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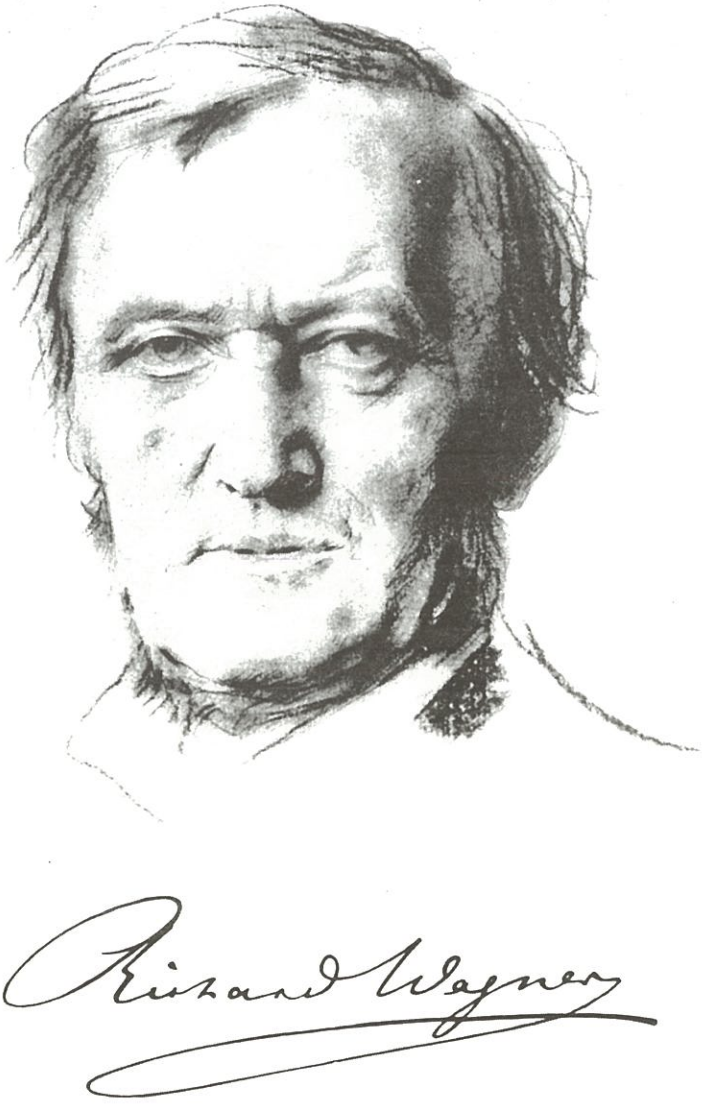
Leitmotive

The Wagner Quarterly



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ISSUE 99

The Editor's Thoughts

During his lifetime and up to the present day, Wagner's influence in the intellectual communities of the world (but especially those of Europe), has been unprecedented.

One often sees the claim that more books have been written about Wagner than any other person in history excepting only for Christ and Napoleon. We do not know if this claim has ever been verified, but we do know for sure that the Library of Congress had, in 1980, more than 5,000 volumes about Wagner. And it seems certain that they have added many more since.

A great many of the leading 19th and 20th Century thinkers of Europe found Wagner's art and his writings[1] to be of such importance and interest that they themselves wrote, often extensively, about him and his ideas. Bryan Magee points out that those included, for starters (among many others), Proust, Joyce, Oscar Wilde, D.H.Lawrence, Thomas Mann, Baudelaire, T.S.Eliot, Nietzsche, G.B.Shaw and W.H. Auden who described Wagner as "the greatest genius who ever lived."

Interestingly, the only Italian that Magee includes in his listing is D'Annunzio. It seems likely that other Italians, including scholars and composers, wrote of Wagner's influence. However, only a few seem to have surfaced. And one of the apparently most perceptive, Gabriele D'Annunzio (in his "The Case of Wagner"), has never before been translated into English. Thomas Grey and James Westby have done so for the first time in this issue.

Considering the remarkably clear and detailed understanding that D'Annunzio had, not only of Wagner, but also of Nietzsche, it is most satisfying to have his many insights at last available in English.

1. Over 3,000 pages in published form, not counting his 10,000+ letters.

LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY*

Robert S. Fisher, Editor
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LEITMOTIVE – *THE WAGNER QUARTERLY* is a journal intended for all persons interested in the works, life, and influence of Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Although many of our authors and readers are scholars affiliated with academic institutions, many are informed lay persons with a keen interest in Wagner studies.

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We invite all interested persons to submit articles for publication: please see the back cover.

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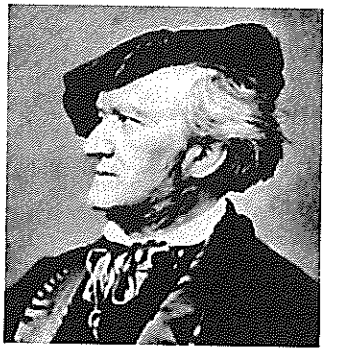
David Daito, Founding Editor (1985–1989) Paul Schofield, Editor (1990)

About the Authors

Thomas Grey ("Il caso Wagner–A Translation of D'Annunzio's 1893 Essay"), is a Professor in the Department of Music at Stanford University. His scholarly specializations include 19th Century opera (especially Wagner), the history of musical aesthetics and criticism, music of the Romantic era, music and visual culture, and, more recently, American musical theater. He is the author of *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* and the editor as well as contributor to the Cambridge Opera Handbook on *Der fliegende Holländer, The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (2008) and *Wagner and his World* (Princeton University Press, 2009). An article on Wagner and the Austrian painter Hans Makart is forthcoming in the Cambridge Opera Journal (Fall 2013). Professor Grey received his doctorate at the University of California, Berkeley.

James Westby ("Il caso Wagner–A Translation of D'Annunzio's 1893 Essay") holds a Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is the leading authority on the life and music of Italian-born composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (among other publications: the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians entry and the first edition of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's memoirs, published by Casalini Libri in 2009). Recently Westby has been researching the pre-war Italian career of the composer as well as its musical and cultural context, particularly Florence in the first half of the twentieth century. Westby has taught at Dartmouth College and now lives in Los Angeles.



Friedrich Nietzsche, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and Richard Wagner.

Gabriele D'Annunzio's "Il caso Wagner" (The Case of Wagner)

Reflections on Wagner, Nietzsche, and *Wagnerismo* from *fin-de-siècle* Italy

Introduction

Italian author, politician, and all-round cultural icon Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938) might be seen as the spiritual offspring of Richard Wagner and Friedrich Nietzsche, the two figures he tries to reconcile in his 1893 essay "Il caso Wagner" ("The case of Wagner"). Like Wagner, D'Annunzio believed that the arts, including music, should play a central role in defining the nation—not merely in terms of cultural identity, but even its political principles. Like Nietzsche, be believed that modern European "decadence" should be both embraced (as a literary, artistic phenomenon) and transcended through the cultivation of the highest, most evolved individual talents in the person of the "superman." D'Annunzio, like Wagner, was in no doubt that he was just such a superior individual, destined to lead his people to a higher plane of cultural evolution. In what was probably the most celebrated chapter of his highly visible public life, D'Annunzio led the occupation of the Italo-Croatian city of Fiume in aftermath of World War I, declaring a newly independent state of this politically contested territory, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. While in strictly political terms the episode is more than a little farcical, it generated enormous symbolic power at the time and is widely viewed as the founding paradigm of fascism as a compelling, irrational, and personality-driven form of political theater: politics as "total work of art." The charter of this independent "Regency of Carnaro," as the new regime was christened, is said to have identified music as a "founding principle," although the precise

meaning of this was never clarified during the brief period of the state's existence (1920–24).

