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# *A Communication to my Friends*

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



The Wagner Library

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## About this Title

### Source

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By Richard Wagner  
Translated by William Ashton Ellis

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## Translator's Note

From among the many references to the *Mittheilung*, in the *Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt* and the *Letters to Uhlig, Fischer and Heine*, I select the following:—

To Liszt, Nov. 25, 1850, "When I have finished *Opera and Drama*, I intend, provided I can find a publisher, to bring out my three romantic opera-poems with a Preface introducing them and explaining their genesis."—To Uhlig, (undated; but apparently written in August '51), "My *Mittheilung* was ready soon after you left. The part you do *not* know is actually the most important. This is a decisive work!—The copying took me over a week."—To Uhlig, Nov. 1, '51, "Well!—Härtels have only just read the *Vorwort*, and will not venture to publish it."—To Liszt, Nov. 20, '51, "The timidity of Messrs Härtel, the proposed publishers of the book, has taken exception to certain passages in that Preface to which I did not wish to have any demonstrative intention attributed, and which I might have expressed just as well in a different way; and the appearance of the book has in consequence been much retarded, to my great annoyance...But, although the Preface, written at the beginning of last August, appears in the present circumstances too late, the aforesaid declaration" (as to the intended destiny of *Siegfried*) "will be given to the public without any change."—To Liszt, Dec. 14, '51 "The three operatic poems, with a Communication to my Friends, will appear at the end of this month... The conclusion I have recently altered a little, but in such a manner that everything referring to Weimar remains unchanged"—To Uhlig, Jan. 1, '52, "Yesterday I received the book: 'Three opera poems.'... This Preface was really the most important message I had to deliver, for it was absolutely necessary in completion of *Opera and Drama*... What can I still say, if now my friends do not clearly understand?"—



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## A Communication to my Friends

My motive for this detailed "Communication" took rise in the necessity I felt of explaining the apparent, or real, contradiction offered by the character and form of my hitherto published opera-poems, and of the musical compositions which had sprung therefrom, to the views and principles which I have recently set down at considerable length and laid before the public under the title: "*Opera and Drama*."

This explanation I propose to address to my *Friends*, because I can only hope to be understood (01) by those who feel a need and inclination to understand me; and these, again, can only be my Friends.

As such, however, I cannot consider those who pretend to love me as *artist*, yet deem themselves bound to deny [270] me their sympathy as *man*. (02) If the severance of the Artist from the Man is as brainless an attempt as the divorce of soul from body, and if it be a stable truth that never was an Artist loved nor his art comprehended, unless he was also loved—at least unwittingly—as Man, and with his art his life was also understood: then at the present moment less than ever, and amid the hopeless desolation of our public art-affairs, can an artist of my endeavour be loved, and thus his art be understood, if this understanding and that love which makes it possible be not above all grounded upon sympathy, *i.e.* upon a fellow-pain and fellow-feeling with the veriest human aspect of his life.

Least of all, however, can I deem those to be my friends who, led by impressions gathered from an incomplete acquaintance with my artistic doings, transfer the nebulous uncertainty of this their understanding to the artistic object itself, and ascribe to a peculiarity of the latter that which finds its only origin in their own confusion of mind. The position which these gentry take up against the artist, and seek to fortify by all the aids of toilsome cunning, they dub "impartial criticism," seizing on every opportunity of posing as the only "true Friends" of the artist,—whose actual Foes are therefore those who take their stand beside him in full sympathy.—Our language is so rich in synonymes that, having lost our intuitive understanding of their meaning, we fancy we may use them at our pleasure and draw private lines of demarcation between them. Thus do we employ and separate [271] "Love" and "Friendship." For my own part, with the attainment of years of discretion I have host the power of imagining a Friendship without Love, to say nothing of experiencing such a feeling; and still harder should I find it, to conceive how modern Art-Criticism and Friendship for the artist criticised could possibly be terms of like significance.

The Artist addresses himself to the Feeling, and not to the Understanding. If he be answered in terms of the Understanding, then it is as good as said that he has not been *understood*; and our Criticism is nothing else than the avowal of the misunderstanding (*Geständniss des Unverständniss*) of the artwork, which can only be really understood by the Feeling—admitted, by the formed, and withal not mis-formed feeling. Whosoever feels impelled, then, to bear witness to his lack of understanding of an artwork, should take the precaution to ask himself one simple question, namely: what were the reasons for this lack? True, that he would come back at last to the qualities of the artwork itself; but only after he had cleared up the immediate problem of the physical garb in which it had addressed itself to his feelings. Was this outward garb unable to arouse or pacify his feelings, then he would have, before all else, to endeavour to procure himself an insight into a manifest imperfection of the artwork; namely, into the grounds of a failure of harmony between the purpose of the artist and the nature of those means by which he sought to impart it to the hearer's Feeling. Only two issues could then lie open for his inquiry, namely: whether the means of presentation to the senses were in keeping with the artistic aim, or whether this aim itself was

indeed an artistic one?

We are not here speaking of the works of plastic art, in which the technical execution is part and parcel of the creation of the artist himself; but of the Drama, whose physical garb is merely planned-out by the technique of the poet, but not—as in the case of the plastic artist—realised also by him; since it first gains this realisation [272] at the hands of a specific art, the art of dramatic portrayal. Now if the Feeling of our critical friend has not received a sure and definite impression from the physical show (*sinnliche Erscheinung*), in the present case the province of the art of dramatic portrayal, he ought before all things to perceive that the execution was at any rate inadequate; for the very essence of physical portrayal consists in this, that it should exert a sure and definite impression upon the Feeling. The shortcoming of the means once recognised, it then would only remain for him to inquire, on what the disproportion between aim and means was grounded: whether the aim was of such a character that it was either unworthy of realisation, or generally unfit for realisation by the means of Art,—or whether the disproportion simply rested on the mischaracter of the means which, at a given time and place, and under given circumstances, had proved themselves insufficient to realise a given artistic aim. In the latter case, it would be a question of distinctly understanding an artistic aim which had been only so far realised as the limited technical means of the dramatic poet allowed of. But, from the nature of every *artistic* aim, this understanding cannot be compassed by the sheer unaided Intellect (*mit dem reinen Verstande*), but only by the Feeling; and indeed by that more or less *artistically* cultured feeling which can only be the property of those who find themselves in a predicament more or less akin to that of the artist, who have developed amid conditions of life like his, and who in their inmost being so heartily sympathise with him that they are prepared, under certain circumstances, to adopt that aim as their very own, and are able to take an intimate and weighty share in the struggle for its realisation.

Manifestly these can only be the artist's actual loving Friends, and not the Critics who place themselves at an intentional distance from him. When the 'absolute' Critic looks out upon the Artist from his private peephole, he as good as sees *nothing*; for the only thing he [273] can spy, namely his own likeness on the mirror of his vanity, is—take it reasonably—naught. The imperfection of the artwork's semblance (*Erscheinung*) he by no means traces to its actual source; he discerns it, at the utmost, in the felt imperfection of his impression, and endeavours to vindicate the latter by defects in the artist's aim, which he is the very last person to be in a position to understand. In fact he has already so thoroughly practised himself in this procedure, that he finally gives up the attempt to let himself be influenced by the physical appearance of the artwork; but fancies that, with his acquired professional aptness, he may make shift with the written or printed pages on which the poet or musician—so far as his technical powers permitted—had set down his aim as such transferring to this aim itself so much of his discontent—unconsciously developed in advance—as he desires to base especially thereon. Though this position is that least fitted for the understanding of any work of art, particularly in the Present, yet it is the only one which enables our modern art-critics to maintain their eternal paper life. But even with this my Communication—alas! likewise on paper—I do not address myself to them, so proud in their exalted station: I decline to accept one iota of their critical Friendship. What I might have to tell them, even *about* myself and my artistic doings, they would not deign to understand; for the very good reason that they make it a point of honour to know everything in the world already.

