
Autobiographic Sketch

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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About this Title

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[2]

Translator's Note

This sketch of his life, down to the year 1842, was drawn up by Wagner, at the request of his friend Heinrich Laube, for publication (1843) in a Journal edited by the latter, and called the "*Zeitung für die Elegante Welt*." The editor then prefaced it by the following remark:—

"The storm and stress of Paris have rapidly developed the Musician into a Writer. I should only spoil the life-sketch, did I attempt to alter a word of it."

[3]

Autobiographic Sketch

My name is *Wilhelm Richard Wagner*, and I was born at Leipzig on May the 22nd, 1813. My father was a police-actuary, and died six months after I was born. My step-father, Ludwig Geyer, was a comedian and painter; he was also the author of a few stage plays, of which one, "*Der Bethlehemitische Kindermord*" (The Slaughter of the Innocents), had a certain success. My whole family migrated with him to Dresden. He wished me to become a painter, but I showed a very poor talent for drawing.

My step-father also died ere long,—I was only seven years old. Shortly before his death I had learnt to play "*Üb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit*" and the then newly published "*Jungfernkranz*" upon the pianoforte; the day before his death, I was bid to play him both these pieces in the adjoining room; I heard him then, with feeble voice, say to my mother: "Has he perchance a talent for music?" On the early morrow, as he lay dead, my mother came into the children's sleeping-room, and said to each of us some loving word. To me she said: "He hoped to make *something* of thee." I remember, too, that for a long time I imagined that something indeed would come of me.

In my ninth year I went to the Dresden *Kreuzschule*: I wished to study, and music was not thought of. Two of my sisters learnt to play the piano passably; I listened to them, but had no piano lessons myself. Nothing pleased me so much as *Der Freischütz*; I often saw *Weber* pass before our house, as he came from rehearsals; I always watched him with a reverent awe. A tutor who explained to me [4] *Cornelius Nepos*, was at last engaged to give me pianoforte instructions; hardly had I got past the earliest finger-exercises, when I furtively practised, at first by ear, the Overture to *Der Freischütz*; my teacher heard this once, and said nothing would come of me.—He was right; in my whole life I have never learnt to play the piano properly.—Thenceforward I only played for my own amusement, nothing but overtures, and with the most fearful 'fingering.' It was impossible for me to play a passage clearly, and I therefore conceived a just dread of all scales and runs. Of Mozart, I only cared for the *Magic Flute*; *Don Juan* was distasteful to me, on account of the Italian text beneath it: it seemed to me such rubbish.

But this music-strumming was quite a secondary matter: Greek, Latin, Mythology, and Ancient History were my principal studies. I wrote verses too. Once there died one of my schoolfellows, and our teacher set us the task of writing a poem upon his death; the best lines were then to be printed:—my own were printed, but only after I had cleared them of a heap of bombast. I was then eleven years old. I promptly determined to become a poet; and sketched out tragedies on the model of the Greeks, urged by my acquaintance with *Apel's* works: *Polyidos*, *Die Ätolier*, &c., &c. Moreover, I passed in my school for a good head "*in litteris*;" even in the 'Third form' I had translated the first twelve books of the *Odyssey*. For a while I learnt English also, merely so as to gain an accurate knowledge of Shakespeare; and I made a metrical translation of Romeo's monologue. Though I soon left English on one side, yet Shakespeare remained my exemplar, and I projected a great tragedy which was almost nothing but a medley of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. The plan was gigantic in the extreme; two-and-forty human beings died in the course of this piece, and I saw myself compelled, in its working-out, to call the greater number back as ghosts, since otherwise I should have been short of characters for my last Acts. This play occupied my leisure for two whole years.