Before World War I D'Annunzio had made a name for himself as a poet, novelist, and journalist. His novels *Il trionfo della morte* ("The Triumph of Death," 1894) and *Il fuoco* ("The Flame," 1900) are key texts of the "decadent" movement in Italy, following the lead of French writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Joris-Karl Huysmans (or, less directly, Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley in England). The celebration of the erotic inner life and the rejection of the quotidian outer world in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* was a fundamental influence on decadent writers throughout Europe, including D'Annunzio, whose *Triumph of Death* leads up to a climactic episode built around a performance of Wagner's music drama. *The Flame* concerns a group of Italian aesthetes gathered around the charismatic cultural "superman" Stelio Effrena, a writer and composer. Effrena's lover-muse called Foscarina is modeled on the actress Eleonora Duse, D'Annunzio's celebrated mistress at the time. The novel is set in Venice at the moment of Wagner's death there and represents, as Anna Meda writes, "D'Annunzio's true theoretical manifesto on art and the role of the artist in the renewal of Italian drama and the promotion of a Latin Renaissance parallel to the one brought about in Germany by great thinkers and artists like Nietzsche and Wagner."[1] In 1910 D'Annunzio provided the verse inscription for a plaque mounted on the wall of the Ca' Vendramin-Calergi, the Venetian palazzo on the Grand Canal where Wagner died in 1883. (see illustration on p. 26): "In this palazzo the soul still hears the last breath of Richard Wagner continuing like the tides that lap at these walls."

D'Annunzio developed important ties with contemporary musicians in Italy and abroad around the turn of the century. Best known among these ties today is his collaboration with Claude Debussy on the five-act "mystery play" with recitation, dance, and music entitled *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien* ("The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian," 1911), commissioned by Ida Rubinstein—a kind of post-Wagnerian, symbolist experiment in the "synthesis of the arts." D'Annunzio also supplied librettos, or the basis for librettos, set by such composers as Riccardo Zandonai (*Francesca da Rimini*, 1901), Ildebrando Pizetti (*Fedra*, 1909), Pietro Mascagni (*Parisina*, 1913), and Italo Montemezzi (*La nave*, 1918).

In 1881 the eighteen-year-old D'Annunzio arrived in Rome from the rural Abruzzo region to attend university. In Rome he would establish himself as a journalist and critic, particularly with the daily newspaper *La Tribuna*. During

1. Anna Meda, "Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Il fuoco*" in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies*, ed. Gaetana Morrone, vol. 1 (A-K) (New York and Milton Park, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007), 545.

his tenure with the paper its French office supplied him regularly with the latest literary publications from Paris for review. These kept him in touch with Parisian intellectual society and gave him the opportunity to introduce the material to Italian readers.

In 1891 he left Rome to begin a sojourn to Naples where he would remain until 1893. While in Naples, he was invited into local pro-Wagnerian society. The Neapolitan Angelo Conti, a strong Wagnerian supporter, encouraged D'Annunzio and introduced him into literary and musical circles which included Federigo Verdinoi, Giulio Massimo Scalinger, Vittorio Pica and most importantly Niccolò van Westerhout, whose piano performances of Wagner mesmerized D'Annunzio. At Westerhout's salon, he later recalled, they played through *Tristan and Isolde* more than ten times (at the time when he was working on his Wagnerian inspired *Triumph of Death*).

It was while in Naples and reviewing for *La Tribuna* that he first encountered the writings of Nietzsche, whose impact on him was immediate and forceful. D'Annunzio became the first to introduce Nietzsche to Italian readers when he published on the front page of *Il Mattino* an article titled "La bestia elettiva" ("the beast who wills") on 26 September 1892.[2] Up to this point, none of Nietzsche's writings had been translated from German and he was little known in Italy.

So it was that the French translation of Nietzsche's *Der Fall Wagner* (as *Le Cas Wagner*)[3] landed on D'Annunzio's desk as literary correspondent for *La Tribuna*. Nietzsche's attack on Wagner required an immediate defense, and D'Annunzio put pen to paper. His response came in the form of a three-part series published in *La Tribuna* in the summer of 1893 under the title "Il caso Wagner." D'Annunzio's essay is of interest not only for its impassioned attempt to reconcile the later, anti-Wagnerian Nietzsche with his earlier Wagnerian and Schopenhauerian self from the time of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but also as a document of Wagner reception among the Italian intelligentsia at the time of Verdi's last operas (*Falstaff* premiered in the same year), when debates over the phenomenon of *Wagnerismo* were becoming especially contentious.

—Thomas Grey and James Westby

2. D'Annnunzio, "The Beast who Wills," translation by Jeffrey Schnapp in *Stanford Italian Review* 6 (1986): 6(12): 265-277.

3. The translation was the work of "Halévy and Dreyfus," two of the most celebrated Jewish names in late-19th-century France, though the individuals in this case were not the most famous bearers of those names (the composer Fromental Halévy, the librettist Ludovic Halévy, or the officer Alfred Dreyfus, whose eponymous "affair" began a year later).

Il caso Wagner

A Translation of D'Annunzio's 1893 Essay

Part 1 (La Tribuna, 23 July 1893)

For some time now, books on Wagner have been appearing in great abundance. The catalogue of apologias and exegeses on the "Jesus of Bayreuth" becomes richer daily, as the organs of musical propaganda grow in number and intensity. There are countless handbooks to guide you through his great works, and the Italian neophytes of the Wagner cult are no less ardent than their co-religionists abroad.

Recently, Carlo Jachino and Edoardo Nicolello have written a book issued by the publisher Fratelli Bocca[1]—a very clear analytical study of *Die Meistersinger,* treating the poem and music by act and by scene, and presenting the opera as an example of the whole system of "leitmotif" (still little known to the majority). They have included in their little book examples of thematic motifs that constitute the plot of the drama, following its development with particular care. Their work also includes a summary table grouping the themes according to three principle ideas that together constitute the substance of the drama, as embodied by (1) the ancient guilds, (2) the reformer Walter, and (3) the poet-shoemaker Hans Sachs. With this, the curious reader can easily understand Wagner's entire system, and at the same time, he can easily discern how much of the opera is vitally organic, as opposed to what remains extraneous, inert material.[2]

1. Carlo Iachino and Edoardo Nicolello, *I Maestri Cantori di Norimberga di Riccardo Wagner. Guida attraverso al poema e la musica con la notazione musicale dei motivi tematici.* Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1891.