By thus explaining—to whom I do *not* address myself I have *ipso facto* defined those to whom I do. They are those who so far sympathise with me both as man and artist, that they are able to understand my *aims*, even though I cannot bring these before them in the perfect realisation of a fitting physical embodiment because the conditions prior thereto are lacking in

the public art-life of the Present, and I can therefore only appeal to those who think and feel with me,—in short: *to my Friends, who love me.*

Only those Friends, however, who above all feel an [274] interest in the Man within the Artist, are capable of understanding him; and that not only in the Present, which forbids the realisation of any high poetic aim, but at all times and in all places.—The *absolute artwork*, i.e. the artwork which shall neither be bound by time and place, nor portrayed by given men in given circumstances, for the understanding of equally definite human beings,—is an utter nothing, a chimera of æsthetic phantasy. Its sponsors have distilled the idea of Art from the actuality of the artworks of diverse epochs: to give this idea an imagined reality again, since one otherwise could not have kept it handy even in the imagination, they have clothed it around with a conceptual body which, under the firma of the 'absolute artwork,' avowedly or unavowedly makes out the brain-spook of our æsthetic critics. Moreover, as this hypothetical body has taken all the features of its imaginary physical form from the actual attributes of the artworks of the Past, so also is the æsthetic belief therein essentially conservative; and therefore the reduction of this creed to practice, the completest artistic infertility.

Only in a truly inartistic era, could the belief in such an artwork arise within the heads—naturally, not within the hearts—of men. We descry its first historical traces in the era of the Alexandrians, after the demise of Grecian art. To the dogmatic character, however, which this conception has taken-on in our own time,—to the rigour, obstinacy, and persecuting savagery with which it mounts the tribune of our journalistic criticism, it could only grow in an era when Life itself began to face it with fresh-budding germs of the genuine artwork, whose qualities every man of healthy feeling could recognise—though not, for obvious reasons, our art-criticism that lives upon the refuse of the old and outlived. That the new germs, especially in the teeth of such a criticism, cannot as yet reach full unfoldment into flowers, it is, that brings to its speculative energy a constant store of fresh apparent vindication; for, amongst its other abstractions from the artworks of the Past, it has also bottled-off the notion of the actuality of physical show [275] being indispensable to the artwork. Now it observes that this condition, with whose fulfilment itself must certainly cease to exist, is as yet unfulfilled by the germs of a new and living art, and for that very reason it denies them the right to life, or in other words, the right to that impulse which spurs them onward to the blossom of physical manifestment. Herewith the Science of Æsthetics assumes a truly art-murderous activity, and carries it to the pitch of fanatical barbarity; inasmuch as it hugs to its breast the conservative phantasm of an 'absolute art-work' which it can never see realised, for the simple reason that its realisation lies already far behind us in the realm of History, and with reactionary zeal would sacrifice to that the reality of natural beginnings of fresh works of art. That which alone can bring those beginnings to completion, alone those germs to blossom,—That which must consequently throw the æsthetic phantasm of the absolute artwork for ever on the dustheap of the ages, is this: the winning of the *conditions* for the complete and full appearance of the physical artwork amid and from our actual Life.

The absolute, i.e. the *unconditioned* artwork, existing but in Thought, is naturally bound to neither time nor place, nor yet to definite circumstance. It can, for instance, be indited two thousand years ago for the democracy of Athens, and performed to-day before the Prussian Court at Potsdam. In the conception of our aesthetists it must bear exactly the same value, possess exactly the same essential features, no matter whether here or there, to-day or in the days of old; nay, they go farther, and imagine that, like certain sorts of wine, it gains by being cellared, and can to-day and here be first entirely understood aright, because they now forsooth can think into it the democratic public of Athens, and gain an endlessly augmented store of knowledge from the criticism of both this phantom public and the to-be-assumed impression once exercised upon it by the artwork. (03)

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Now however elevating all this may be to the modern intellect, yet for one thing it forms a sorry outlook, namely the factor of artistic enjoyment; that factor naturally not coming into play, since such an enjoyment can only be won through the Feeling, and not through antiquarian Research. Wherefore if, in contradistinction to this arid, critical enjoyment of the ghost of art, we are ever to come to a genuine enjoyment; and if the latter, in keeping with the nature of Art, can only be approached through Feeling: then nothing remains for us but to turn to that Art-work whose attributes present as great a contrast to the fancied monumental artwork as the living Man to the marble Statue. But these attributes consist herein, that it proclaims itself in sharpest definition by Time, by Place, by Circumstance; therefore that it can never come to living and effective show, if it come not to show at a given time, in a given place, and amid given circumstances; in a word, that it strips off every vestige of the *monumental*.

We shall never gain a clear perception of the necessity of these attributes, nor shall we ever advance that claim for the genuine Art-work which such perception must engender, if we do not first arrive at a proper understanding of what we are to connote by the term "Universal-human." Until we come to recognise, and on every hand to demonstrate in practice, that the very essence of the human species consists in the diversity of human Individuality,—instead of placing the essence of the individuality in its conformity to the general characteristics of the species, and consequently sacrificing it to the latter, as Religion and State have hitherto done, (04) —neither shall we comprehend that the fully and wholly Present must once and for [277] all supplant the half or wholly Absent, *the monumental*. In truth, our entire ideas on Art are now so bound up in the "monumental," that we fancy we may only assign a value to works of art in measure as we are justified in imputing to them a monumental character. Though this view may be right as applied to the offspring of frivolous *Mode*, which never can content a human need, still we cannot but see that it is at bottom but a mere reaction of man's nobler feeling of natural shame against the motley utterances of *Mode*, and with the ceasing of the reign of *Mode* itself, must stand confessed of no more right, because of no more reason. An absolute respect for the Monumental is entirely unthinkable: at best, it can only bolster itself upon aesthetic revulsion against an uncontenting Present. But this feeling of revulsion has not the needful strength to take victorious arms against such a Present, so long as it merely shows itself as a passion for the monumental. The utmost which that passion can eventually effect, is the perversion of the Monumental itself into another *Mode*,—such as, to tell the truth, is the case to-day. And thus we never leave the vicious circle from which the noblest impulse of the 'monumental' craze itself is striving to withdraw, regardless that no rational exit is so much as thinkable except by violent withdrawal of their life-conditions both from *Mode* and *Monument*; for even the *Mode* has its full justification in face of the Monumental, to wit as the reaction of the immediate [278] vital impulse of the Present from the coldness of that unfelt sense of beauty which proclaims itself in the passion for the monumental. But the annihilation of the Monumental together with the *Mode* is, in other terms: the entry upon life of the ever freshly present, ever new-related and warm-appealing Art-work; which, again, is as much as to say: the winning of the conditions for this artwork *from Life itself*.