[5]

Meanwhile, I left Dresden and its *Kreuzschule*, and went to Leipzig. In the *Nikolaischule* of that city I was relegated to the 'Third form,' after having already attained to the 'Second' in

Dresden. This circumstance embittered me so much, that thenceforward I lost all liking for philological study. I became lazy and slovenly, and my grand tragedy was the only thing left me to care about. Whilst I was finishing this I made my first acquaintance with Beethoven's music, in the Leipzig *Gewandhaus* concerts; its impression upon me was overpowering. I also became intimate with Mozart's works, chiefly through his *Requiem*. Beethoven's music to *Egmont* so much inspired me, that I determined—for all the world—not to allow my now completed tragedy to leave the stocks until provided with suchlike music. Without the slightest diffidence, I believed that I could myself write this needful music, but thought it better to first clear up a few of the general principles of thorough-bass. To get through this as swiftly as possible, I borrowed for a week Logier's "*Method of Thorough-bass*," and studied it in hot haste. But this study did not bear such rapid fruit as I had expected: its difficulties both provoked and fascinated me; I resolved to become a musician.

During this time my great tragedy was unearthed by my family: they were much disturbed thereat, for it was clear as day that I had woefully neglected my school lessons in favour of it, and I was forthwith admonished to continue them more diligently. Under such circumstances, I breathed no word of my secret discovery of a calling for music; but, notwithstanding, I composed in silence a Sonata, a Quartet, and an Aria. When I felt myself sufficiently matured in my private musical studies, I ventured forth at last with their announcement. Naturally, I now had many a hard battle to wage, for my relations could only consider my penchant for music as a fleeting passion—all the more as it was unsupported by any proofs of preliminary study, and especially by any already won dexterity in handling a musical instrument.

[6]

I was then in my sixteenth year, and, chiefly from a perusal of E. A. Hoffmann's works, on fire with the maddest mysticism: I had visions by day in semi-slumber, in which the 'Keynote,' 'Third,' and 'Dominant' seemed to take on living form and reveal to me their mighty meaning: the notes that I wrote down were stark with folly.—At last a capable musician was engaged to instruct me: the poor man had a sorry office in explaining to me that what I took for wondrous shapes and powers were really chords and intervals. What could be more disturbing to my family than to find that I proved myself negligent and refractory in this study also? My teacher shook his head, and it appeared that here too no good thing could be brought from me. My liking for study dwindled more and more, and I chose instead to write Overtures for full orchestra—one of which was once performed in the Leipzig theatre. This Overture was the culminating point of my foolishness. For its better understanding by such as might care to study the score, I elected to employ for its notation three separate tints of ink: red for the 'strings,' green for the 'wood-wind,' and black for the 'brass.' Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was a mere Pleyel Sonata by the side of this marvellously concocted Overture. Its performance was mainly prejudiced by a *fortissimo* thud on the big drum, that recurred throughout the whole overture at regular intervals of four bars; with the result, that the audience gradually passed from its initial amazement at the obstinacy of the drum-beater to undisguised displeasure, and finally to a mirthful mood that much disquieted me. This first performance of a composition of mine left on me a deep impression.

But now the July Revolution took place; with one bound I became a revolutionist, and acquired the conviction that every decently active being ought to occupy himself with politics exclusively. I was only happy in the company of political writers, and I commenced an Overture upon a political theme. Thus was I minded, when I left school and went to the university: not, indeed, [7] to devote myself to studying for any profession—for my musical career was now resolved on—but to attend lectures on philosophy and aesthetics. By this opportunity of improving my mind I profited as good as nothing, but gave myself up to all the excesses of student life; and that with such reckless levity, that they very soon revolted me. My relations were now sorely troubled about me, for I had almost entirely abandoned my

music. Yet I speedily came to my senses; I felt the need of a completely new beginning of strict and methodical study of music, and Providence led me to the very man best qualified to inspire me with fresh love for the thing, and to purge my notions by the thoroughness of instruction. This man was *Theodor Weinlig*, the Cantor of the Leipzig *Thomasschule*. Although I had previously made my own attempts at Fugue, it was with him that I first commenced a thorough study of Counterpoint, which he possessed the happy knack of teaching his pupils while playing.

At this epoch I first acquired an intimate love and knowledge of Mozart. I composed a Sonata, in which I freed myself from all buckram, and strove for a natural unforced style of composition. This extremely simple and modest work was published by Breitkopf und Härtel. My studies under Weinlig were ended in less than half a year, and he dismissed me himself from his tuition as soon as he had brought me so far forward that I was in a position to solve with ease the hardest problems of Counterpoint. "What you have made your own by this dry study," he said, "we call Self-dependence." In that same half year I also composed an Overture on the model of Beethoven; a model which I now understood somewhat better. This Overture was played in one of the Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts, to most encouraging applause. After several other works, I then engaged in a Symphony: to my head exemplar, Beethoven, I allied Mozart, especially as shewn in his great C major Symphony. Lucidity and force—albeit with many a strange aberration—were my end and aim.