2. Guides illustrating the "leitmotifs" of Wagner's operas were published in great numbers following the model of Hans von Wolzogen's *Führer durch die Musik zu Richard Wagner's Festspiel Der Ring des Nibelungen: ein thematischer Leitfaden* (Leipzig: Edwin Schloemp, 1876). Like Wolzogen's model, they most often attached a descriptive name to their musical examples of the leitmotifs, embedding these within a narrative gloss on the drama (which may explain D'Annunzio's remark that the leitmotifs themselves "constitute the plot of the drama"). The musical and cultural ramifications of the practice are discussed by Christian Thorau in "Guides for Wagnerites: Leitmotifs and Wagnerian Listening," in *Wagner and his World,* ed. Thomas S. Grey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 133–50. The relation of French and Italian leitmotif guides to the many German publications of the era has not been closely studied. It is typical of the influence of these guides, in any case, that D'Annunzio divides the musical substance of the opera between "organic" and "inert" material according to the presence or absence of identifiable leitmotifs.

In Bologna, too, where there seem to be the largest number of sectarians (of both sexes) of the new doctrine, there recently appeared a *Cronaca wagneriana* which intends to popularize the ideas of Richard Wagner and disseminate news about performances and his writings.[3]

In France, in the meantime, exegetes *bonae voluntatis*[4] continue to swarm. But their glosses, rather than clarifying, only obscure the text; their writing is characterized by a metaphysical verbosity of wretched taste. On my desk, I have the latest commentary, produced by Firmin-Didot with great typographical elegance. It is by a certain Nerthal, and titled *Tristan et Yseult: La passion dans un drame Wagnérien.*[5] You cannot imagine anything more foolish or more vacuous (yet at the same time, here and there, nothing more exhilarating). All the old romantic clichés have here been warmed over in rancid oil.

Georges Noufflard has released the second volume of his *Richard Wagner, d'après lui-même,* where the evolution of the Wagnerian idea is illustrated with excerpts drawn from critical and expository works of the Master.[6] This volume, divided into four parts, describes the various phases of what Noufflard calls "l'élaboration du grand oeuvre d'art," beginning with the first dramatic sketch for the *Nibelungen,* and finishing with the fully composed third act of *Tristan.*

But the most curious pamphlet, deserving of some attention, is that of Friedrich Nietzsche entitled *The Case of Wagner,* of which the recent French translation by Messrs. Daniel Halévy and Robert Dreyfus will assure a degree of dissemination in the Latin countries.[7]

Friedrich Nietzsche! "And who is he?" The question will occur to many of my readers still unfamiliar with this German philosopher who has attacked again and again, and with such violence, contemporary bourgeois doctrines,

3. Bologna's *Cronaca Wagneriana* (1893–1895) was comparable to the French *Revue wagnérienne* (1885–1888) and the British Wagner journal *The Meister* (1885–1895). Published by the Bolognese "Associazione Universale Richard Wagner," this bimonthly newsletter devoted itself to the dissemination of Wagnerian news and information. A network of "Wagner Societies" had been established in Germany in support of the first Bayreuth festival of 1876, and by the end of the century they had become an international phenomenon. The Bologna "Associazione" was the most important of the early Italian Wagner Societies.

4. "of good will," i.e., Wagnerian apologists

5. Nerthal, *Tristan et Yseult: La passion dans un drame Wagnérien.* Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot, 1893. Nerthal was the pseudonym for a French writer on music and letters whose works included *Tannhaeuser: la conscience dans un drame Wagnérien* (1895), *L'anneau du Nibelung. L'or dans un drame Wagnérien* (1897), and *Michelet, ses amours et ses haines, suivi d'une étude sur Beaumarchais et sur Perrault* (1906).

6. Georges Frederic Noufflard, *Richard Wagner, d'après lui-même: dévelopment de l'homme et de l'artiste,* Vol. 2, (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1891). Noufflard (1846–1897) was a writer on musical topics including Berlioz, Wagner, and Verdi.

7. Frédéric Nietzsche. *Le cas Wagner, un problème musical.* Translated into French by Daniel Halévy and Robert Dreyfus. Paris: Librairie Albert Schultz, 1893. Halévy (1872–1962) and Dreyfus (1873–1939), while students at the Lycée Condorcet, had been part of a close knit circle of friends which included Marcel Proust and Jacques Bizet (son of the composer). Halévy would go on to write biographies of Nietzsche, Jules Michelet and Sébastien Vauban, while Dreyfus would become an important historian of the Third Republic, known especially for his work *Monsieur Thiers contre l'empire, la guerre, la commune, 1869–1871.*

even Christianity itself.

Nietzsche is one of the most original and daring spirits to have appeared at the *fin-de-siècle*. The results of his intellectual speculations are contained in series of bizarre books, written in a pointed and incisive style, and consisting of a steady stream of paradoxes, sarcasms, vehement invective, and terse formulations. Among the most significant of these books are *Thus Spake Zarathustra, On the Genealogy of Morals, Beyond Good and Evil, Twilight of the Idols,* and *The Gay Science.*[8]

In this era when the evangelical doctrine preached by the Slavs is gaining new converts,[9] when the religion of Pity [*Pietà*] resurfaces upon the ruins of old religions, Friedrich Nietzsche rises up furiously against it ("this sponge to wipe away the entire horizon")[10]—against self-denial, against devotion, and, in sum, against everything he believes to be the consequence of universal weakness. The old social edifice, based on lies, seems to him ridiculous and shameful. He believes that a new aristocracy, slowly and relentlessly formed by natural selection, must restore to a place of honor the *will to power* [*sentimento della potenza*], rising above Good and Evil, taking up the reins again to subdue the masses for their own benefit.

According to Nietzsche, the reason for our general decay lies in this: the character of all Europe bears the imprint of a notion of Good and Evil taken from the morality of the slave class.

There are two sets of morals: that of the Masters and that of the servile herd. Since, in all primitive languages, "noble" and "good" are equivalent terms, and since the word "noble" is also a designation of class, it follows as an obvious consequence that the ruling caste created the first notion of Good. The whole morality of these first rulers is rooted in the sovereign conception of their dignity, and tends toward the proud glorification of life.[11]

The genesis of Good is necessarily different with the slave. He instinctively distrusts what his Master calls Good; what for the Master constitutes Good is, in fact, bad for the slave, and to him therefore represents Evil.

But unfortunately, according to Nietzsche, the slave morality has won out.

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8. *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–1885), *Zur Genealogie der Moral* (1887), *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (1886), *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1888), *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882).

9. D'Annunzio is alluding to Leo Tolstoy's influential advocacy of a return to Christian beliefs and values of pre-revolutionary Russia. In *Genealogy* Part 3, section 26 Nietzsche refers to "Petersburg metapolitics and Tolstoian 'pity'."

10. Although Nietzsche famously condemns the "slave morality" at the root of Christian doctrines of meekness and pity, D'Annunzio's quoted phrase is nowhere to be found in Nietzche's writings.

11. The concept of a Judeo-Christian "slave morality" as a reaction against a previously dominant Greco-Roman (and northern "barbarian") "master morality" is developed in Part 1 of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where he explains differing views of "good" and "evil" as reflections of these opposing moral bases.

