

## Chapter 8

### Wagner

*Companions the creator seeks, not corpses, not herds and believers. Fellow creators the creator seeks--those who write new values on new tablets. Companions the creator seeks, and fellow harvesters; for everything about him is ripe for the harvest<sup>1</sup>.*

In the middle of his stint at the University of Leipzig, Nietzsche enlisted in the Prussian army for his mandatory one-year military service in October 1867. He served in an artillery regiment and managed to receive an assignment in his hometown of Naumburg. Although he enjoyed being so close to his dear sister and mother, his active military service was brief. In his training early that winter he was thrown from a horse and injured his chest. The rest of that year was spent recuperating, although he somehow managed to earn a promotion to lance corporal in April of the next year (1868). From that point onward his health was very delicate. Many believe that the injury in 1867 caused not only his subsequent chronic health problems, but also started a deterioration that eventually led to his insanity in 1889. Another, more probable theory, ascribes Nietzsche's poor health to syphilis, most likely contracted from prostitutes while studying in Bonn. Evidence to support the latter theory includes the previously mentioned letter to his mother. According to this theory, the severity of his military injury could have weakened him enough to allow the syphilis to manifest itself. Without the presence of syphilis, it is difficult to account for his consistent sickness and eventual insanity. Still other explanations supported by the testimony of his close friends assert that Nietzsche never had sexual relations with anybody in his entire life, and that if he did, in fact,

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<sup>1</sup> TSZ, 24: Zarathustra's Prologue, 9.

contract syphilis, he was exposed to it while treating soldiers in the Franco-Prussian War. Regardless of competing syphilitic theories, Nietzsche's health took an incontrovertible turn for the worse after his military injury; his headaches occurred more frequently, his already poor eyesight continued to deteriorate and his sensitive digestion worsened.

During his recuperation, Nietzsche detailed his departure from Schopenhaurianism and became more interested in Wagner's music. A friend and fellow philology student, Ernst Windisch, visited him in Naumburg and suggested he recuperate in Leipzig at the home of their professor, Friedrich Ritschl. During his stay at the Ritschls, he became good friends with both Professor Ritschl and his wife, Sophie. Always better at socializing with women, Nietzsche charmed Frau Ritschl with his conversation and his pianistic abilities.<sup>2</sup> Their frequent musical soirees included Nietzsche's performance of several transcriptions from Wagner's *Meistersinger* as well as piano works by Schumann and Beethoven. In October 1868, his mandatory year of service completed, Nietzsche was discharged from the army and returned to school. Back in academia after having been surrounded by military men for a year, and having had his cultural tastes whetted by his stay at the Ritschl's, he vowed to make the most of his re-entry into Leipzig society. In a letter to Erwin Rohde, he wrote:

I plan on becoming more of a member of society: in particular, I am focusing on a woman of whom I am told miraculous things, the wife of Professor Brockhaus, sister of Richard Wagner with respect to whose capacity friend Windisch (who has visited me) has an amazing opinion...the Ritschls almost exclusively socialize with the Brockhaus family<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In one letter, Nietzsche jokes by calling her, "My intimate friend." HKB II, 229.

<sup>3</sup> HKB II, 259-60.

Thanks in part to Windisch, Nietzsche obtained invitations to various social events and eventually made the acquaintance of Professor and Ottolie Brockhaus neè Wagner.

Later that month, on 28 October, Nietzsche finally had the opportunity to hear Wagner's music performed. The concert consisted of the introduction to *Tristan und Isolde* and the overture to *Der Meistersinger*, and any criticisms Nietzsche previously had were swept away after hearing Wagner's music performed.

Tonight, I was in the *Euterpe* that had begun its winter concerts and which delighted me with both the Introduction to *Tristan und Isolde* and with the Overture to *Der Meistersinger*. I can not find it in my heart to remain critically-cool towards this music; every fiber, every nerve in me twitches, and I have not had such a lasting feeling of transport than in listening to the last-mentioned overture, in a long time<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the rest of his life, even in the midst of scathing attacks on Wagner, Nietzsche never swayed from his firm belief in the genius of *Tristan*. If anything, Nietzsche's later attacks on Wagner were intensified to combat the strong power Wagner's music could exert on its listeners. In later letters, both before and after his split with Wagner, he refers to this first experience with *Tristan* and adds to the symptoms listed above; mentioning also the sweating, dizziness and tingling he felt that night.