[8]

My Symphony completed, I set out in the summer of 1832 on a journey to Vienna, with no other object than to get a hasty glimpse of this renowned music-city. What I saw and heard there edified me little; wherever I went, I heard *Zampa* and Straussian pot pourris on *Zampa*. Both—and especially at that time—were to me an abomination. On my homeward journey I tarried a while in Prague, where I made the acquaintance of Dionys Weber and Tomaschek; the former had several of my compositions performed in the conservatoire, and among them my Symphony. In that city I also composed an opera-book of tragic contents: "*Die Hochzeit*." I know not whence I had come by the mediaeval subject-matter: — a frantic lover climbs to the window of the sleeping chamber of his friend's bride, wherein she is awaiting the advent of the bridegroom; the bride struggles with the madman and hurls him into the courtyard below, where his mangled body gives up the ghost. During the funeral ceremony, the bride, uttering one cry, sinks lifeless on the corpse.

Returned to Leipzig, I set to work at once on the composition of this opera's first 'number,' which contained a grand Sextet that much pleased Weinlig. The textbook found no favour with my sister; I destroyed its every trace.

In January of 1833 my Symphony was performed at a Gewandhaus concert, and met with highly inspiring applause. At about this time I came to know Heinrich Laube.

To visit one of my brothers, I travelled to Wurzburg in the spring of the same year, and remained there till its close; my brother's intimacy was of great importance to me, for he was an accomplished singer. During my stay in Wurzburg I composed a romantic opera in three Acts: "*Die Feen*," for which I wrote my own text, after Gozzi's: "*Die Frau als Schlange*." Beethoven and Weber were my models; in the *ensembles* of this opera there was much that fell out very well, and the Finale of the Second Act, especially, promised a good effect. The 'numbers' from [9] this work which I brought to a hearing at concerts in Wurzburg, were favourably received. Full of hopes for my now finished opera, I returned to Leipzig at the beginning of 1834, and offered it for performance to the Director of that theatre. However, in spite of his at first declared readiness to comply with my wish, I was soon forced to the same experience that every German opera-composer has nowadays to win: we are discredited upon our own native stage by the success of Frenchmen and Italians, and the production of our operas is a favour to be cringed for. The performance of my *Feen* was set upon the shelf.

Meanwhile I heard the *Devrient* sing in Bellini's *Romeo and Juliet*. I was astounded to witness so extraordinary a rendering of such utterly meaningless music. I grew doubtful as to the choice of the proper means to bring about a great success; far though I was from attaching to Bellini a signal merit, yet the subject to which his music was set seemed to me to be more propitious and better calculated to spread the warm glow of life, than the painstaking pedantry with which we Germans, as a rule, brought naught but laborious make-believe to market. The flabby lack of character of our modern Italians, equally with the frivolous levity of the latest Frenchmen, appeared to me to challenge the earnest, conscientious German to master the happily chosen and happily exploited means of his rivals, in order then to outstrip them in the production of genuine works of art.

I was then twenty-one years of age, inclined to take life and the world on their pleasant side. "*Ardinghello*" (by Heinse) and "*Das Junge Europa*" (by H. Laube) tingled through my every limb; while Germany appeared in my eyes a very tiny portion of the earth. I had emerged from abstract Mysticism, and I learnt a love for Matter. Beauty of material and brilliancy of wit were lordly things to me: as regards my beloved music, I found them both among the Frenchmen and Italians. I forswore my model, Beethoven; his last Symphony I deemed the keystone [10] of a whole great epoch of art, beyond whose limits no man could hope to press, and within which no man could attain to independence. Mendelssohn also seemed to have felt with me, when he stepped forth with his smaller orchestral compositions, leaving untouched the great and fenced-off form of the Symphony of Beethoven; it seemed to me that, beginning with a lesser, completely unshackled form, he fain would create for himself therefrom a greater.