To achieve this victory, a certain power of seduction was necessary. Jesus of Nazareth brought to the slave class the tool of love [*l'artifizio del'amore*], drawing unto him the wretched and the oppressed. All the suffering of the weak and downtrodden was now transformed into virtue; and the strong man, who derived his laws from the contrary principle [i.e., power], seemed hateful. Asceticism spread its pallid veil of sadness over all things.

This morality is nothing but herd instinct. Superior men, leaving it to naïve and simple people to improve the fortunes of the multitude and to practice the Christian virtue of charity, meanwhile directed their own efforts toward the destruction of that self-same charity.

Does it help to extend the life of the wretched? To what end? To worry about the masses at the expense of the Masters—would that not be like neglecting the most vigorous saplings in a forest in the effort to cultivate some insignificant or lowly weed?

Men are to be divided into two races. To the superior race, elevated by the pure energy of its will, everything will be permitted; to the inferior, little or nothing. The ultimate well-being would be for the privileged, whose personal nobility makes them worthy of such privilege.

But true nobility, according to Nietzsche, does not resemble in any way the weak descendants of ancient patrician families. The essence of the 'noble' is inner sovereignty. He is a free man, stronger than circumstances, convinced that personality transcends in value any subsidiary attributes. He is a self-governing force, the spirit of freedom that affirms and regulates itself according to an ideal of dignity. He has an unerring eye when looking into himself. In this autocracy of conscience we find the principal sign of the new aristocrat.

This, essentially, is the doctrine of Friedrich Nietzsche. "He has come"—he writes in *Zarathustra* [speaking of the new "superman"]—

> that you, my friends, might grow weary of the old words you have learned from the fools and liars. That you might grow weary of the words: reward, retribution, punishment, righteous revenge. That you might grow weary of saying: 'An action is good when it is unselfish.'[12]

He is, in short, a revolutionary, but an aristocratic revolutionary. Everything, for him, depends on this definition of life: "Life is power."

It is necessary to understand the sense of this violent philosopher's doctrines to understand the sense of his aversion toward the author of *Parsifal*.

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, translated by Walter Kaufman (Penguin Books: London, 2003), 119.

The music of Richard Wagner "is music depersonalized—neo-Hegelian music—mass music instead of individual music." [13] I cite the words of another Frederick [Henri Frédéric Amiel], written in 1857 apropos of a performance of *Tannhäuser*; they could not better suit our case. The music of Richard Wagner is the music of socialist democracy as opposed to aristocratic, heroic, or subjective art. It represents the abdication of the individual ego and emancipation of all things previously oppressed. It responds to the trends of our time, which disregard the true value of human personality, submerging it to the whole of nature or of society.

Nietzsche then—whose ideal, as we have seen, is life in the *ascendant*—recognizes and combats in Wagner the exemplary type of the *decadent* artist; he recognizes and abhors in him all the weaknesses and all the infirmities of the age.

Confronted with the "labyrinth of the modern soul," Nietzsche asks, where could the philosopher find

> a guide more initiated, a more eloquent prophet of the soul, than Wagner? Through Wagner modernity speaks most intimately, concealing neither its good nor its evil—having forgotten all sense of shame. And conversely: one has almost completed an account of the value of what is modern once one has gained clarity about what is good and evil in Wagner. I understand perfectly when a musician says today: "I hate Wagner, but I can no longer endure any other music." But I'd also understand a philosopher who would declare: "Wagner sums up modernity. There is no way out, one must first become a Wagnerian." [14]

Thus began Nietzsche. And he freed himself from Wagner's influence as from a perilous disease.

It should be of some use, even pleasure, for readers to learn about the judgment of Richard Wagner passed by this bizarre German philosopher in his "Letter from Turin" [i.e., *The Case of Wagner*].

Part 2 (*La Tribuna*, 3 August 1893)

Richard Wagner is one of the most complicated, the most disturbing, the most fluid, the most contradictory cases that this century offers for the scrutiny

13. *"C'est la musique dépersonnalisée, la musique néohélegienne, la musique-foule, au lieu de la musique-individu."* Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1821–1881), entry of 27 May 1857, *Amiel's Journal: The Journal Intime of Henri-Frédéric Amiel*, trans. Mrs. Humphrey Ward (MacMillan: New York, 1898), no page number.

14. Nietzsche, Preface to *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem—Turinese Letter of May 1888*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, The Modern Library Edition: New York, 1968, 612.

of our psychologists. We can assume that the poet of *Siegfried* and *Parsifal* was well acquainted with the restlessness, the anxieties, the aspirations, the distastes, the thousand delicate and incurable infirmities that plague the modern spirit. His entire inner life, over any extended period, was a rapid succession of enthusiasm, discouragement, abandon, and disgust, produced by various and contradictory causes. His world view was never narrow and rigid, rather it was always evolving step by step with his intellectual development, and with the unfolding of external events. And, as his views of the universe were changing, so too was his method of developing a work of art. The scheme of the tetralogy [the *Ring* cycle] passed through many transformations from first sketch to its final completion. Often the work was interrupted and abandoned for a long time, and then Wagner returned in a state of mind and intelligence very different from where he began.[15] *Siegfried*, begun at a time when Wagner was a fervent follower of the optimistic philosophy of Feuerbach,[16] was completed at a time when he had heard, in the funereal silence of a Good Friday, "that profound sigh of pity that was heard one day from the cross upon Golgotha, and which today erupts from within our own breast."[17]

I regret not being able to collect and represent, at length, the different "states of mind" through which the great Master passed in the most painful and wretched periods of his existence. Certainly, it would not be unhelpful in understanding the entire oeuvre to search out those influences his imagination underwent between his utopia of the Golden Age [i.e., *Rheingold*?] to the mystical catharsis of *Parsifal*.

Just a few lines should suffice here to show what were the real motives behind the hate expressed with such warmth by Friedrich Nietzsche toward the god of Bayreuth.

It's a strange paradox: Richard Wagner, when he first began to ponder his new art form, shared the same animosity, even fury, against Christianity that

15. While D'Annunzio speaks of "frequent" long periods of interruption in work on the *Ring* cycle, the one extended hiatus is that which began at the moment he is alluding to in this passage. In the summer of 1857 Wagner decided to put aside the composition of the third opera, *Siegfried*, to pursue the project of *Tristan und Isolde*. Around the same time he had his first ideas for *Parsifal*, which (like *Tristan*) was conceived under the influence of Wagner's new enthusiasm for the "pessimistic" philosophy of Schopenhauer, diametrically opposed in some ways to the utopian, meliorist, "optimistic" Feuerbachian spirit of Wagner in 1848–49.

16. Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1804–1872) was a "Left-Hegelian" materialist philosopher whose works (*The Essence of Christianity*, 1841 and *Foundations of the Philosophy of the Future*, 1843) arguing the purely human basis of all religions exerted a strong influence on Wagner's "Zürich" writings of 1849-1851.