To map out the character of this Art-work: that it could not be the work of our plastic art of nowadays—in so far as that art is compelled to proclaim itself as monumental, and owes its bare existence to our monumental craze,—but could only be *the Drama*; further, that this *Drama* could only find its proper attitude toward Life, when in its every moment it should be completely present with that Life, in its remotest relations so bound therewith and issuing therefrom, in its individuality of time and place and circumstance so characteristic thereof, that for its understanding (*Verständniss*), i.e., for its enjoyment, there should be no longer need of the reflecting Intellect (*Verstand*) but only of the directly seizing Feeling; in fine, that

this understanding could only be brought about when the contents, in themselves strictly emotional, should be presented to the senses in their own most fitting form, to wit, by man's universal-artistic faculty of expression to man's universal-artistic faculty of reception, and not by one severed attribute of that one faculty to another fenced-off attribute of this:—to show all this in general terms, was the object of my essay "The Art-work of the Future." The nature of the difference between this art-work and that *monumental* artwork which hovers in the mist before our critical Æsthetes, lies there exposed for any one who will trouble himself to understand me; and to assert that the thing I there demanded is already extant, could only occur to those for whom true art itself is absolutely non-extant.

Only *one* situation, in which I necessarily found myself herewith, could give to even less prejudiced persons a colour for the cry of "contradictions." It is this: I place *Life* as [279] the first and foremost condition for the appearance of the Artwork, and not indeed its wilful reflection in the thought of the philosopher, but the most real and sentient Life of all, the freest fount of natural Will (*den freiesten Quell der Unwillkürlichkeit*); yet from my standpoint of artist of the Present, I sketch the outlines of the "art-work of the future," and this with reference to a form which only the artistic instinct of that future Life itself can ever shape aright. Against this reproach I not merely advance the plea that I have only suggested the barest *general* features of the Art-work, but I go farther and observe—not alone for my justification, but as essential to the understanding of my aim—that the Artist of the Present must certainly have an influence, determinative in every respect, upon the Art-work of the Future, and that he may well count up this influence in advance, for the very reason that he must grow conscious of it even now. Amid his noblest striving, this consciousness waxes in him from his inward feeling of deepest discontent with the life of the Present: he sees himself pointed to the life of the Future alone, for the realisation of possibilities whose existence has come to his consciousness from the promptings of his own artistic powers.

Now he who cherishes the fatalistic view anent this Life of the Future, that we can conceive absolutely nothing of it, thereby confesses that he has not got so far with his human development as to possess a *reasonable Will* (*vernünftigen Willen*): for the reasonable Will is the willing of the recognised Spontaneous and Natural, and only he who has reached the point of grasping its substance for himself can presuppose this Will as fashioning the Life of the Future. Whosoever does not conceive this fashioning of the Future as a necessary consequence of the reasonable will of the Present, neither has he the shadow of a reasonable conception of the Present or the Past: whosoever possesses no initiative in his own character, neither can he perceive in the Present any initiative for the Future. But the initiative for the Art-work of the Future must come [280] from the Artist of the Present who is in the position to grasp this Present, who takes up its powers and its necessary Will into himself, and withal remains no slave to the Present but shows himself as its moving, willing, and fashioning organ, as a consciously-operating portion of that vital impulse which urges it to reach forth from out itself.

To recognise the Life-stress (*Lebenstrieb*) of the Present, is to be impelled to put it into action. But, with *our* Present, such a setting-in-action cannot possibly proclaim itself in any other way than as a foreshadowing of the Future; and, indeed, of such a Future as shall not depend upon the mechanism of the Past, but, in all its movements free and self-dependent, shall shape from out itself, i.e., from out of Life. This setting-in-action is the annihilation of the Monumental, and, in the case of Art, must take that path which brings it into most immediate contact with ever-present Life; this path is that of *Drama*. The recognition of the necessity of Art's taking this direction, to set it in an ever fruitful interaction with Life, and lift it from the Monumental rut, must naturally also lead the artist to recognise the inability of present public life either to further such an artistic tendency or itself to fall in therewith; for our public life, so far as it comes into any contact with the phenomena of Art, has shaped

itself under the exclusive influence of the Monumental and its counterpoise, the Mode. Wherefore only such artists can work in harmony with present public life as either imitate the monuments of the past, or stamp themselves as servants of the mode: but both are, in very truth, no artists at all. The genuine artist, on the other hand, who moves along the said true path of Drama, cannot but show himself at variance with the spirit of present public life. But just as he recognises the true Artwork to be *that* which can unveil to Life its meaning in fullest physical show, so must he necessarily throw forward to the Future the realisation of his highest artistic wish, as to a life enfranchised from the tyranny of both Monument and Mode; he thus must turn his artist Will straight toward the Art-work of the Future, no matter [281] whether it shall be himself or others to whom it first is granted to set foot upon the soil of that Life of the Future which shall bring both means and consummation.

It is certainly not the professional thinker or critic, who can ever reach this Will; but only the actual artist, to whom, from his artistic standpoint in the life of the Present, thought and criticism have become an indispensable attribute of his general artistic activity. This attribute is necessarily developed in him through the survey of his position towards our public life, which he cannot look on with the cold indifference of a sheer critical experimentalist, but with the warm desire to address himself intelligibly thereto. What this artist most perceives, when he looks upon the public life of the Present, is the utter impossibility of thus addressing himself by means of the mechanical implements of prevailing monumental, or modish art. As I am here dealing with the genuine dramatic poet alone, I allude to the absence of *that* theatric art, and *that* dramatic platform, which would be equal to the task of realising his aim. Our modern theatres are either the tools of monumental criticism—as witness, the Berlin Sophocles, Shakespeare &c.—or of absolute fashion. The possibility of entirely dispensing with these theatres he can only embrace by an abandonment of every, even the remotest, attempt to realise his specific purpose: in other words, he must write dramas for the reading-desk. But since the Drama is just that thing which only in its fullest physical manifestment can ever become a work of Art, he is forced at last to content himself with an *incomplete* realisation of his purpose, so as not to bid entire farewell to his main endeavour.

But the poet's purpose would first be fully realised, when he not only saw it adequately expressed upon the stage, but when this should happen withal at a definite time, under definite conditions, and before a gathering of spectators connected by a definite measure of affinity with himself. A poetic aim which I have conceived with a view to certain relations and surroundings, can only expend its [282] full effect when I impart it amid the same relations and to the same surroundings: then alone can this aim be understood apart from the critic's art, and its human purport be perceived; but not when all these vital conditions shall have vanished, and the relations changed. When, for instance, before the first French Revolution, there existed amongst an entire class of frivolous pleasure-seekers that mood (*Stimmung*) in which a *Don Juan* could be deemed an entirely comprehensible phenomenon, the true expression of that mood; when this type was seized by artists and, in its last process of realisation, embodied by an actor whose whole temperament was as fitted to this personality as was the Italian tongue to give this personality an adequate expression,—the emotional effect of such an exhibition, at such a time, was certainly most definite and unmistakable. But what is the complexion of affairs when, to-day, before the entirely altered Public of the Present composed of members of the Bourse or State-officialdom the same *Don Juan* is played again, by a performer who treats his leisure to beer and skittles and thus escapes all temptation to be unfaithful to his wife; a *Don Juan* transposed, to boot, to the German tongue, and disguised in a translation from which every trace of the Italian linguistic character has been washed completely out? Will not this *Don Juan* be understood at least *quite otherwise* than as the poet meant; and is not this quite other understanding—at best depending on the critic's aid—in truth *no* understanding of the real *Don Juan*? Or can ye, perchance, enjoy a

lovely landscape, when ye look on it in darkest midnight?—

In the haphazard and piecemeal fashion in which the artist now attains the public's ear, he must become the less intelligible, the more the artistic aim from which his work took rise has an actual connexion with Life; for such an aim can never be an accidental, abstract one, conceived amid the generalisms of aesthetic caprice, but only ripens to the force requisite for artistic manifestment when it has borrowed from time and circumstance an individual shape. If the [283] realisation of such an aim can only have its full effect when it comes to manifestment while the relations which awoke it in the poet are still warm with life, and when it is brought before those who were included, consciously or unconsciously, amongst those relations: then the artist who sees his work treated as a monumental one, which may indifferently be given at any convenient time or before any audience one pleases, must be exposed to every conceivable peril of misunderstanding. Then can he cleave alone to those who, by reason of their general sympathy with him, *can understand this situation also, and through their sharing in his endeavour*—which they find made infinitely more difficult by this his situation—make *good to him* in self-creative generosity *the fulness of those furthering conditions* which are denied his artwork by the actual times.—It is therefore to these fellow-feeling and fellow-creating Friends alone, that I feel impelled to here address myself.