Everything around me appeared fermenting: to abandon myself to the general fermentation, I deemed the most natural course. Upon a lovely summer's journey among the Bohemian watering-places, I sketched the plan of a new opera, "*Das Liebesverbot*," taking my subject from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*—only with this difference, that I robbed it of its prevailing earnestness, and thus re-moulded it after the pattern of *Das Junge Europa*; free and frank physicalism (*Sinnlichkeit*) gained, of its own sheer strength, the victory over Puritanical hypocrisy.

In the summer of this same year, 1834, I further took the post of Music-Director at the Magdeburg theatre. The practical application of my musical knowledge to the functions of a conductor bore early fruit; for the vicissitudes of intercourse with singers and singeresses, behind the scenes and in front of the footlights, completely matched my bent toward many-hued distraction. The composition of my *Liebesverbot* was now begun. I produced the Overture to *Die Feen* at a concert; it had a marked success. This notwithstanding, I lost all liking for this opera, and, since I was no longer able to personally attend to my affairs at Leipzig, I soon resolved to trouble myself no more about this work, which is as much as to say that I gave it up.

For a festival play for New Year's day, 1835, I hastily threw together some music, which aroused a general interest. Such lightly won success much fortified my views that in order to please, one must not too scrupulously choose one's means. In this sense I continued the composition of my *Liebesverbot*, and took no care whatever to avoid the echoes [11] of the French and Italian stages. Interrupted in this work for a while, I resumed it in the winter of 1835-6, and completed it shortly before the dispersal of the Magdeburg opera troupe. I had now only twelve days before the departure of the principal singers; therefore my opera must be rehearsed in this short space of time, if I still wished them to perform it. With greater levity than deliberation, I permitted this opera—which contained some arduous rôles—to be set on the stage after a ten days' study. I placed my trust in the prompter and in my conductor's baton. But, spite of all my efforts, I could not remove the obstacle, that the singers scarcely half knew their parts. The representation was like a dream to us all: no human being could

possibly get so much as an idea what it was all about; yet there was some consolation in the fact that applause was plentiful. From various reasons, a second performance could not be given.

In the midst of all this, the 'earnestness of life' had knocked at my door; my outward independence, so rashly grasped at, had led me into follies of every kind, and on all sides I was plagued by penury and debts. It occurred to me to venture upon something out of the ordinary, in order not to slide into the common rut of need. Without any sort of prospect, I went to Berlin and offered the Director to produce my *Liebesverbot* at the theatre of that capital. I was received at first with the fairest promises; but, after long suspense, I had to learn that not one of them was sincerely meant. In the sorriest plight I left Berlin, and applied for the post of Musical Director at the Königsberg theatre, in Prussia—a post which I subsequently obtained. In that city I got married in the autumn of 1836, amid the most dubious outward circumstances. The year which I spent in Königsberg was completely lost to my art, by reason of the pressure of petty cares. I wrote one solitary Overture: "*Rule Britannia*."

In the summer of 1837 I visited Dresden for a short time. There I was led back by the reading of Bulwer's "*Rienzi*" [12] to an already cherished idea, viz., of turning the last of Rome's tribunes into the hero of a grand tragic opera. Hindered by outward discomforts, however, I busied myself no further with dramatic sketches. In the autumn of this year I went to Riga, to take up the position of first Musical Director at the theatre recently opened there by Holtei. I found there an assemblage of excellent material for opera, and went to its employment with the greatest liking. Many interpolated passages for individual singers in various operas, were composed by me during this period. I also wrote the libretto for a comic opera in two Acts: "*Die Glückliche Bärenfamilie*," the matter for which I took from one of the stories in the "Thousand and One Nights." I had only composed two 'numbers' for this, when I was disgusted to find that I was again on the high road to music-making *à la Adam*. My spirit, my deeper feelings, were wounded by this discovery, and I laid aside the work in horror. The daily studying and conducting of Auber's, Adam's, and Bellini's music contributed its share to a speedy undoing of my frivolous delight in such an enterprise.