17. D'Annunzio alludes to Wagner's alleged inspiration for the "Good Friday Magic" episode in *Parsifal* while sitting in the garden of his new lodgings near the villa Wesendonk in Zürich on Good Friday of 1857. Most likely he is drawing on Maurice Kufferath's 1890 study of *Parsifal*. Cf. Kufferath, *The Parsifal of Richard Wagner with Accounts of the Perceval of Chrétien de Troies and the Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach*, trans. Louise M. Henermann (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1892), 169: "On that day, as he himself said later, he heard the sigh of profoundest pity that once was heard from the cross on Golgotha, and which now escaped his own breast."

animates the polemical pages of the philosopher of *Zarathustra*. In the pugnacious book entitled *Art and Revolution*,[18] Wagner sought to demonstrate that modern society not only has failed to produce true art, but *cannot* produce it, and that today there is no art at all, merely industry; there are no artists [*artifici*] but only artisans [*artigiani*]. And, apropos the Latin decadence, he noted:

> Since all societies have to create a general expression that may represent themselves, even the late Roman Empire had to find this. But this expression could not be art, which is nothing but a flower opened up to the supreme joy of life, the full satisfaction that a man feels in the eyes both of himself and the world. It was necessary here, however, to exhibit a disgust for abject existence, the contempt of the world and of himself. Its only possible expression was Christianity.[19]

And, after having fiercely denounced the Christian idea, he concluded that "*Hypocrisy* is the salient feature, the peculiar characteristic of every century of our Christian era, right down to our own day" [20]

He also believed that the world could not save itself except through love, writing at this time:

> Redeeming love is not the abstract love taught by Christianity; rather, it is the most vigorous manifestation of human nature, not deformed, which, having its source in the sensual joy of life, is not limited to but extending to conjugal relations, but extends to children, siblings, friends, and finally to all mankind.[21]

By that, he meant that love should be the affirmation of life. He aspired to

18. *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849).

19. D'Annunzio paraphrases and condenses a passage from *Art and Revolution*. In W. A. Ellis's translation the passage reads, in full:
This mutual and general slavery—so clear, that no one could gainsay it—yearned, as every universal feeling of the world must yearn, for an adequate expression of itself. But the manifest degradation and dishonour of all men; the consciousness of the complete corruption of all manly worth; the inevitably ensuing loathing of the material pleasures that now alone were left; the deep contempt for their own acts and deeds, from which all spirit of Genius and impulse of Art had long since joined with Freedom in her flight; this sorrowful existence, without actual aimful life,—could find but one expression; which, though certainly universal as the condition that called it forth, must yet be the direct antithesis of Art. For Art is pleasure in itself; in existence, in community; but the condition of that period, at the close of the Roman mastery of the world, was self-contempt, disgust with existence, horror of community. Thus Art could never be the true expression of this condition: its only possible expression was *Christianity*." *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. W. A. Ellis, vol. 1 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1895), 36.

20. *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 1, 39.

21. The passage is from the 1850 essay "Art and Climate." Aside from abbreviating the opening sentence, D'Annunzio's translation corresponds fairly closely to W. A. Ellis's in the paragraph beginning "The mediator between Power and Freedom, the redeemer without whom Power remains but violence, and Freedom but caprice, is therefore—*Love*" (*Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 1, 263).

life in the ascendant,[22] to strength, health, and joy to the fullest.

In the fall of 1851, on the shores of the Swiss lakes, wishing to compose a healthy and robust score for his *Siegfried*, he gave himself over passionately to the improvement of his own physical health through hygienic regimens and nutritious food.[23] He ate only succulent meats, he drank neither coffee nor beer, he partook of frequent ice water ablutions, recklessly, and risking an effect quite the opposite of the one he sought. He wrote:

> To be able to write music that is truly healthy, you first need to make your body healthy. I needed to be fully healthy, to be in a state conducive to the composition of *Siegfried*, a task that was, for me, cheerfully solemn.

The benefits conferred by this naive hydrotherapy were illusory and short-lived. Under the impact of a series of events, certain intellectual and moral influences, and by a psychic process which we cannot analyze in depth or even describe in brief, he lost any sense of joy; viewing life intently though through a veil of sorrow, he began to turn towards a new ideal of metaphysical redemption.

That same man who earlier had wished to establish *anarchy*, believing in the native goodness of man, that same man who earlier propagated a theory of *communism* in the arts, now recognized mankind as essentially evil, merely intent on nourishing and reproducing itself. He now asserted that the pure contemplation from which aesthetic pleasure is derived cannot be anything but the privilege of certain rare creatures of monstrous intellect. He recognized that love is nothing if not the most energetic manifestation of that terrible *will to live* that aspires only to perpetuate itself. And, pursuing the doctrine of Arthur Schopenhauer to its ultimate consequences, he became convinced that salvation lies in complete renunciation. "I now possess a sedative that helps me find sleep," he wrote to Liszt, "and it is a passionate and profound

22. *"la vita ascendente."* D'Annunzio puts in Wagner's mouth here a phrase taken, in fact, from Nietzsche's *Case of Wagner*, the "Epilogue" of which speaks of the cultural poles of "ascending life" (Nietzsche's new life-affirming ideal) vs. "declining life" (modern decadence or "degeneration").

23. During the early years of his Swiss exile, especially between 1850 and 1851, Wagner continually suffered from a variety of internal and nervous complaints, largely brought on by the excitable state of mind that produced his interminable theoretical writings of this period as well as the whole groundwork for what would become the *Ring* cycle. Between 15 September and 23 November 1851 he took an extended "water cure" in the town of Albisbrunn, inspired by the theories of a certain Dr. Rausse that argued for a need to purge the body of toxins by means of a regimen of cold baths, compresses, and such. During his cure (and for some time after) he avoided coffee, tea, and any kind of alcoholic beverages, drinking only water and cold milk. Aside from "dry bread" there is no record of what foodstuffs were allowed—whether D'Annunzio's "succulent meats" or any other kind. See Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933), 239, 246–8, and the letter to Theodor Uhlig of 11 November 1851 in *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 230–1.

desire for death. Complete unconsciousness, dissolution of all dreams, absolute annihilation: that is the final release!" [24]

His sensitivity was exacerbated day by day and he became more and more sickly. He suffered from everything: he raged against that "terrible will to live" that forever made him victim to the wildest contradictions. Resignation! Resignation!—For him there is no other path to health.

He conceived a poem that hinged on the idea of renunciation—a poem on a Buddhist subject that can be regarded as the generative seed of *Parsifal*.[25]

In another letter to Liszt, regarding a symphony on the theme of Dante by the Abbé, he says:

> I have followed *Dante* through Hell and Purgatory with the deepest fellow-feeling; having emerged form the pit of hell, I washed myself with fervent emotion, together with the poet, at the foot of Mount Purgatory—in the waters of the sea, I then savoured the divine morn, the pure air, rose up from one cornice to the next, mortified one passion after another, struggled to subdue my wild instinct for survival, until I finally stood before the flames, abandoned my final wish to live and threw myself into the fiery glow in order that, sinking into rapt contemplation of Beatrice, I might cast aside my entire personality, devoid of will.[26]

But, since the drama must be animated by an active principle, he transforms the hero of resignation into the hero of compassion: he created the trans-humanized figure of Parsifal. He was now so full of this new emotion that he wrote to Liszt from Venice: "Compassion for this sorrowful world has superseded my own sorrows." [27] He exhibited the desire, like Parsifal, to purify and redeem himself by means of Pity.