To them, whom I have never been able to address in that fashion which alone could satisfy my wish, I have thus, in order to make myself completely understood, to explain the contradictions presented by my hitherto enacted opera-poems to my recently expressed views upon the operatic *genre* in general. I speak chiefly of the *poems*, not only because the bond between my art and my life lies plainest shown in them, but also because I have to call on them to witness that my musical working-out, my method of operatic composition, was conditioned by the very nature of those poems.

The contradictions to which I here allude, do not at all events exist for any one who has accustomed himself to regard a phenomenon with due allowance for its development *in time*. Whosoever in his verdict on a phenomenon takes this development also into consideration, can only light on contradictions when the phenomenon is one divorced from time and place, unnatural, or illogical. But to leave the evolutionary factor completely out of count, to jumble phases separated by time and well-marked [284] difference into one conglomerate mass, is certainly itself an unnatural or illogical mode of viewing things, and such as can only belong to our monumental-historic criticism, not to the healthy criticism of the sympathetic, feeling heart. This uncritical demeanour of our modern Criticism is due, among other things, to the standpoint from which she applies to each and every object the monumental foot-rule. For her, the artists and masterpieces of all ages and nations stand piled beside and on each other, and their differences she treats as merely art-historical, to be computed by the abstract date, not felt as warm and living; for with any truth of feeling, their simultaneous exhibition must needs be utterly insupportable,—about as painful as when we hear Sebastian Bach performed at a concert by side of Beethoven. In my own case, also, certain critics, who pretend to judge my art-doings as a connected whole, have set about their task with this same uncritical heedlessness and lack of Feeling: views on the nature of Art, that I have proclaimed from a standpoint which it took me years of evolution step-by-step to gain, they seize-on for the standard of their verdict, and point them back upon those very compositions from which I started on the natural path of evolution that led me to this standpoint. When, for instance—not from the standpoint of abstract aesthetics, but from that of practical artistic *experience*—I denote the Christian principle as hostile to or incapable of Art (*kunstunfähig*), these critics point me out the contradiction in which I stand towards my *earlier* dramatic works, which undoubtedly are filled with a certain tincture of this principle, so inextricably blended with our modern evolution. But it never occurs to them that, if they would only compare the new-won standpoint with that abandoned, the two are certainly distinct enough yet the one is

organically connected with the other, and that far rather were the new standpoint to be *explained* from the old, than were this relinquished to be judged by that adopted. No,—thinking fit to take my older works as planned and carried out in the light of the newer standpoint, they find in them [285] an inconsequence with, a contradiction to my present views, and derive the clearest proof of the erroneous nature of those views from my own contradiction of them in the practice of my art; and thus, in the most easy-going fashion in the world, they kill two birds with one stone, inasmuch as they brand both my artistic and my theoretic labours as the acts of a critically untrained, confused, and extravagant person. But the product of their own acumen they call true "Criticism," forsooth, and criticism of the "historical" school!—

I have here touched on one essential point of the above-mentioned contradictions. Since I now wish to address my friends alone, I might perhaps have left it wholly unregarded; for in truth no one can be my friend who is not able to detect for himself the phantom nature of this 'contradiction.' This insight, however, is immeasurably hindered by the incomplete and fragmentary fashion in which alone I am able to impart my purpose even to my Friends. One has witnessed a performance of this, another of that, of my dramatic works, as chance might hap; his inclination towards me has sprung from his acquaintance with just this one work; even this one work has come before him in a halting fashion, at the best; he has had to fill up many a gap, by drawing on the store of his own feelings and endeavours, and to gain himself at last a full enjoyment by importing a perchance preponderating share of himself and his hobbies into the object of enjoyment. But here comes the point where we must clearly understand each other: my friends must see the *whole* of me, in order to decide whether they can be *wholly* my friends. I can no longer content myself with half arrangements; I cannot consent that things which were necessities in my development should appear to good natured people as accidentals, which they may twist to my advantage according to their degree of inclination toward me. Thus I face towards *my Friends*, to render them a clear account of my path of evolution, in course of which those apparent contradictions, also, must be thoroughly unriddled.

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I will not, however, attempt to reach this end by the paths of abstract criticism; but will point out my evolutionary career, as faithfully as I can now survey it, by reviewing my works, and the moods of life which called them forth, in series—not tossing everything upon one heap of generalities.



Of my earliest efforts I shall have but a brief report to make: they were the usual attempts of an as yet undeveloped individuality, to find, with advancing adolescence, its bearings toward those general impressions of art which affect us from our youth up. The first artistic Will is nothing else than the contentment of the instinctive impulse to imitate what most attracts us.—

If I seek to gain myself a fairly satisfactory explanation of the artistic faculty, I can only do so by attributing it chiefly to the *force of the receptive faculty* (die Kraft des Empfängnisvermögens). The un-artistic, political temperament may be characterised thus: that from youth up it sets a check upon impressions from outside, which, in the course of the man's development, mounts even to a calculation of the personal profit that his withstanding of the outer world will bring him, to a talent for referring this outer world to himself and never himself to it. On the other hand, the un-political, artistic temperament is marked by this one feature: that its owner gives himself up without reserve to the impressions which move his emotional being (*Empfindungswesen*) to sympathy. The motive power of these

impressions, again, is in direct ratio to the force of the receptive faculty, which latter only gains the strength of an *impulse to impart* (*Mittheilungsdrang*) when they fill it to an ecstatic excess (*entzückenden Übermaase*). (05) The [287] artistic force is conditioned by the measure of this excess, for it is nothing else than the need to make away to others the over-swelling store (*Empfängniss*). This force may operate in either of two directions, according as it has been set in motion by *exclusively* artistic impressions, or finally by impressions *also* harvested from Life itself. That which first decides the *Artist*, as such, is certainly the purely artistic impression; if his receptive force be completely absorbed thereby, so that the impressions to be later received from Life find his faculty already exhausted, then he will develop as an *absolute* artist along the path which we must designate the feminine, i.e. that which embraces alone the feminine element of art. On this we meet all those artists of the day whose deeds make out the catalogue of modern art; it is the world of art close fenced from Life, in which Art plays with herself, drawing sensitively back from every brush with actuality—not merely the actuality of the modern Present, but of Life in general—and treats it as her *absolute* foe; believing that Life in every age and every land is waging war against herself; and therefore that any toil to fashion Life is labour lost, and consequently unbeseeming to the artist. In this class we find above all Painting and, pre-eminently, Music. The case is otherwise, where the previously developed artistic receptive-force has merely formed and focussed the faculty for receiving Life's impressions; where in place of weakening, it has the rather strengthened it—in the highest sense of the term. On the path along which this force evolves, Life itself is at last surveyed in the light of artistic impressions, and the impulse towards imparting which gathers from the overflow of these impressions is the only true *poetic force*. This divorces not itself from Life, but from the standpoint of Art it strives to tender Life a fashioning hand. Let us denote this as the masculine, the generative path of Art.—