Little more than a week later, Richard Wagner returned to Leipzig, his hometown, to visit his sister, Ottolie. One evening when the Ritschls were visiting, Wagner sat down at the piano and played the "Meisterlied" for the guests. Mrs. Ritschl told him she was already familiar with the piece, having heard Nietzsche play it, and went on to recount the young student's enthusiasm for Wagner's music. Intrigued by her description of the brilliant young man, he requested a meeting. The next day, after presenting a paper at

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<sup>4</sup> Middleton, 35.

Leipzig's annual philology conference (a high honor for a student), Nietzsche returned home to find a note from Windisch asking him if he would like to meet Wagner in person. In an amusing letter to Rohde, Nietzsche described in great detail the events of that night. Having recently purchased a new suit, Nietzsche was anxious to have it tailored before going to meet "Der Meister." The tailor agreed to send a messenger to Nietzsche's lodging with the new suit, but upon Nietzsche's receipt of the suit, the messenger demanded to be paid in full. Nietzsche explained that he did not know this messenger and would deal with the tailor in person when he next saw him. This did not satisfy the messenger and their argument led to a scuffle, and as he tried to take back the clothes, Nietzsche tried to put them on. In Nietzsche's own words:

A scene. I fight, standing there in my shirt, since I want to put the new trousers on. Finally: Collecting my dignity, I solemnly threaten him, curse my tailor and his helper, swear revenge: during the course of this, the little man vanishes with my clothes. End of the second act: In my shirt, I sit on my sofa and look at my black suit coat and ponder it if is good enough for Richard.<sup>5</sup>

Reduced to wearing his old suit, Nietzsche arrived at the café late and winded.

Upon their meeting, the two men immediately fell into lively discussion and each was impressed by the other. They discussed Schopenhauer, Wagner lambasted the conductors in Leipzig, Nietzsche explained how he had come to know Wagner's music, and Wagner played extensive excerpts from *Der Meistersinger*. In the same letter to Rohde, Nietzsche describes Wagner's "fiery" and "colorful" personality, and his magnetic and powerful presence. According to all accounts, Nietzsche was just as drawn

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

to the man as he had been a week earlier to the music. The highly enjoyable meeting ended as,

Then, he read a passage from his biography that he is writing at this time, a very amusing scene from his Leipzig study years, of which I even now cannot think without laughing; by the way, he writes extremely well and with great wit. Finally, when both of us prepared to leave, he warmly shook my hand and invited me in a very friendly way to visit him in order to talk about music and to discuss philosophy, he also asked me to introduce his sisters and his relatives to his music, what I solemnly took on as my task."<sup>6</sup>

Nietzsche truly *did* take this as his solemn task, and became a vocal Wagner-phile.

Writing to his mother, sister and friends of Wagner's "genius" and "revolutionary aesthetic," Nietzsche's immediate enthusiasm was immense.

His association with Wagner might have been limited to that one encounter were it not for several other extraordinary coincidences. Shortly after meeting Wagner, Nietzsche was awarded a position at the University of Basel in Switzerland (February 1869). Nietzsche's official title was "extraordinary professor of classical philology"—the inclusion of "extraordinary" resulting from several factors. Practically speaking, the "extraordinary" referred to it being a one-year replacement position. (The next year Nietzsche became "ordinary professor of classical philology" upon his permanent appointment.) Most remarkably, albeit less pragmatically, the "extraordinary" reflected Nietzsche's being awarded the post before completing his degree requirements in Leipzig. His final dissertation had been waived and earlier essays accepted in its place because of his extraordinary gifts and long list of academic accomplishments. His research into the poetry of Theogenis, to provide one example, had brought him such acclaim that he began delivering well-attended lectures to his fellow students, and several

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

other papers had been published in various philological journals. Such an exception was never made in the strict Prussian academic world, and Nietzsche's treatment caused a stir throughout the academic community. In addition to the early date of his graduation, a glowing letter from his mentor, Friedrich Ritschl, sealed the Basel appointment. Among other compliments, he described Nietzsche as the best philology student he had supervised in his thirty-seven years of teaching, and foretold great and wonderful things from the young man.<sup>7</sup>