The utter childishness of our provincial public's verdict upon any art-manifestation that may chance to make its first appearance in their own theatre—for they are only accustomed to witness performances of works already judged and accredited by the greater world outside—brought me to the decision, at no price to produce for the first time a largish work at a minor theatre. When, therefore, I felt again the instinctive need of undertaking a major work, I renounced all idea of obtaining a speedy representation of it in my immediate neighbourhood: I fixed my mind upon some theatre of first rank, that would some day produce it, and troubled myself but little as to where and when that theatre would be found. In this wise did I conceive the sketch of a grand tragic opera in five Acts: "*Rienzi, the last of the Tribunes*;" and I laid my plans on so important a scale, that it would be impossible to produce this opera—at any rate for the first time—at [13] any lesser theatre. Moreover, the wealth and force of the material left me no other course, and my procedure was governed more by necessity than set purpose. In the summer of 1838 I completed the poem; at the same time, I was engaged in rehearsing our opera troupe, with much enthusiasm and affection, in Méhul's "*Jacob and his Sons*."

When, in the autumn, I began the composition of my *Rienzi*, I allowed naught to influence me except the single purpose to answer to my subject. I set myself no model, but gave myself entirely to the feeling which now consumed me, the feeling that I had already so far progressed that I might claim something significant from the development of my artistic powers, and expect some not insignificant result. The very notion of being consciously weak or trivial—even in a single bar—was appalling to me.

During the winter I was in the full swing of composition, so that by the spring of 1839 I had finished the long first two Acts. About this time my contract with the Director of the theatre terminated, and various circumstances made it inconvenient to me to stay longer at Riga. For two years I had nursed the plan of going to Paris, and with this in view, I had, even while at Königsberg, sent to Scribe the sketch of an opera plot, with the proposal that he should elaborate it for his own benefit and procure me, in reward, the commission to compose the opera for Paris. Scribe naturally left this suggestion as good as unregarded. Nevertheless, I did not give up my scheme; on the contrary, I returned to it with renewed keenness in the summer of 1839; and the long and the short of it was, that I induced my wife to embark with me upon a sailing vessel bound for London.

This voyage I never shall forget as long as I live; it lasted three and a half weeks, and was rich in mishaps. Thrice did we endure the most violent of storms, and once the captain found himself compelled to put into a Norwegian haven. The passage among the crags of Norway made a wonderful impression on my fancy; the legends of [14] the Flying Dutchman, as I heard them from the seamen's mouths, were clothed for me in a distinct and individual colour, borrowed from the adventures of the ocean through which I then was passing.

Resting from the severe exhaustion of the transit, we remained a week in London; nothing interested me so much as the city itself and the Houses of Parliament,—of the theatres, I visited not one. At Boulogne-sur-mer I stayed four weeks, and there made the acquaintance of Meyerbeer. I brought under his notice the two finished Acts of my *Rienzi*; he promised me, in the friendliest fashion, his support in Paris. With very little money, but the best of hopes, I now set foot in Paris. Entirely without any personal references, I could rely on no one but Meyerbeer. He seemed prepared, with the most signal attentiveness, to set in train whatever might further my aims; and it certainly seemed to me that I should soon attain a wished-for goal—had it not unfortunately so turned out that, during the very period of my stay in Paris, Meyerbeer was generally, nay almost the whole time, absent from that city. It is true that he wished to serve me even from a distance; but, according to his own announcement, epistolary efforts could avail nothing where only the most assiduous personal mediation is of any efficacy.

First of all, I entered upon negotiations with the *Théâtre de la Renaissance*, where both comedy and opera were then being given. The score of my *Liebesverbot* seemed best fitted for this theatre, and the somewhat frivolous subject appeared easily adaptable to the French stage. I was so warmly recommended by Meyerbeer to the Director of the theatre, that he could not help receiving me with the best of promises. Thereupon, one of the most prolific of Parisian dramatists, *Dumersan*, offered to undertake the poetical setting of the subject. He translated three 'numbers,' destined for a trial hearing, with so great felicity that my music looked much better in its new French dress than in its original German; in fact, it was music such as Frenchmen most readily comprehend, and [15] everything promised me the best success—when the *Théâtre de la Renaissance* immediately became bankrupt. All my labours, all my hopes, were thus in vain.