At this point the reader, if he remembers the essential teachings of Friedrich Nietzsche and the definition of Pity offered by the philosopher, will easily understand that those feelings of bitter enmity [of Nietzsche toward Wagner]

24. Undated letter to Franz Liszt (mid-December 1854). As translated in Spencer and Millington, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* (p. 323): "I have yet found a sedative which has finally helped me to sleep at night; it is the sincere and heartfelt yearning for death: total unconsciousness, complete annihilation, the end of all dreams – the only ultimate redemption!"). This letter documents Wagner's early response to the philosophy of Schopenhauer which he began reading in October 1854.

25. Allusion to the project of a Buddhist drama called *Die Sieger* (The Victors), conceived in the first phase of Wagner's enthusiasm for Schopenhauer. A prose sketch for the drama is dated 16 May 1856. A theme thought to be sketched for *Die Sieger* became the so-called "World-Inheritance" motive in *Siegfried*. As D'Annunzio notes, the *Sieger* project was afterwards displaced by *Parsifal*.

26. Wagner to Liszt, London, 7 June, 1855. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 343.

27. Here again, D'Annunzio condenses the text of a letter from Wagner to Liszt (19 October 1858). "In all my relations to the suffering world one thing guides and determines me—pity. When I give myself up to it unconditionally, all my personal suffering ceases." *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt*, vol. 2, trans. Francis Hueffer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 255.

are by their nature more ethical than aesthetic. And furthermore, he will understand that the detractor [Nietzsche] seeks to diminish the importance of this extraordinary artist by designating as an ignoble and intolerable vice in a work of art a condition that has for us, instead, the greatest value: I mean modernity.

Richard Wagner—Nietzsche asserts, correctly—is the *summation of modernity.* He seeks to prove that Richard Wagner is an abomination precisely because he is *the summation of modernity*!

Nietzsche's abomination is at least logical in its own terms. His reasoning is simple:

> What does a philosopher demand of himself first and last? To overcome his time in himself, to become "timeless." With what must he therefore engage in the hardest combat? With whatever marks him as the child of his time. Well, then! I am, no less than Wagner, a child of this time; that is, a decadent: but I comprehended this, I resisted it. The philosopher in me resisted.[28]

And, in fact, he admits that perhaps no one was more dangerously immersed in Wagnerism; but that nobody experienced greater joy in feeling himself victorious over it.

Nietzsche experiences a spiritual phenomenon analogous to that we have already noted in Richard Wagner, but in the reverse. From his [initial] aspirations to health, strength, joy and youth, to all the virtues of life *in the ascendant,* Wagner turns to the contrary virtues: towards a morality of negation, towards the gospel of humility, towards renunciation. Nietzsche, on the other hand, raises himself above this *foeda superstitio* [vulgar superstition] to an affirmative morality, positing the feeling of power as the principle of life and triumphally exalting the *Ego* over any self-denial.

Thus the philosopher extricates himself from his times, while the artist remains part of his time. The one man, while glorifying life, inhabits a purely speculative domain; while the other man *realizes* his abstractions in the concrete form of works of art.

Part 3 (*La Tribuna,* 9 August 1893)

Nietzsche's invective against Wagner can therefore be considered as an invective against Decadence, since for him, *Wagnerism* and *Decadence* are equivalent.

28. Preface to *The Case of Wagner,* in Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Friedrich Nietzsche,* 611.

Through the eyes of Zarathustra (those eyes that contemplate the phenomenon of Humanity from incalculable distance) everything goes badly, everything is lost. The disease has deep roots. And Richard Wagner is the greatest corrupter of the century.

The wit, the mockery, and the sarcasm, often of a dubious or excessively Germanic taste, continue unremittingly throughout the eighty pages of this pamphlet [*The Case of Wagner*].

> [Wagner's] opera is the opera of redemption. Somebody or other always wants to be redeemed in his work: sometimes a little male, sometimes a little female—this is his problem.—And how richly he varies his leitmotif! What rare, what profound dodges! Who if not Wagner would teach us that innocence prefers to redeem interesting sinners? (The case in *Tannhäuser.*) Or that even the Wandering Jew is redeemed, settles down, when he marries? (The case in *The Flying Dutchman.*) Or that old corrupted females prefer to be redeemed by chaste youths? (The case of Kundry.) Or that beautiful maidens like best to be redeemed by a knight who is a Wagnerian? (The case in *Die Meistersinger.*) Or that married women, too, enjoy being redeemed by a knight? (The case of Isolde.) Or that "the old God," after having compromised himself morally in every respect, is finally redeemed by a free spirit and immoralist? (The case in the *Ring.*)[29]

And so on . . .

The metamorphosis of Wagner from an optimist to a pessimist (which I have already discussed) brought out in Nietzsche a fierce mockery. The marriage of the Philosopher of Decadence with the Artist of Decadence seems comical.

> Brunhilde was initially supposed to take her farewell with a song in honor of free love, putting off the world with the hope for a socialist utopia in which "all turns out well"—but now she gets something else to do. She has to study Schopenhauer first; she has to transpose the fourth book of The World as Will and Representation into verse.[30]

There is some truth in this passage. The first version of the Ring ended with a hymn to the joy of the future.

29. *Case of Wagner,* Section 3, p. 616.
30. Ibid, Section 4, 620.

Not wealth, not gold,
nor godly pomp;
not house, not garth,
nor lordly splendour;
not troubled treaties'
treacherous bonds,
not smooth-tongued custom's
stern decree:
blessed in joy and sorrow
love alone can be.—" [31]

This hymn was replaced with a Schopenhauerian hymn, which was later also deleted.

"Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn't he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches—he has made music sick." [32] Nietzsche continues in this tone:

> Wagner's art is sick. The problems he presents on the stage—all of them problems of hysterics—the convulsive nature of his affects, his overexcited sensibility, his taste that required ever stronger spices, his instability which he dressed up as principles, not least of all the choice of his heroes and heroines—consider them as physiological types (a pathological gallery)!—all of this taken together represents a profile of sickness that permits no further doubt. *Wagner est une névrose.*[33] Perhaps nothing is better known today, at least nothing has been better studied, than the Protean character of degeneration that here conceals itself in the chrysalis of art and artist. Our physicians and physiologists confront their most interesting case in Wagner, at least a very complete case. Precisely because nothing is more modern than this total sickness, this lateness and overexcitement of the nervous mechanism. Wagner is *the modern artist par excellence,* the Cagliostro[34] of modernity. In his art all that the modern world requires most urgently is mixed in the most seductive manner: the

31. "Nicht gut, nicht Gold, / noch göttliche Pracht; / Nicht Haus, nicht Hof, / noch herrischer Prunk; / nicht trüber Verträge / trügender Bund, / nicht heuchelnder Sitte / hartes Gesetz: / selig in Lust und Leid / läßt—die Liebe nur sein.—" Text and translation from Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, *Wagner's* Ring of the Nibelung: *A Companion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 362–3. This so-called "Feuerbach" ending was interpolated in Brünnhilde's immolation scene at the conclusion of the *Götterdämmerung* in 1852. This was replaced by a "Schopenhauerian" ending in 1856, which was discarded in favor of the earlier ending, without the "Feuerbach" interpolation.