In April, Nietzsche left Leipzig and headed to Basel to begin his professorial career. Being relatively close to Tribschen—the Wagners' home—Nietzsche was able to accept the friendly invitation he had received back in November. His first visit, on 25 May, was a cause for much nervousness in the younger man. Having been invited for Wagner's birthday (22 May) and being unable to attend due to professional obligations, Nietzsche came soon after. Upon arriving, Nietzsche was notified by Wagner's servant that the master was not to be interrupted while he worked, and that Nietzsche should try back the next morning. When he finally was admitted to the household, he, Cosima von Bülow (soon to be Cosima Wagner) and Richard Wagner greatly enjoyed each other's company; so much in fact, that Nietzsche became a regular visitor there for the next few years. Having made plans to travel to Paris with Rohde that summer, Nietzsche cancelled them in order to work on his various projects. Remaining in Basel also allowed Nietzsche to make frequent visits to Tribschen, quickly becoming a regular member of the household and even attending the birth of Wagner's son, Siegfried. In a letter to Rohde he confessed that he visited almost every weekend. His letters to Wagner during

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<sup>7</sup> Kaufmann, 7.

this time highlight the inherently unequal relationship of the two men. After their second meeting, Nietzsche wrote, “How long have I intended to express unreservedly the degree to which I feel grateful to you; because indeed the best and loftiest moments of my life are associated with your name.”<sup>8</sup> In another example, the two men had a rare argument over Nietzsche’s vegetarianism. Both enlisted the most absolute and fundamental reasons for their respective opinions, and Wagner especially became very angry. Cosima reported in her diary that, “Richard became angry because the professor acknowledges that Richard is right and yet remains abstinent.”<sup>9</sup> Shortly thereafter, Nietzsche gave up his vegetarianism, and in a letter to von Gersdorff explained that, “. . .intellectually productive and emotionally intense natures *must* have meat. The other mode of living should be reserved for bakers and bumpkins who are nothing but digesting machines.”<sup>10</sup> While this indicates Nietzsche’s willingness to undergo major lifestyle changes to suit the master, Wagner viewed Nietzsche as someone to do his Christmas shopping, entertain his wife, and write letters for him.

At this point it becomes valuable to differentiate between two modes of evaluation Nietzsche applied to Wagner and Wagnerian topics: the emotional, intuitive mode and the intellectual, reflective mode. As the excerpts from his letters show, he experienced deep emotions in response to both Wagner’s music and Wagner’s personality. His reaction to Wagner’s music needs no explanation. There have been countless audience members over the last century who experienced the same sensations

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<sup>8</sup> Middleton, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner’s Diaries*, transl. Geoffrey Skelton, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (New York: Harcourt Brace: 1978); 148.

<sup>10</sup> Middleton, 59.

and attested to the incredible power of Wagner's music. His personal attachment to Wagner, the man, deserves more attention. Throughout his letter to Rohde his description of Wagner - "...that lively illustration of that which Schopenhauer calls 'genius'"—resembles that of a love-sick teenager. Many scholars have commented on the obvious father-figure role Wagner most likely filled in Nietzsche's life. Wagner was born the same year as Nietzsche's father and supplied the strong masculine influence Nietzsche had not known since his eighth year. The absence of a paternal model was only reinforced by being raised in a family of women, including his grandmother, mother and sister. Nietzsche's recognition of Wagner's revolutionary genius also provided him with the role model he had never had. His descriptions of Schopenhauer had frequently pointed out the elder man's role as *intellectual* father, but in Wagner he had a flesh and blood mentor who demanded everyone's respect and, through the force of his personality, held court virtually anywhere he went.

A close look at Nietzsche's notebooks from periods temporally removed from Wagnerian experiences (both musical and social) reveal a continuum with his earlier writings. When allowed to decompress from the effects of Wagner's music and personality, Nietzsche's reflections on aesthetic issues maintain characteristically Nietzschean traits that would be easily recognized as those written by the author of *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, *Der Fall Wagner*, or *Ecce Homo*. It is, therefore, not surprising that Ernest Newman, the Wagner biographer, criticizes Nietzsche for being an "overworked, humorless, *over-intellectualised*, (sic) perhaps under-sexed young

