This note is from the translator.

10. A note from the author: It was a real disaster for the study of art and beauty when the word "drama" came to be translated as "action." Wagner is not the only one to blame here. The whole world does the same thing, even the language scholars, who should know better. What ancient drama was aiming at was grand, deeply emotional scenes. It even left action out, or put it before the play began, or behind the scenes. The word "drama" comes from the Dorians, an ancient Greek people. In the way the Dorian language used it, it meant "event" or "story," and both words in a holy, priestly sense. The oldest dramas showed local legends, a kind of "sacred history," on which the worship of a god was based. So drama was not about "action" but

about fate. The Dorian Greek word "dran" has nothing to do with action.

11. The philosopher Hegel and his followers were famous for writing German that was very hard to understand. This note is from the translator.

12. Was Wagner really German at all? There are plenty of reasons to ask this question. It is hard to find even one German trait in his character. Since he was a great learner, he naturally copied a lot of things that were German, but that is all. His very soul goes against everything that people have so far thought of as German, to say nothing of German musicians! His father was an actor named Geyer. What has been spread around so far as "Wagner's life" is a story everyone has agreed to accept, if not something worse. I admit I doubt every point that only Wagner himself vouches for. He was not proud enough to be able to stand the truth about himself. Nobody had less pride than he did. Like the French writer Victor Hugo, he stayed true to himself even in his life story: he stayed an actor.

13. This surely refers to Peter Gast, Nietzsche's only follower and friend. This note is from the translator.

14. My book "The Genealogy of Morals" gives the best explanation of the contrast between "noble morality" and "Christian morality." There may be no more important turning point in the history of the study of religion and morals. This book works like a test that shows me who my equals are. It is glad to be open only to the highest and strictest minds. The others do not have the ears to hear me. You have to be passionate about things that nobody is passionate about nowadays.

15. This points to a poem by the German poet Schiller called "The Veiled Statue at Sais." This note is from the translator.

16. This is what Schiller said about Goethe. This note is from the translator.

17. See the note on page 37.

18. Please note that the German Catholic party is called the Ultramontane Party, which means "the party beyond the mountains," since Rome lies beyond the Alps. So the river that can flow over mountains is the Catholic Church, which Nietzsche believed Wagner's art was moving toward. This note is from the translator.

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