32. *Case of Wagner,* Section 5, 620.

33. "Wagner is a neurosis."

34. Count Alessandro di Cagliostro was the alias of the notorious Italian occultist, adventurer, and confidence artist Giuseppe (aka Joseph) Balsamo (1743–1795).

> three great *stimulantia* of the exhausted—the *brutal*, the *artificial*, and the *innocent* (idiotic).[35]

And, after reviewing the means by which the Master produces his effects on the public, the philosopher pronounces this following: "The musician now becomes an actor, his art develops more and more as a talent to lie."[36]

Of course, Richard Wagner is "an incomparable histrio [actor], the greatest mime, the most amazing genius of the theater ever among Germans, our scenic artist par excellence."[37]

For Nietzsche, then, the composer of Parsifal is not a musical artist. The proof, according to him lies in the fact that Wagner abandoned

> all lawfulness and, more precisely, all style in music in order to turn it into what he required, theatrical rhetoric, a means of expression, of underscoring gestures, of suggestion, of the psychologically picturesque.[38]

He concedes that "we may consider Wagner an inventor and innovator of the first rank—*he has increased music's capacity for language to the point of making it immeasurable.*" But his concession is subordinate to the hypothesis, "that under certain circumstances music may be not music but language, instrument, *ancilla dramaturgica*.[39] Wagner's music, "if not shielded by theater taste, which is a very tolerant taste, is simply bad music, perhaps the worst ever made."[40]

Here is the gross error, or the idle injustice. For me and my peers, the superiority of Richard Wagner lies precisely in this: his music is, in large part, beautiful, and it has a high and pure artistic value *independent* of all the complex stage machinery and the symbolic meaning superimposed. In sum, the spontaneous and ultra-powerful composer often succeeds, fortunately, in overcoming the assuredly poor theorist and the scenic rhetorician. I believe that in the theater at Bayreuth, where the experience [*gusto*] of the music would be more profound, the dramatic action would be as veiled and hidden as the orchestra, reduced to a hazy appearance, almost relegated to a chimerical distance, in such a fashion that the total musical sensation dominates the nerves of the listener absolutely.[41]

35. *Case of Wagner*, Section 5, 622.
36. Ibid., Section 7, 625.
37. Ibid., Section 8, 628.
38. Ibid., Section 8, 628–9.
39. "handmaiden of drama"
40. Case of Wagner, Section 8, 629.
41. D'Annunzio had not been to Bayreuth himself, hence the conditional tense here.

Nietzsche insists on the theatricality of Richard Wagner. He repeats several times that the dramatist of the tetralogy does not even belong to the history of music per se; rather, within that history, he represents merely the *advent of theatricality in music.*

He rages with fury against what he calls the

> *theatrocracy*—the nonsense of a faith in the *precedence* of the theater, in the right of the theater to *lord it* over the arts, over art.—But one should tell the Wagnerians a hundred times to their faces *what* the theater is: always only *beneath* art, always only something secondary, something made cruder, something twisted tendentiously, mendaciously, for the sake of the masses [...] The theater is a form of demolatry [worship of the masses] in matters of taste; the theater is a revolt of the masses, a plebiscite *against* good taste [...] Wagner is still grand opera—and not even *good* opera. Wagner, too, did not change anything in this respect.[42]

And finally, having expelled all his fury against those who allow themselves to be seduced "by the old rattlesnake" and especially against the long legged and blindly obedient Germans, the philosopher of the *Untimely Meditations*[43] concludes with the following three demands:

> I. That the theater should no longer "lord it over" the arts;
> II. That the actor should no longer seduce the innocent;
> III. That music should no longer be an art of lying.[44]

As the reader can see, this is not just a case of Wagner, but also clearly a *case of Nietzsche.* There's something frantic in this bizarre piece of libel: in the messy succession of ideas, the syntactic incoherence of phrases, the fury of invective. And yet all the same there are frequent, beautiful flashes of truth and boldness; and, certainly, some of the principle characteristics of decadence are described with fine precision.

But why on earth does this Zarathustra, observing from afar rather than examining the artist of decadence with calm rigor and separating out the innumerable elements that make this artist so complex, instead lash out at him with such anger and charge him so harshly with the "corruption for which he is not responsible?"

---

42. Ibid., Postscript, 638–9.

43. Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (1873–1876) are a set of four essays concerning German culture which include *David Strauss: the Confessor and Writer, On the Use and Abuse of History for Life, Schopenhauer as Educator,* and *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth.*

44. *Case of Wagner,* Section 12, 636.

Accusations, reproaches, ironies of this kind are by now quite in vain, and moreover unworthy, especially for a philosopher—even if that philosopher has "placed himself out of his time." The musician, like the painter, like the novelist, like the poet, like all artists who educate and refine our feelings, is a phenomenon beyond accountability. The work of art is determined by the general condition of the spirit and customs present in any era. There is a necessary link and a constant correspondence between the facts of real life and the fiction that art produces under the influence of those facts. Some forms of art cannot hatch except in a particular moral temperature. Hippolyte Taine has demonstrated magisterially and definitively how art assumes with complete necessity certain dominant characteristics in certain eras and certain lands, and how it thus develops in one direction rather than another.[45] A given epoch leaves its mark on all its artists. It is not possible to resist the pressure of the popular spirit. The general state of culture always determines the type of art works produced, tolerating only those that conform to it and eliminating others by a series of interposed obstacles and renewed assaults at each stage of development.

The extraordinary development of music in our time is encouraged by certain conditions of the public spirit and corresponds to certain requirements, certain attitudes, certain special sensibilities. Today, music alone is able to express the dreams that are born in the depths of modern melancholy, indefinite thoughts, limitless desires, baseless anxieties, inconsolable despair—all the darkest and most agonizing disturbances that we have inherited from the Obermanns, the Renés, the Jocelyns, the Guerins, the Amiels and that we will transmit to our successors.[46]

Richard Wagner has not only collected within his oeuvre all this spirituality and ideality dispersed around him, but, interpreting our metaphysical needs, he has revealed to us the most secret aspect of our interior life. Like Tristan hearing the *alte Weise* sounded by the shepherd, each of us owes to the mysterious power of great music the immediate revelation of a distress which he believes to capture the true essence of his own soul and the terrible secret of his Destiny.

Recall the scene in Act III of *Tristan and Isolde* where the prostrate knight

45. Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), a French critic and historian best known for his three-part approach to the contextual study of a work of art based on "race, milieu, and moment."

46. *Obermann* (1804), a novel by French author Etienne Pivert de Senancour (1770–1846); François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848); *Jocelyn* (1836), an epic poem by Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869); Maurice de Guérin (1810–1839), a French poet, author of *Centaure* and *Bacchante*; Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1821–1881) and his sister Eugenie de Guérin (1805–1848) are remembered for their journals and correspondence. With this literary catalogue D'Annunzio is suggesting that the genealogy of the modern temperament of fin-de-siècle European culture ("decadence" in particular) is to be sought in the traditions of French Romanticism.

hears the sound of the shepherd's pipe.

Tristan sighs, "What does the old lament tell me? Where am I?"