hierophant.”<sup>11</sup> It was, after all, in his reflective, intellectual moments that he exerted his individuality, and it was in these moments that the fundamental differences between his and Wagner’s philosophies came into most striking contrast. While Newman describes Nietzsche’s post-Wagnerian years as indicative of his “over-intellectualised” mentality, his earlier works display the same principles. The common notion—accepted by Newman and many others—that Nietzsche fell under Wagner’s spell in 1868, fell out of it around 1876, and spent his remaining twelve years of sanity in an attempt to eradicate Wagnerianism, should be adjusted. Nietzsche fell under Wagner’s spell every time he heard his music or visited Tribschen and slowly emerged from its effects after removing himself from his Wagnerian environment. The conflict between Nietzsche’s carefully articulated philosophical arguments and the blind hero-worship of Wagner took several years to identify, and it took him several more to finally extricate himself from the situation.

Seeds of their differences can be found throughout Nietzsche’s early notebooks and published works, and an investigation into them will not only shed light on the deterioration of their friendship, but also on Nietzsche’s music composed during this time. To do this, we must first evaluate Wagner’s aesthetic and compare it to Nietzsche’s. Although it would seem appropriate to look through Nietzsche’s own writings to uncover his own unique interpretation of Wagner’s views, he left virtually no detailed analyses of “Der Meister’s” theories. Again and again Nietzsche refers to

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<sup>11</sup> Newman, 334; italics added.

Wagner's genius<sup>12</sup> but does not delve into the qualifications consulted in applying that term. In fact, Nietzsche's familiarity with Wagner's many articles in which he sets out his aesthetic theories can even be called into question. In the many letters to friends and family telling them of Wagner's genius and calling on them to read Wagner's writings, he never quotes these works. For example, his letter to Rohde contains the following: "A recent book of Wagner's on Beethoven will give you a good idea of what I desire of the future. Read it—it is a revelation of the spirit in which we—we!—shall come to live."<sup>13</sup> Or in another discussion of Wagner's idealism, "...which is what relates him most closely to Schiller: this glowing high-hearted struggle for the dawning of the 'day when men shall be noble.'"<sup>14</sup> The fact that Nietzsche resorts to quotations of others to give validity to Wagner's prose speaks volumes on his precarious intellectual position.

Lacking Nietzsche's own explanation of Wagner's aesthetic, a more sterilized and standardized definition must suffice. On a very general level, Wagner believed music should be felt more than understood; that music must appeal to the emotions as much or more than to the intellect. To reach this end, Wagner sought to unify drama and music and coined the term, "Gesamtkunstwerk," or "Total Art Work" for this new union. As the artist, Wagner wrote the text, composed the music, designed the sets, and conceived of the costumes. The unification of all aspects of art allowed the artist to be faithful to his vision without sacrificing anything to the demands of external constraints. Opera would no longer be hemmed in by "aria" and "recitative" designations, nor would the composer have to shape the music around someone else's libretto. Wagner's break with

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to Nietzsche's many letters during his infatuation with Wagner. Mentions of Wagner's name *without* the descriptor "genius" are extremely rare.

<sup>13</sup> Middleton, 74.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 65; Nietzsche's quote is from Goethe's poem "Epilog zu Schillers Glocke."

traditional opera was so extreme, in fact, that it was referred to as “music drama” to indicate the significant differences.<sup>15</sup>

Thematically, Wagner’s music dramas dealt with epic stories and displayed a level of sensuality never before seen. He shocked audiences with Tristan and Isolde’s passionate love that was more carnal than ideal, and with a whole gamut of incestuous relationships in the ring cycle. To portray this new aesthetic musically, Wagner abandoned many traditional musical constructs. Not only were individual numbers eliminated, but melodies themselves were sacrificed in favor of “eternal melody;” a style in which the traditional framework of phrases and melodic repetition was replaced with an ever-changing melodic line without internal divisions. He took through-composition to a new level, essentially applying it to an entire fifteen-hour opera. Within this broad framework seemingly defined only by what it is not, Wagner inserted his own positively charged constructions: *leitmotifs*. These short melodic fragments were associated with particular aspects of the music drama, with one motif referring to love, one to anvils, one to Siegfried, etc. Although Berlioz and Weber had used motifs earlier in the form of the *idée fixe*, Wagner employed them on such a grand scale that a new terminology became necessary.