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Whosoever may choose to think that with my present Communication I propose to make out for myself a title to the halo of a "Genius," I flatly and distinctly contradict him in advance. On the contrary, I feel prepared to prove that it is a piece of uncommonly vapid and superficial criticism, to ascribe, as we customarily do, the definitive operation of a particular artistic force to a gift (*Befähigung*) which we fancy we have fathomed when we briefly call it "Genius." In other words, we treat this Genius as a pure and absolute windfall, which God or Nature casts hither and thither at pleasure, often without the favoured bounty falling even to the right man: for how frequently we hear, that "So-and-so does not know what to be about with his genius."—I attribute the force which we commonly call Genius solely to the faculty which I have just described at length. That which operates so mightily upon this force that it must finally come forth to full productiveness, we have in truth to regard as the real fashioner and former, as the only furthering condition for that force's efficacy, and this is the Art already evolved outside that separate force, the Art which from the artworks of the ancient and the modern world has shaped itself into a universal Substance, and hand in hand with actual Life, reacts upon the individual with the character of the force that I have elsewhere named the *communistic*. Amid these all-filling and all-fashioning influences of Art and Life, there thus remains to the Individual but one chief thing as his own: namely Force, vital force, force to assimilate the kindred and the needful; and this is precisely that receptive-force which I have denoted above, and which—so soon as it opens its arms in love without reserve—must necessarily, with the attainment of its perfect strength, become at last productive-force.

In epochs when this force, like the force of Individuality in general, has been entirely crushed out by state-discipline, or by the complete fossilisation of the outward forms of Life and Art—as in China, or in Europe towards the end of the Roman world-dominion—neither have those phenomena [289] which we christen by the name of "Genius" ever come to light: a plain proof that they are not cast upon life by the caprice of God or Nature. On the other hand,

these phenomena were just as little known in those ages when both creative forces, the individualistic and the communistic, reacted on each other with all the freedom of unfettered Nature, forever fresh-begetting and ever giving birth anew. These are the so-called prehistoric times, the times when Speech, and Myth, and Art were really born. Then, too, the thing we call Genius was unknown: no one man was a Genius, since all men were it. Only in times like ours, does one know or name these "Geniuses"; the sole name that we can find for those artistic forces which withdraw themselves from the drillground of the State and ruling Dogma, or from the sluggard bolstering-up of tottering forms of Art, to open out new pathways and fill them with their innate life. Yet if we look a little closer, we shall find that these new openings are in no wise arbitrary and private paths, but continuations of a long-since-hewn main causeway; down which, before and with these solitary units, a joint and many-membered force of diverse individualities has poured itself, whose conscious or unconscious instinct has urged it to the abrogation of those forms by fashioning newer moulds of Life and Art. Here, then, we see again a common force, which includes within its coefficients that individual force we have erstwhile foolishly dismissed with the appellation "Genius," and, according to our modern notions thereof, utterly annuls it. By all means, that associate, communistic force is only brought into play through the medium of the individual force; for it is, in truth, naught other than the force of sheer human Individuality in general. The form, however, that comes eventually to manifestment is nowise, as we superficially opine, the work of the solitary individual; but the latter takes his share in the common work—namely that of most palpably revealing, by its realisation, an existing potentiality—only by virtue of that one quality which I have already denoted above, and whose prime energy I wish [290] now to express still more distinctly. An ancient myth which I will now relate—despite the comminations of the historico-political school—shall serve me in the stead of definition.

The fair sea-wife Wachilde had born a son to good King Viking: the three Norns came to greet the child, and dower it with gifts. The first Norn gave it strength of body, the second wisdom; and the grateful father bade them take their seat beside his throne. But the third bestowed upon the child "the ne'er-contented mind that ever broods the New." Viking, aghast at such a gift, refused the youngest Norn his thanks; indignant, she recalled her gift, to punish his ingratitude. The son grew up to strength and mighty stature; and whate'er there was to know, he mastered it betimes. But never did he feel the spur to change or venture; with every turning of his life he was content, and found his home in all. He never loved, and neither did he hate: but, since he hit by chance upon a wife, he, too, begat a son, and sent him to take schooling from the Dwarves, that he might learn what's fit;—this son was that Wieland whom Want was once to teach to forge himself his wings. But the Ancient soon became the sport of fools and children, since every one might plague him, without it moving him to ire; for he was so wise that he knew that fools and children love to scoff and tease. Only when they said light words about his mother, did he kindle into wrath; about *her*, he would bear no jesting. When he came upon the Sound, it never dawned on him to build a boat and ship across it, but he waded plump into the waters, shoulder-high; so the people called him "Wate." One day he wished to get him news about his son, if the child was well-behaved and making progress with his lessons; he found the gateway closed, that led into the cavern of the Dwarves, for they were planning mischief against the child and wished to balk the father's visit. But he felt no care, for he was always satisfied: he laid him down beside the entrance, and fell asleep. His mighty snoring shook [291] a boulder that hung above his head; it hurtled down on him and killed him. Such was the life of the sage and sturdy giant Wate: thereto had Viking's father-care brought up the son of the sweet sea-wife Wachilde; and thus art thou brought up,

to this very day, my German Folk!

That one rejected gift: "the ne'er contented mind, that ever broods the New," the youngest Norn holds out to all of us when we are born, and through it alone might we each, one day, become a "Genius;" (06) but now, in our craze for education, 'tis Chance alone that brings this gift within our grasp,—the accident of *not becoming educated* (erzogen). Secure against the refusal of a father who died beside my cradle, perchance the Norn, so often chased away, stole gently to it, and there bestowed on me her gift; which never left poor untrained me, and made Life and Art and mine own self my only, quite anarchic, educators.—

I may pass over the endless variety of impressions which exercised a lively effect upon me in my earliest youth; they were as diverse in their operation as in their source. Whether, under their influence, I ever appeared to any one an "Infant prodigy" ("*Wunderkind*"), I very much doubt: mechanical dexterities were never drubbed into me, nor did I ever show the slightest bent towards them. To play-acting I felt an inclination, and indulged it in the quiet of my chamber; this was naturally aroused in me by the close connection of my family with the stage. The only remarkable thing about it all, was my repugnance against going to the theatre itself; childish impressions which I had imbibed from the earnestness of classical antiquity, so far as I had made its acquaintance in the 'Gymnasium,' may have inspired me with a certain contempt, nay, an abhorrence of the rouge-and-powdered ways of the Comedian. [292] But my passion for imitation (*Nachahmungseifer*) threw itself with greatest zest into the making of poetry and music,— perhaps because my stepfather, a portrait-painter, died be-times, and thus the pictorial element vanished early from among my nearer models; otherwise I should probably have begun to paint too, although I cannot but remember that the learning of the technique of the pencil soon went against my grain. First I wrote plays; but the acquaintance with Beethoven's Symphonies, which I only made in my fifteenth year, eventually inflamed me with a passion for music also, albeit it had long before this exercised a powerful effect upon me, chiefly through Weber's "*Freischütz*." Amidst my study of music, the poetic 'imitative-impulse' never quite forsook me; it subordinated itself, however, to the musical, for whose contentment I only called it in as aid. Thus I recollect that, incited by the Pastoral Symphony, I set to work on a shepherd-play, its dramatic material being prompted by Goethe's "Lovers' Fancies" ("*Laune der Verliebten*"). I here made no attempt at a preliminary poetic sketch, but wrote verses and music together, thus leaving the situations to take their rise from the music and the verses as I made them.