The shepherd plays upon the fragile reed the age-old melody that was handed down from his father long ago. In his profound ignorance, he remains free from anxiety.

> "You, old and solemn melody with your plaintive tones," says Tristan, "uneasily upon the evening air you came to me, when long ago you brought the child news of his father's death."
>
> Through the grey light of morning, ever more fearfully you sought me, as the son learned of his mother's fate.
>
> You asked me one day, and ask me here again:
>
> For what lot was I then born? For what fate?
> The ancient tune tells me once more:
>
> TO DESIRE AND TO DIE! TO LONG FOR DEATH!

And the shepherd, unawares, plays on, plays upon his pipe. The melody does not change; the notes remain the same. They speak of that which is no more, they speak of things now lost and far away.

> "Tell me, old friend," says the shepherd to Kurwenal who watches Tristan. "What is the matter with our lord?"

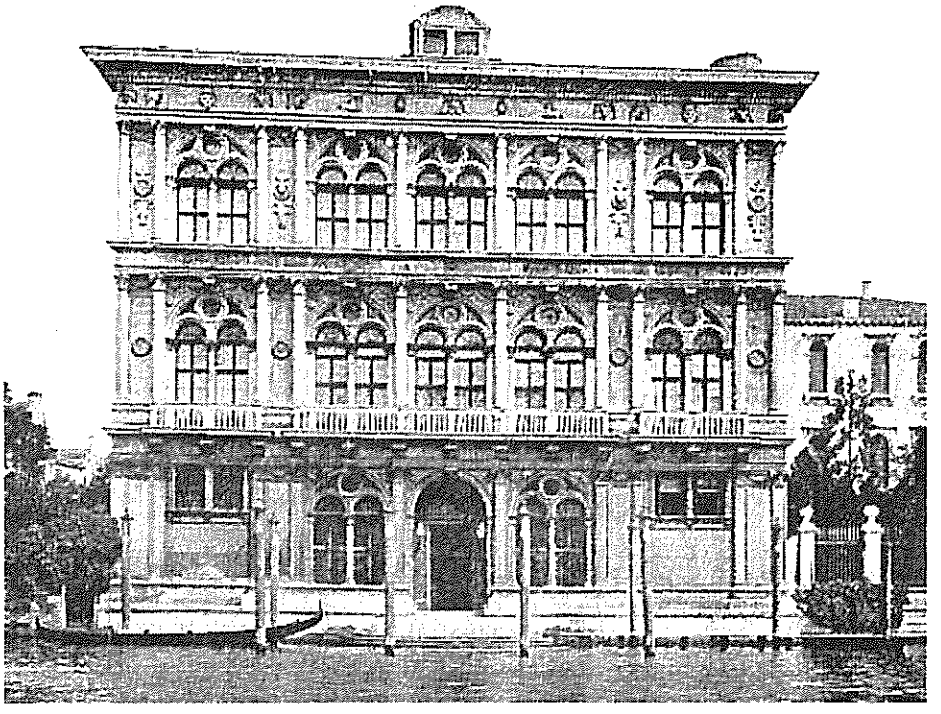
And Kurwenal: "Let it go... You can never understand."

And Tristan again, to whose soul these humble sounds have revealed all:

> Where I was, I cannot tell you. I did not see the sun, nor did I see land and people; what I did see, I cannot tell you. I was where I had been before I was, and where I am destined to go: into the vast realm of the everlasting night. One sure truth is ours here on earth: divine, eternal, utter oblivion![47]

—Gabriele D'Annunzio
(Thomas Grey and James Westby, *translators)*

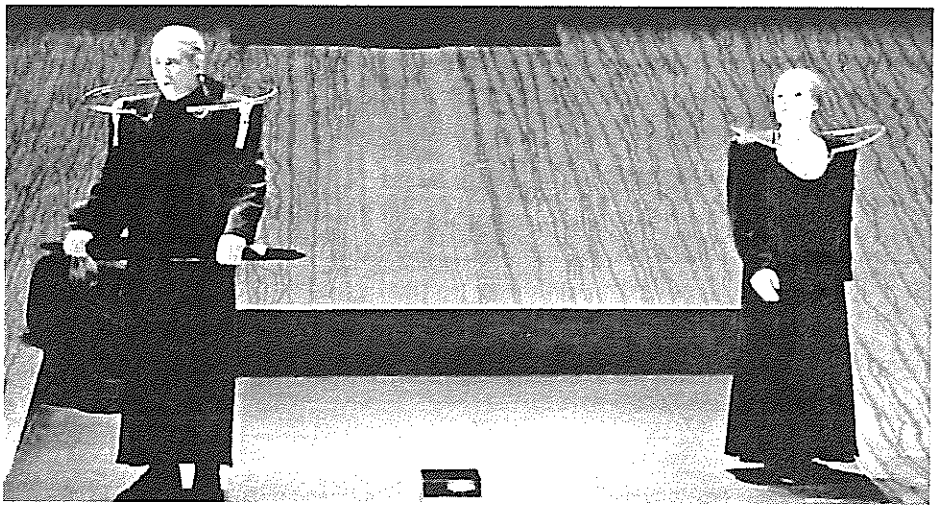
47. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde,* Act III, scene i.



The Palazzo Vendramin on the Grand Canal in Venice, where Richard Wagner died on 13 February 1883. (See Leitmotive issue 85, Spring 2009, for more information.)

Plaque on the side of the Palazzo Vendramin with inscription by Gabriele D'Annunzio honoring the memory of Richard Wagner. (See translation on p. 8 above.)

Erratum



Aboard the ship to Cornwall, a bitter Isolde confronts Tristan about the wrongs she has suffered in the past, to which he calmly responds.

In the prior issue on page 6 the upper photo was incorrect. Above is the photo that was intended. We very much regret this mistake. It resulted from a production error and was not the author's error.

Letter to the Editor

Editor,

I think you're right that the drive to reinterpret Wagner is greater than with other composers. It may be that he is so chest-thumping that directors feel challenged to assert their own visions on a similarly grand scale. Smaller scale pieces just don't demand such muscular handling. Usually an overbearing set and silly costumes acquit the honor of the producers.

But sometimes there are wonderful interpretations that really do enlarge a piece, and give it new dimensions. That wonderful San Francisco production of *Il Barbiere* what, ten years ago, the one with the rotating house, the fascinating mute butler, and the chorus disassembling the motor scooter. It didn't contradict Rossini in the slightest; it added enrichment. It was respectful and enlarging and new, all at the same time. Everyone who saw it loved it. Innovation and authenticity can live together under the right circumstances. When that doesn't happen, however, I am entirely of your mind if a director can't handle a piece intelligently, he should go find something within the limits of his imagination, and the fact that Wagner gets jerked around so often doesn't excuse the jerkers.

—Stan Washburn

Mr. Washburn has for many years taught drama, producing a very wide range of plays with his students. Further, he is a published author of several novels and has, for many years, painted with one-man shows on both coasts to his credit.

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U.S. Mail: PO Box 8832, Emeryville, California 94662
Telephone: (510) 985–0260
Fax: (510) 985–0260 **Note: New Fax number**
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