Wagner justified such revolutionary changes to western musical traditions in part by pointing to an ancient Greek practice. In his article, *Oper und Drama*, he attributes the ideas of music drama to the Greeks and explains his current works as attempts to recreate the Greek drama and its audience. Important in this regard is the unique role the

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<sup>15</sup> Wagner himself did not use the term – it was coined by others from Wagner’s frequent use of the word “drama” instead of opera.

audience played in the Dionysian festivals to which Wagner (and Nietzsche) refer.<sup>16</sup> The objectifying glance of the audience common to pre-Wagnerian opera was to be replaced with the audience's complete immersion in the total experience. Beyond his aesthetic claims to ancient Greece, Wagner also borrowed thematically from his ancient predecessors. Observe, for example, the similarities between Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy and Wagner's own ring cycle.<sup>17</sup> Not only are the two plots very similar, but Aeschylus' use of the trilogy format is adapted and magnified in Wagner's tetralogy. Wagner himself acknowledges his debt to Aeschylus, especially in regards to the relationship between speech and music. From what little is known about Greek music, it can be gleaned that the music closely followed the natural speech rhythms of the text. While the vocal line was to be a faithful servant to the text, the orchestra took on the role of the Greek chorus, using the *leitmotifs* as reminiscences or presentiments.

Wagner's adherence to ancient Greek ideals provided yet another point of agreement between him and Nietzsche, and their letters are filled with frequent discussions of Greek aesthetics. For Nietzsche's part, he was also hard at work exploring Greek conceptions of music, text and rhythm, although his approach was markedly different from his mentor's. Whereas Wagner frequently constructed his prose works around his own views and then searched for evidence to support his claims, Nietzsche followed a more academically rigorous research plan. It would be erroneous, however, to attribute pure objectivity to Nietzsche's research and dismiss Wagner's work as propaganda. Wagner had done significant reading of ancient Greek dramas and was

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to p.87 for a description of the Dionysian festivals.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Michael Ewans, *Wagner and Aeschylus: the Ring and the Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).

well-versed in the corresponding dramatic theses, and Nietzsche frequently allowed his personal motivations to play a large role in his scientific endeavors. The marked difference arises primarily from the depth of the two men's understanding of Greek theories. Wagner's amateur fascination with the ancient plays paled in comparison to Nietzsche's thorough philological training. By the time of his appointment at Basel, Nietzsche had published several papers on Greek poets, given numerous talks throughout the German academic world, and was widely seen as one of the foremost experts on Theogenis.<sup>18</sup> That thorough academic training also allowed Nietzsche to somewhat distance himself from personal attachments (i.e. Wagner) when pursuing his research endeavors. A case in point is his essay, "On Words and Music," completed in 1871, but begun several years before.

Begun as a discussion of Greek theories of word and music, "On Words and Music" quickly became an ahistorical investigation of the phenomenon utilizing sources ranging from Aeschylus to Raphael to Beethoven to Schopenhauer. The article begins from the assumption that all art forms are media of communication. In a Schopenhauerian vein, Nietzsche assents to our inability to directly interface with reality, and then builds upon his predecessor's ideas by implying that our attempts at communication allow us to construct a relation to reality. That music allows for the most direct interaction<sup>19</sup> is accounted for by an interesting adoption of Darwinian ideals.

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<sup>18</sup> In the first few months of 1869 alone, Nietzsche published two reviews in the *Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland*, and an article entitled: "De Laertii Diogenis fontibus scripsit Friedericus Nietzsche," in the *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*.

<sup>19</sup> Although Nietzsche does not make issue of his differences with Schopenhauer in this work, he frequently apologizes for the strictly metaphysical qualities Schopenhauer attributes to the "will" and reinforces the superficial and illusory quality of all our experiences and creations. All our sensations, even the most base, are "...known to us – as I am forced to insert here in opposition to Schopenhauer – after a most rigid self-

Music's unspoken *metaphysical* attributes hinted at by the fourteen year-old boy listening to Handel oratorios in his church are replaced by the mature scholar with *anthropological* attributes. Instead of preceding language on a psychological level, music precedes it on a paleo-historical level, wherein early man's crude grunts or howls comprised the first language. These grunts contained information through tonal inflection, and it was only through a long process of communicative evolution that the tonal variance was disengaged from the strictly linguistic aspects. Our modern-day words are therefore symbols of symbols—disembodied representations of their original, quasi-musical incantations. Nietzsche explains this in the following passage:

All degrees of pleasure and displeasure—expressions of *one* primeval ground that we cannot see through—find symbolic expression in the *tone of the speaker*, while all other representations are designated by the *gesture symbolism* of the speaker. Insofar as this primeval ground is the same in all human beings, the *tonal background* is also universal and intelligible despite the differences between languages.<sup>20</sup>

The “gesture symbolism” to which Nietzsche refers is the movement of the mouth to shape and divide the “tonal background” into linguistic units. The pure tone is a representation of that “primeval ground” common to us all, and language is a secondary representation, twice removed from that to which it refers. Having created a hierarchy of communicative media, Nietzsche next sets out to justify the inclusion of words with music.