After many a digression to this side and to that, toward the commencement of my eighteenth year I was confronted by the Revolution of July 1830. The effect upon me was both violent and stimulating; especially keen was my enthusiasm for the struggling, my sorrow for the vanquished, Poles. But these impressions were not as yet of any perceptible formative influence upon my artistic evolution; in that respect they were stimulators only in a general sense. Indeed, so much were my receptive and imitative faculties still under the sole dominion of artistic impressions, that it was precisely at this time that I occupied myself the most exclusively with music, wrote Sonatas, Overtures, and a Symphony, and in fact declined a proffered opera-text on the subject of "Kosziusko." (07) [293] My passion for reproduction, however, soon turned towards the drama—at least, towards the opera. On the model of one of Gozzi's fairy-tales, (08) I wrote for myself an opera-text in verse, "*Die Feen*" ("The Fairies"); the then predominant "Romantic"-Opera of Weber, and also of Marschner—who about this time made his first appearance on the scene, and that at my place of sojourn, Leipzig—determined me to follow in their footsteps. What I turned out for myself was nothing more than barely what I wanted, namely an opera-text; this I set to music according to the impressions made upon me by Weber, Beethoven, and Marschner. (09) However, what took my fancy in the tale of Gozzi, was not merely its adaptability for an opera-text, but the fascination of the 'stuff' itself.—A Fairy, who renounces immortality for the sake of a human

lover, can only become a mortal through the fulfilment of certain hard conditions, the non-compliance wherewith on the part of her earthly swain threatens her with the direst penalties; her lover fails in the test, which consists in this, that however evil and repulsive she may appear to him (in an obligatory metamorphosis) he shall not reject her in his unbelief. In Gozzi's tale the Fairy is now changed into a snake; the remorseful lover frees her from the spell, by kissing the snake: thus he wins her for his wife. I altered this denouement by changing the Fairy into a stone, and then releasing her from the spell by her lover's passionate song; while the lover — instead of being allowed to carry off his bride into his own country—is himself admitted by the Fairy-King to the immortal bliss of Fairyland, together with his fairy wife.—At the present time, this feature seems to me of some importance: though it was only the music and the ordinary traditions of opera, [294] that gave me then the notion, yet there lay already here the germ of a weighty factor in my whole development.—

I had now attained that age when the mind of man, if ever it is to do so, throws itself with greater directness upon the immediate surroundings of life. The fantastic looseness of German student-life, after a turbulent bout or two, had quickly filled me with disgust: *Woman* had begun to dawn on my horizon. The longing which could nowhere still itself in life found an ideal food in the reading of Heinse's "*Ardinghello*," as also the works of Heine, and other members of the then "Young-German" school of literature. The effect of the impressions thus received, expressed itself in my actual life in the only way wherein Nature can utter herself under the pressure of the moral bigotry of our social system. On the other hand, my artistic 'impulse-to-impart' unburdened itself of these life-impressions along the line of the artistic impressions which I received at the like time; among these, the most vivid were those derived from the newer French, and even Italian, operas. As this genre had, in effect, gained the upper hand on the German operatic stage, and figured in its repertoire almost exclusively, so was its influence inevitable upon one who found himself in a life-mood such as that I have referred to as mine at that period; there spoke out in this music, at least for me, all that which I then felt: the joyous throb of life, imprisoned in the makeshift garment of frivolity.—But it was a living personality, that kindled this inclination of mine into an enthusiasm of nobler intent: this was the *Schröder-Devrient*, in a 'star' engagement (*Gastspiel*) on the Leipzig stage. The remotest contact with this extraordinary woman electrified me; for many a long year, down even to the present day, I saw, I heard, I felt her near me, whenever the impulse to artistic production seized me.

The fruit of all these impressions, and all these moods, was an opera: the "*Liebesverbot, or the Novice of Palermo*." I took its subject from Shakespeare's "Measure for [295] Measure." It was Isabella that inspired me: she who leaves her novitiate in the cloister, to plead with a hardhearted Stateholder for mercy to her brother, who, in pursuance of a draconic edict, has been condemned to death for entering on a forbidden, yet Nature-hallowed love-bond with a maiden. Isabella's chaste soul urges on the stony judge such cogent reasons for pardoning the offence, her agitation helps her to paint these reasons in such entrancing warmth of colour, that the stern protector of morals is himself seized with passionate love for the superb woman. This sudden-flaming passion proclaims itself by his promising the pardon of the brother as the price of the lovely sister's favours. Aghast at this proposal, Isabella takes refuge in artifice, to unmask the hypocrite and save her brother. The Stateholder, whom she has vouchsafed a fictitious indulgence, still thinks good to withhold the stipulated pardon, so not to sacrifice his stern judicial conscience to a passing lapse from virtue.—Shakespeare disentangles the resulting situation by means of the public return of the Duke, who had hitherto observed events from under a disguise: his decision is an earnest one, and grounded on the judge's maxim, "measure for measure." I, on the other hand, unloosed the knot without the Prince's aid, by means of a revolution. The scene of action I transferred to the capital of Sicily, in order to bring in the southern heat of blood to help me with my scheme; I also made the

Stateholder, a puritanical German, forbid a projected carnival; while a madcap youngster, in love with Isabella, incites the populace to mask, and keep their weapons ready: "Who will not dance at our behest, Your steel shall pierce him through the breast!" The Stateholder, himself induced by Isabella to come disguised to their rendezvous, is discovered, unmasked, and hooted;—the brother, in the nick of time, is freed by force from the executioner's hands; Isabella renounces her novitiate, and gives her hand to that young leader of the carnival. In full procession, the maskers go forth to meet their home-returning [296] Prince, assured that he will at least not govern them so crookedly as had his deputy. (10)

If one compares this subject with that of the *Feen*, one will see that there was a possibility of my developing along two diametrically opposite lines: to the reverent earnestness (*heiligen Ernste*) of my original promptings there here opposed itself, implanted by impressions gained from Life, a pert fancy for the wild turmoil of the senses, a defiant exuberance of glee which seemed to offer to the former mood a crying contrast. This becomes obvious to myself, when I compare the musical working-out of the two operas. Music always exercised a decisive influence upon my emotional fund (*Empfindungsvermögen*); and indeed this could not well be otherwise, at a period of my evolution when the impressions of Life had not as yet made so sharp and definite an effect upon me, that they could lend me the imperious force of individuality to hold that receptive power to a definite field of outward action. The effect of the impressions produced on me by Life was still of general, and not of individual sort; therefore 'general' music as yet must dominate my individual powers of artistic fashioning. Even in the case of the *Liebesverbot*, the music had exercised a prior sway upon the fashioning and arranging of the subject-matter; and this music was nothing else than the reflex of the influence of modern French and (as concerns the melody) Italian Opera upon my physically-excited receptive faculties. Whosoever should take the pains to compare this composition with that of the *Feen*, would scarcely be able to understand how in so short a time so surprising a reverse of front could have been brought about: the balancing of the two tendencies was to be the work of my further course of evolution as an artist.—

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My path led first to utter frivolity in my views of art; this coincides with my earliest practical contact with the theatre, as Musical-director. (11) The rehearsing and conducting of those loose-limbed French operas which were then the mode, the piquant prurience of their orchestral effects, gave me many a childish thrill of joy when I could set the stew a-frothing right and left from my conductor's desk. In Life, which henceforth meant for me the motley life of the stage, I sought by distraction to content an impulse which, as regards the things of everyday, took the form of a chase after pleasure, and as regards music, of a prickling, sputtering unrest. My *Feen*-composition became utterly indifferent to me, until at last I gave up all idea of getting that work produced. A performance of the *Liebesverbot*, carried out with headstrong obstinacy under the most unfavourable conditions, and completely unintelligibly rendered, caused me much vexation; yet this experience was quite insufficient to cure me of the hightmindedness with which I then set about everything.—The modern requital of modern levity, however, soon knocked at my unready door. I fell in love; married in feverish haste; distressed myself and others with the trials of a poverty-stricken home; and thus fell into that misery whose nature it is to bring thousands upon thousands to the ground.