In the same winter, 1839-40, I composed — besides an Overture to the first part of Goethe's *Faust* — several French Ballads; among others, a French translation made for me of H. Heine's *The Two Grenadiers*. I never dreamt of any possibility of getting my *Rienzi* produced in Paris, for I clearly foresaw that I should have had to wait five or six years, even under the most favourable conditions, before such a plan could be carried out; moreover, the translation of the text of the already half-finished composition would have thrown insuperable obstacles in the way.

Thus I began the summer of 1840, completely bereft of immediate prospects. My acquaintance with Habeneck, Halévy, Berlioz, &c., led to no closer relations with these men: in Paris no artist has time to form a friendship with another, for each is in a red hot hurry for

his own advantage. Halévy, like all the composers of our day, was aflame with enthusiasm for his art only so long as it was a question of winning a great success: so soon as he had carried off this prize, and was enthroned among the privileged ranks of artistic 'lions,' he had no thought for anything but making operas and pocketing their pay. Renown is everything in Paris: the happiness and ruin of the artist. Despite his stand-off manners, Berlioz attracted me in a far higher degree. He differs by the whole breadth of heaven from his Parisian colleagues, for he makes no music for gold. But he cannot write for the sake of purest art; he lacks all sense of beauty. He stands, completely isolated, upon his own position; by his side he has nothing but a troupe of devotees who, shallow and without the smallest spark of judgment, greet in him the creator of a brand new musical system and completely turn his head;—the rest of the world avoids him as a madman.

My earlier easy-going views of the means and ends of [16] music received their final shock—from the Italians. These idolised heroes of song, with Rubini at their head, finished by utterly disgusting me with their music. The public to whom they sang, added their quota to this effect upon me. The Paris Grand Opera left me entirely unsatisfied, by the want of all genius in its representations: I found the whole thing commonplace and middling. I openly confess that the *mise en scène* and the decorations are the most to my liking of anything at the *Académie Royale de Musique*. The *Opéra Comique* would have had much more chance of pleasing me — it possesses the best talents, and its performances offer an *ensemble* and an individuality such as we know nothing of in Germany—but the stuff that is nowadays written for this theatre belongs to the very worst productions of a period of degraded art. Whither has flown the grace of Méhul, Isouard, Boieldieu, and the *young* Auber, scared by the contemptible quadrille rhythms which rattle through this theatre to-day? The only thing worthy the regard of a musician that Paris now contains, is the *Conservatoire* with its orchestral concerts. The renderings of German instrumental compositions at these concerts produced on me a deep impression, and inducted me afresh into the mysteries of noble art. He who would fully learn the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, must hear it executed by the orchestra of the Paris Conservatoire. But these concerts stand alone in utter solitude; there is naught that answers to them.

I hardly mixed at all with musicians: scholars, painters, &c., formed my *entourage*, and I gained many a rare experience of friendship in Paris.—Since I was so completely bare of present Paris prospects, I took up once more the composition of my *Rienzi*. I now destined it for Dresden: in the first place, because I knew that this theatre possessed the very best material—Devrient, Tichatschek, &c; secondly, because I could more reasonably hope for an *entrée* there, relying upon the support of my earliest acquaintances. My *Liebesverbot* I now gave up almost completely; I felt that I could no longer regard [17] myself as its composer. With all the greater freedom, I followed now my true artistic creed, in the prosecution of the music to my *Rienzi*. Manifold worries and bitter need besieged my life. On a sudden, Meyerbeer appeared again for a short space in Paris. With the most amiable sympathy he ascertained the position of my affairs, and desired to help. He therefore placed me in communication with Léon Pillet, the Director of the Grand Opera, with a view to my being entrusted with the composition of a two- or three-act opera for that stage. I had already provided myself for this emergency with an outline plot. The "Flying Dutchman," whose intimate acquaintance I had made upon the ocean, had never ceased to fascinate my phantasy; I had also made the acquaintance of H. Heine's remarkable version of this legend, in a number of his '*Salon*'; and it was especially his treatment of the redemption of this Ahasuerus of the sea—borrowed from a Dutch play under the same title—that placed within my hands all the material for turning the legend into an opera-subject. I obtained the consent of Heine himself; I wrote my sketch, and handed it to M. Léon Fillet, with the proposal that he should get me a French text-book made after my model. Thus far was everything set on foot when Meyerbeer