Remaining in the paleo-anthropological mode of his earlier assertions, Nietzsche first refers to the ancient vocal traditions that predate most instrumental forms. In

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examination, not according to its essence but merely as conception.” From Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Words and Music,” in *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, transl. Maximilian A. Mügge (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 27-48; (MW); 31.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

addition to the Greek examples he alludes to many other ancient cultures, although with enough vagueness to call into question the depth of his research into these other cultures. Regardless, the close historical association between the voice and music is enough to suggest the applicability of text to music. Nietzsche's main concern in this essay is not, however, whether words and music may be combined (and by extrapolation, the combination of any or all of the arts), but what their relation must be. Because music represents a first-degree metaphor for that primeval ground,<sup>21</sup> it must provide the motivating principle behind any other, more metaphorically distant art forms. Music creates the schema of representation, and other art forms find their expression through a relation to that schema. Any attempt to write music for a poem is therefore akin to "...a son beget(ing) his father."<sup>22</sup> The other art forms are therefore dependent on music in a way reminiscent of Schiller's "musical mood." In *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* Nietzsche explains that, "Schiller confessed that, prior to composing, he experienced not a logically connected series of images but rather a musical mood."<sup>23</sup>

It follows that when words are added to music, they necessarily play a secondary role, essentially providing the raw phonation through which music may come into being. He refers to Beethoven's Ninth symphony as an example of this, postulating that "we simply do not hear anything of Schiller's poem," and later quotes from the symphony, "O friends, not these sounds, but let us strike more agreeable and joyous ones."<sup>24</sup> In a

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<sup>21</sup> The obvious metaphysical implications here conflict with Nietzsche's simultaneous anti-metaphysical writings discussed in earlier chapters. Some have suggested that he was hesitant to establish his own system in a public medium without the corroboration of a pre-established metaphysics – in this case, Schopenhauer's.

<sup>22</sup> WM, 33.

<sup>23</sup> BT, 48-52: 5.

<sup>24</sup> WM, 38.

reference to the ancient Dionysian festivals, Nietzsche goes on to explain that words are the individual's attempt to interpret the music in which he is a participant. The words, therefore, are only known by the singers, while the listeners confront it as *absolute* music. Opera, on the other hand, is constructed to convey the words to the audience. Traditional opera interchanges drama and music in the hierarchy of meaning and uses music to reflect the drama. Due to the erroneous preposition on which it is based, most opera is doomed to fail. Although Nietzsche *does* concede that a gifted composer may still manage to create great music, the incongruous action of the singers would then serve only to distract the audience.

In the course of his critique of opera, Nietzsche's harshest attacks are aimed at the degradation of music to the status of "dramatic music." Great operatic music can only serve to distract us from the drama, and correspondingly, great drama requires no music to carry us along in its spell. The only music that can *accompany* drama is one that points, refers and reminds the audience, or one that shamelessly excites the audience. Nietzsche compares the former to mnemonic devices that point out dramatic events that we must not miss. Similar to the trumpet blast that commands the horse to trot, this use of music reminds the audience of what the drama is attempting to relate. Marches indicate a military component, woodwinds indicate the outdoors, trumpets point to an important announcement; in short, the orchestra becomes an audio version of the program notes. As for the second category - music that aims to excite - Nietzsche calls it "a stimulant for dull or wearied nerves."<sup>25</sup> Designed only to overwhelm the audience, it contains nothing in itself, and exists as a vacuous intensifier of generic emotion. After

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 45.

combining these two types of music, the resulting mixture of drums and bugle calls must then be cloaked to hide its crudity and patronizing nature from the audience. Considering the hopelessness of this situation, Nietzsche sarcastically bemoans the composer's plight:

...what despair for the dramatic musician, who must mask the big drum by good music, which, however, must nevertheless have no purely musical, but only a stimulating effect! And now comes the great Philistine public nodding its thousand heads and enjoys this 'dramatic music' which is ever ashamed of itself, enjoys it to the very last morsel, without perceiving anything of its shame and embarrassment.<sup>26</sup>

Nietzsche provides no solution to the problem of drama, although several points may be deduced. Opera can only maintain its integrity if its source is a musical one. Any constructivist approach in which manifestations of other art forms are juxtaposed and made to fit degrades all the mediums involved. Because opera is associated with an extended narrative, any acceptable work recognizable as opera would have to be the result of music that coincidentally inspires a lengthy, coherent story. If the Dionysian festivals are any indication, a level of coincidental narrative sophistication seems unlikely, as these "plays" usually dealt with little more than the act of Dionysus's death. The other example Nietzsche provides, that of Beethoven's ninth symphony, utilizes a poem that can hardly be described as a dramatic narrative. Even if one assumes that Nietzsche would allow for a dramatic text to be joined to the music after some reflection (a text created from the composition's "musical mood") it seems unlikely that the text would be coherent if required to compliment and never distract from the music itself.

A second point that can be assumed is that Nietzsche felt Wagner's music dramas did *not* constitute a degradation of music. His subservience to and praise of Wagner

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

indicate nothing but the most intense approval of everything Wagnerian. Yet so many of Nietzsche's critiques find their mark most precisely in Wagner's works. Nietzsche's mocking of "mnemonic devices" that "remind the spectator of something that he must not miss while watching the drama," immediately call to mind Wagner's use of leitmotifs. His critique of "music that aims at excitement as a stimulant for jaded or exhausted nerves" reminds one of Nietzsche's own description of hearing the prelude to *Tristan*, and foreshadows almost word for word Nietzsche's later attacks on Wagner. Compare to a passage written seventeen years later in *The Case of Wagner*:

Wagner represents a great corruption of music. He has guessed that it is a means to *excite weary nerves*—and with that he has made music sick. His inventiveness is not inconsiderable in the art of goading again those who are weariest, calling back into life those who are half dead. He is a master of hypnotic tricks, he manages to throw down the strongest like bulls.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, his attack on opera's audience deserves a full quotation due both to its vitriol and its similarity to later descriptions of Wagnerians.

...feel how agreeably its fur is being tickled, for it is receiving homage in all sorts of ways—though it is a sybarite craving diversions, faint-eyed, in need of excitement, well-bred and thinking much too well of itself, as used to good drama and good music as to good food without ever making much of any of this, a forgetful and absent-minded egoist who has to be led back to the work of art by means of force and bugles because selfish plans concerning profit or enjoyment keep going through his mind all the time.<sup>28</sup>

In a bewildering bit of irony, Nietzsche seems to have been so overcome by Wagner's musical "stimulant" that he was unable to recognize his own immediate proximity to the very thing he detested.

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<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, with *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Random House, 1967); (CW); 166: 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Certainly there are several aspects of Nietzsche's "On Music and Words" that compliment Wagner's new style—most notably his conception of "Gesamtkunstwerke." Modeled after the ancient Greek lyric poets, the concept of the "total art work" fits the prototype Nietzsche sets forth in this and other essays. In another psychological turn of events, Wagner's interest in ancient Greece and Nietzsche's expertise in the area caused Nietzsche to feel appreciated and valued—and by a celebrity genius no less. That Wagner did not compose the music and subsequently create a text that complimented it either did not occur to Nietzsche, or did not strike him as significant in light of other circumstances. Most likely, his firm belief in Wagner's genius spared the composer the close scrutiny Nietzsche paid to other opera composers. Nietzsche's dedication to Wagner was even more firmly established with the publishing of his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. Because the main ideas of this book have been discussed earlier,<sup>29</sup> only the biographical events surrounding the book will be discussed here.