One strong desire then arose in me, and developed into an all-consuming passion: to force my way out from the paltry squalor of my situation. This desire, however, was busied only in the second line with actual Life; its front rank made towards a brilliant course as Artist. To extricate myself from the petty commerce of the German stage, and straightway try my luck in Paris: this, in a word, was the goal I set before me.—A romance by H. König, "*die Hohe Braut*," had fallen into my hands; everything which I read [298] had only an interest for me when viewed in the light of its adaptability for an operatic subject: in my mood of then, the

reading of this novel attracted me the more, as it soon conjured up in my eyes the vision of a grand-opera in five acts, for Paris. I drafted a complete sketch, and sent it direct to Scribe in Paris, with the prayer that he would work it up for the Grand Opera there, and get me appointed for its composition. Naturally this project ended in smoke.

My home troubles increased; the desire to wrest myself from a humiliating plight now grew into an eager longing to begin something on a grand and inspiring scale, even though it should involve the temporary abandonment of any practical aim. This mood was fed and fostered by my reading Bulwer's "Rienzi." From the misery of modern private-life, whence I could nowhere glean the scantiest stuff for artistic treatment, I was borne away by the picture of a great historico-political event, in lingering on which I needs must find a salutary distraction from cares and conditions that appeared to me as nothing else than absolutely fatal to art. In accordance with my particular artistic bent, however, I still kept more or less to the purely musical, or rather: operatic standpoint. This Rienzi with great thoughts in his head, great feelings in his heart, amid an entourage of coarseness and vulgarity, set all my nerves a-quivering with sympathy and love; yet my plan for an artwork based thereon sprang first from the perception of a purely lyric element in the hero's atmosphere. The "Messengers of Peace," the Church's summons to awake, the Battle-hymns,—these were what impelled me to an *opera*: "Rienzi."

Before I set about the prosecution of my plan, however, much thrust itself into my outward life that distracted me from my inner resolve. I went to Riga, to take up the post of Musical director to a stage-company just formed there. The somewhat more orderly state of affairs, and the manifest desire of the directorate to give at least good performances, prompted me once more to write something for the forces at my disposal. So I began the composition [299] of a comic opera, the libretto for which I had founded on a droll story in the "Thousand and one Nights," although with a complete modernisation of the subject.—Even here, however, my relations with the theatre soon proved a thorn in my side. The thing we understand by the term, "the traffic of the stage" (*Komödiantenwirthschaft*), took no length of time in showing me the depth and breadth of its economy; and my composition, begun with a view to this "traffic," suddenly so revolted me that I threw the whole thing on one side and, as regards the theatre, confined myself more and more to the bare fulfilment of my conducting duties. I thus stood more and more completely aloof from intercourse with the stage *personnel*, and with drew into that inner fortress of my being where the yearning to tear myself loose from everyday relations found both its nurture and its goad.—At this period I made my first acquaintance with the legend of the "Flying Dutchman"; Heine takes occasion to relate it, in speaking of the representation of a play, founded thereon, which he had witnessed—as I believe—at Amsterdam. (12) This subject fascinated me, and made an indelible impression upon my fancy: still, it did not as yet acquire the force needful for its rebirth within me.

To do something grand, to write an opera for whose production only the most exceptional means should suffice—a work, therefore, which I should never feel tempted to bring before the public amid such cramping relations as those which then oppressed me, and the hope of whose eventual production should thus incite me to make every sacrifice in order to extricate myself from those relations,—this is what resolved me to resume and carry out with all my might my former plan for "Rienzi." In the preparation of this text, also, I took no thought for anything but the writing of an effective operatic libretto. The "Grand Opera" with all its scenic and musical display, its sensationalism and massive vehemence, loomed large before [300] me; and not merely to copy it, but with reckless extravagance to outbid it in its every detail, became the object of my artistic ambition.—However, I should be unjust to myself, did I represent this ambition as my only motive for the conception and execution of my *Rienzi*. The stuff really aroused my enthusiasm, and I put nothing into my sketch which had not a direct bearing on the grounds of this enthusiasm. My chief concern was my Rienzi himself;

and only when I felt quite contented with him, did I give rein to the notion of a "grand opera." Nevertheless, from a purely artistic point of view, this "grand opera" was the pair of spectacles through which I unconsciously regarded my Rienzi-stuff; nothing in that stuff did I find enthral me, but what could be looked at through these spectacles. True, that I always fixed my gaze upon the stuff itself, and did not keep one eye open for certain ready-made musical effects which I might wish to father on it by hook or crook; only, I saw it in no other light than that of a "five-act-opera," with five brilliant "finales," and filled with hymns, processions, and musical clash of arms. Thus I bestowed no greater care upon the verse and diction than seemed needful for turning out a good, and not a trivial, *opera-text*. I did not set out with the object of writing Duets, Trios, &c.; but they found their own way in, here and there, because I looked upon my subject exclusively through the medium of "Opera." For instance, I by no means hunted about in my stuff for a pretext for a Ballet; but with the eyes of the opera-composer, I perceived in it a self-evident festival that Rienzi must give to the People, and at which he would have to exhibit to them, in dumbshow, a drastic scene from their ancient history: this scene being the story of Lucretia and the consequent expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome. (13) Thus in every department of my plan I was certainly ruled [301] by the stuff alone; but on the other hand, I ruled this stuff according to my only chosen pattern, the form of the Grand Opera. My artistic individuality, in its dealings with the impressions of Life, was still entirely under the influence of purely artistic, or rather art-formalistic, mechanically-operating impressions.

I had scarcely finished the composition of the first two Acts of this opera, when my outward affairs at last compelled me to break entirely with my former surroundings. Without being provided with anything like sufficient means, without the smallest prospect, nay, without even the expectation of meeting so much as an acquaintance there, I set out from Riga for Paris. I passed through four weeks of the severest hardship upon the sea, in the course of which we were driven upon the coast of Norway. Here the "flying Dutchman" once more arose before me. From my own plight he won a psychic force; from the storms, the billows, the sailors' shouts and the rock-bound Northern shore, a physiognomy and colour.