again left Paris, and the fulfilment of my wish had to be relinquished to destiny. I was very soon astounded by hearing from Pillet that the sketch I had tendered him pleased him so much that he should be glad if I would cede it to him. He explained: that he was pledged by a previous promise to supply another composer with a libretto as soon as possible; that my sketch appeared to be the very thing for such a purpose, and I should probably not regret consenting to the surrender he begged, when I reflected that I could not possibly hope to obtain a direct commission for an opera before the lapse of four years, seeing that he had in the interval to keep faith with several candidates for grand opera; that such a period would naturally be too long for myself to be brooding over this subject; and that I should certainly discover a [18] fresh one, and console myself for the sacrifice. I struggled obstinately against this suggestion, without being able, however, to effect anything further than a provisional postponement of the question. I counted upon the speedy return of Meyerbeer, and held my peace.

During this time I was prompted by Schlesinger to write for his "*Gazette Musicale*." I contributed several longish articles on "German Music," &c., &c., among which the one which found the liveliest welcome was a little romance entitled, "A Pilgrimage to Beethoven." These works assisted not a little to make me known and noticed in Paris. In November of this year I put the last touches to my score of *Rienzi*, and sent it post-haste to Dresden. This period was the culminating point of the utter misery of my existence. I wrote for the *Gazette Musicale* a short story: "The Life's End of a German Musician in Paris," wherein I made the wretched hero die with these words upon his lips: "I believe in God, Mozart, and Beethoven."

It was well that my opera was finished, for I saw myself now compelled to bid a long farewell to any practice of my art. I was forced to undertake, for Schlesinger, arrangements of airs for all the instruments under heaven, even the *cornet à piston*; thus only was a slight amelioration of my lot to be found. In this way did I pass the winter of 1840-1, in the most inglorious fashion. In the spring I went into the country, to Meudon; and with the warm approach of summer I began to long again for brain-work. The stimulus thereto was to touch me quicker than I had thought for; I learnt, forsooth, that my sketch of the text of the *Flying Dutchman* had already been handed to a poet, Paul Fouché, and that if I did not declare my willingness to part therewith, I should be clean robbed of it on some pretext or other. I therefore consented at last to make over my sketch for a moderate sum. (01) I had now to [19] work post-haste to clothe my own subject with German verses. In order to set about its composition, I required to hire a pianoforte; for, after nine months' interruption of all musical production, I had to try to surround myself with the needful preliminary of a musical atmosphere. As soon as the piano had arrived, my heart beat fast for very fear; I dreaded to discover that I had ceased to be a musician. I began first with the "Sailors' Chorus" and the "Spinning-song"; everything sped along as though on wings, and I shouted for joy as I felt within me that I still was a musician. In seven weeks the whole opera was composed; but at the end of that period I was overwhelmed again by the commonest cares of life, and two full months elapsed before I could get to writing the overture to the already finished opera—although I bore it almost full-fledged in my brain. Naturally nothing now lay so much at my heart as the desire to bring it to a speedy production in Germany; from Munich and Leipzig I had the disheartening answer: the opera was not at all fitted for Germany. Fool that I was! I had fancied it was fitted for Germany alone, since it struck on chords that can only vibrate in the German breast.

At last I sent my new work to Meyerbeer, in Berlin, with the petition that he would get it taken up for the theatre of that city. This was effected with tolerable rapidity. As my *Rienzi* had already been accepted for the Dresden Court theatre, I therefore now looked forward to the production of two of my works upon the foremost German stages; and involuntarily I reflected on the strangeness of the fact, that Paris had been to me of the greatest service for

Germany. As regards Paris itself, I was completely without prospects for several years: I therefore left it in the spring of 1842. For the first time I saw the Rhine—with hot tears in my eyes, I, poor artist, swore eternal fidelity to my German fatherland.

Notes

Note 01 on page 14

Herr C. F. Glasenapp, in his "*Richard Wagner's Leben und Wirken*," tells us that the name of the composer for whom Fouché adapted Wagner's sketch was Dietsch; that his opera was called "*Le Vaisseau Fantôme*," was produced a few years later at the Paris Grand Opera, and was so overloaded with minor personages that it had no more dramatic than musical success.—A righteous nemesis!—Tr.