After the pomp and circumstance surrounding Nietzsche's extraordinary appointment at Basel and the exceptions made for his quick graduation from Leipzig, the philological world anxiously awaited this young genius's first published work. When *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (later re-titled simply, *The Birth of Tragedy*) was finally published, Nietzsche's fellow philologists received a substantial shock. Rather than contributing a scholarly study of ancient texts, the *Birth* was a book filled with cross-historical comparisons, a great deal of praise for Wagner, and relatively little documentation to support any of it. The least of Nietzsche's concerns, however,

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<sup>29</sup> See pp. 86-92.

were with those who were merely shocked. Many others wasted no time bringing the young *wunderkind* back down to earth after his surprising ascent to philological stardom. Most notable of these were Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and his polemical article, “Zukunftsphilologie!” Making light of both Wagner and Nietzsche—the latter for his (perceived) inappropriate interest in the former’s music—the pamphlet sardonically examined the characteristics of this new “philology of the future,” including its lack of footnotes or Greek quotations. Nietzsche’s good friend, Rohde, replied by publishing a response to Wilamowitz’s attack, entitled “Afterphilologie.”<sup>30</sup> Rohde’s response was as vindictive as Wilamowitz’s had been, and even inspired Wilamowitz to a “Zweites Stück” (Second Part) to his original critique.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the tumult, Nietzsche’s mentor, Ritschl, remained above the fray, an inaction that spoke volumes about his reaction to Nietzsche’s first book. This so surprised Nietzsche that he wrote Ritschl, “You will not grudge me my astonishment that I have not heard a word from you about my recently published book, and I hope you will not grudge me my frankness in expressing this astonishment to you.” A gifted and talented philologist, Ritschl had contributed much to the field that he loved and respected, and it was surely a disappointment to see his prized pupil commit such a disservice to the discipline. What Nietzsche had written, if considered a work of philology at all, either introduced an entirely new style or was a patently poor piece of research. In retrospect, *The Birth of Tragedy* was more a piece of aesthetic theory than a work of philology, and as such it has had a profound influence on aesthetic thought. As Nietzsche later wrote in

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<sup>30</sup> One translation of this is “Ass Philology.”

<sup>31</sup> For a further description of Wilamowitz’s and Rohde’s articles, see Kaufmann’s preface in BT, 5-6.

his “Attempt at a Self-criticism” (appended to the *Birth* in 1886): “What I had to say then—too bad that I did not dare say it as a poet: perhaps I had the ability. Or at least as a philologist...”<sup>32</sup> Perhaps that is why its few supporters came mainly from the artistic world. Not surprisingly, the Wagner’s were among the book’s biggest advocates.

To them, the book’s adverse affect on Nietzsche’s credibility and career possibilities was secondary to the service done for Wagnerianism. In an excerpt from Cosima’s diaries she writes that she is, “...particularly pleased that Richard’s ideas can find an extension in it (*The Birth of Tragedy*).”<sup>33</sup> To add insult to injury, she goes on to critique the book’s non-Wagnerian sections<sup>34</sup> and suggests that it could be more effective if edited down to a smaller volume. “Anyone can have wise and great thoughts, but everything depends on their being put forward in a compact and developed form.”<sup>35</sup> When Rohde’s defense of *The Birth* was printed, Cosima complained that it dealt too little with the personalities involved—namely Richard Wagner—and therefore missed the point of Nietzsche’s book. At this, the first signs of Nietzsche’s dissatisfaction with Wagner’s megalomania appeared in complaints to Rohde.<sup>36</sup> After the furor surrounding *The Birth* had subsided, Nietzsche’s standing in the philological community had been badly damaged. As he reported to Wagner at the beginning of the 1872 term, “...our winter semester has begun, and I have no students at all!”<sup>37</sup> Although Nietzsche undoubtedly realized by this time that his genius was better suited for realms outside

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<sup>32</sup> BT, 20: Attempt at a Self-Criticism, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Newman, 326.

<sup>34</sup> Sections 1-15 are generally accepted as the substantive portion of the book, while the final ten sections degenerate into poorly conceived propaganda for Wagner.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Middleton, 94-95.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 110.

simple philology, being ostracized by his peers and former friends was difficult. Few in Leipzig would correspond with him and the University of Basel had suffered a corresponding loss of prestige.

“I have suddenly acquired such a bad name in my field that our small university suffers from it! This agonizes me, because I am really very devoted and grateful to it, and want least of all to do it any harm. ... Until last semester the number of students in classical philology was constantly growing—now, suddenly, they are all blown away!”<sup>38</sup>

Correspondingly, Nietzsche’s loneliness returned, creating a situation that drove him more strongly than even towards Tribschen and Wagner.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.