Paris, however, washed out this figure for a time.—It is unnecessary to give a detailed account of the impressions which Paris, with its art-life and art-doings, was bound to make upon a man in my condition; their influence will be best recognised in the character of my immediate plans and undertakings.—The half-finished *Rienzi* I laid at first upon one side, and busied myself in every way to make myself known in the world's metropolis. But, for this I lacked the necessary personal qualifications; I had scarcely even learnt the French tongue, instinctively distasteful to me, sufficiently for the most ordinary needs of everyday. Not in the remotest degree did I feel tempted to assimilate the Frenchman's nature, though I flattered myself with the hope that I could appeal to it *in my own way*; I confided in Music, as a cosmopolitan language, to fill up that gulf between my own and the Parisian character which my inner feeling could not be blind to.—When I attended the dazzling performances of the Grand Opera—a thing which did not happen very often—a pleasurable warmth would [302] steal into my brain and kindle the desire, the hope, aye, even the certainty, that I, also, could one day triumph there. This splendour of means, once animated by the fire of an artistic aim, appeared to me the highest summit of Art; and I felt myself nowise incapable of reaching that summit. Beyond this, I call to mind a readiness to warm myself at any of that artworld's *ignes fatui* which showed the least resemblance to my goal: their sickly unsubstantiality was mantled with a glittering show, such as never had I seen before. It was only later, that I became conscious how greatly I deceived myself in this respect, through an almost artificial state of nervous excitement. This gratuitous excitement, mounting glibly to the verge of transport, was nourished, all unawares to myself, by the feeling of my outward lot; which I must have recognised as *completely hopeless*, if I had suddenly acknowledged to myself that

all this artistic tinsel, that made up the world in which I was striving to press forward, was inwardly an object of my deepest loathing. But my outward Want compelled me to hold this admission aloof; and I was able to do it with the ready placability of a man and artist whom an instinctive need of love allows to see in every smiling semblance the object of his search.

In this mood and situation, I was prompted to revert to standpoints I had already travelled past. Prospects were held out to me of getting an opera of lighter genre produced at a theatre of minor rank; I therefore harked back to my *Liebesverbot*, and its translation was commenced. I felt all the more humiliated inwardly by this transaction, as I was forced to put on the outward mask of hope for its success.—In order to gain the graces of the Parisian salon-world through its favourite singers, I composed several French 'romances,' which, after all my efforts to the contrary, were considered too out-of-the-way and difficult to be actually sung.—Out of the depth of my inner discontent, I armed myself against the crushing reaction of this outward art-activity by the hasty sketch, and as hasty composition, of an orchestral piece, which I called an [303] "Overture to Goethe's Faust," but which was in reality intended for the first section of a grand Faust-Symphony.

Owing to the complete failure of all my outer efforts, financial straits at last compelled me to a still deeper degradation of the character of my artistic activity: I declared my willingness to concoct the music for a slangy *vaudeville* at a Boulevard-theatre. But even this step was frustrated by the jealousy of a musical money-grubber. So I had to look on it almost as my salvation, that I obtained the chance of doing violence to myself with the arrangement of melodies from "favourite" operas for the cornet-à-pistons. The time which these arrangements left upon my hands I expended on the completion of the second half of my *Rienzi*, for which I gave up all thoughts of a French translation, looking only toward its adoption by some German Court-Theatre. The last three Acts of this opera were finished, amid the circumstances I have mentioned, in a proportionately brief space of time.

After completing *Rienzi*, and while each day was still occupied by hack-work for the music-publishers, I hit upon a new vent for my pent-up energy. With the Faust-Overture, I had sought this before in 'absolute' music; with the musical completion of an older dramatic plan, the *Rienzi*, I had endeavoured to give due artistic effect, and at the same time bid farewell, to the tendency which first led my steps to Paris, and ahead of which I now saw every opening blocked. That opera once finished, I stood entirely outside the territory of my recent past. I was entering upon a new path, *that of Revolution against our modern Public Art*, with whose traffic I had erstwhile sought to familiarise myself when I rushed to Paris, there to seek its glittering crest.—It was the feeling of the *necessity* of my revolt, that turned me first into a writer. The publisher of the *Gazette Musicale* commissioned me, besides arranging melodies for my daily bread, to write him articles for his paper. To him, it was a matter of indifference *which* I sent: to me, not. Just as I found my deepest humiliation in the one task, I greedily snatched at the [304] other to revenge myself for that humiliation. After a few general articles upon music, I wrote a kind of art-novelette, "*A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*," and followed it up by a sequel, "*The End of a Musician in Paris*." In these I described, in a fictitious garb and with a dash of humour, my personal fate, especially in Paris; excepting in so far as touched the actual death by hunger, which, at any rate, I had been lucky enough to escape. Every line that I wrote was a cry of revolt against the conditions of our modern art: I have been told that this caused much amusement To the handful of true friends, however, who gathered cheerily around me of an evening in the triste retirement of my home, I had herewith passed the word that I had completely broken with every wish and every expectation of success in Paris, and that the young man who had come there with such wishes and expectations in his head was virtually dead and buried. (14)

It was a sorrowful mirth—the mood to which I then was tuned; it bore me the long-since brooding *Flying Dutchman*.—All the irony, all the bitter or humoristic sarcasm which, in a

kindred plight, is all that remains to our literary poets to spur them on to work, I first unburdened in the above-named, and in certain directly subsequent literary effusions; (15) and thus put it so far behind me, for a while, that I was again in a position to follow my inner bent toward real artistic fashioning (*Gestalten*). Seemingly—after what I had gone through, and from the standpoint on which my experiences of life [305] had set me—I should not have been able to do this, if I had devoted myself from youth up to the acquirement of a knack for literary poetry; mayhap I should have trodden in the footsteps of our modern scribes and playwrights, who, under the petty influences of our stereotyped social system, take the field, with every stroke of their prose- or rhyme-trimmed quills, against the mere formal surface of that system, and thus conduct a war like that which General Willisen and his volunteers have lately waged against the Danes; (16) to express myself in the vernacular, I should probably have followed the example of the donkey-driver who beats the bundle in place of the beast :—had I not been blessed with Something higher. This Something was my preoccupation with *music*.

I have recently said quite enough about the nature of music; I will here refer to it simply as the good angel which preserved me as an artist, nay, which really first made me an artist when my inner feeling commenced to revolt, with ever greater resolution, against the whole condition of our modern art. That this revolt did not find its sphere of action outside the realm of Art, did not take the coign of vantage either of the criticising man of letters or the art-denying, socialistically calculating, political mathematician of our day; but that my revolutionary ardour itself awoke in me the stress and power for artistic deeds,—this, as I have said, I owe to Music alone. I have just called it my good angel: this angel was not sent down to me from Heaven; it came to me from out the sweat of centuries of human "Genius." It did not, forsooth, lay the feather-light touch of a sun-steeped [306] hand upon my brow; in the blood-warm night of my stifling heart, it girt itself for action in the world outside.

I cannot conceive the spirit of Music as aught but *Love*. Filled with its hallowed might, and with waxing power of insight into human life, I saw set before me no mere formalism to criticise; but, clean through the formal semblance, the force of sympathy displayed to me its background, the Need-of-Love downtrodden by that loveless formalism. Only he who feels the need of Love, can recognise that need in others: my art-receptive faculty, possessed with Music, gave me the power to recognise this need on every hand, even in that art-world from the shock of contact with whose outer formalism my own capacity for love drew smarting back, and in which I felt my hove-need roused to action by that very smart. Thus I revolted out of sheer love, not out of spite or envy; and thus did I become an *artist*, and not a carping man of letters.

The influence which my sense of music (*musikalisches Empfindungswesen*) exerted on the trend of my artistic labours, especially upon the choice and moulding of the poetic material, I will specify after I have first cleared the way for its understanding by an account of the origin and character of those works to which I gave birth under that influence. I shall therefore pass at once to the said account.—

To the path which I struck with the conception of the *Flying Dutchman* belong the two succeeding dramatic poems, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. I have been reproached as falling *back*, in all three works, upon a path already trodden bald—as the opinion goes—by Meyerbeer in his *Robert the Devil*, and already forsaken by myself in my *Rienzi*: the path, to wit, of "romantic opera." Those who level this charge against me are naturally more concerned with the classification, *Romantic Opera*, than with the *operas* thus conventionally classified as "romantic." Whether I set about my task with the formal intention of [307] constructing "romantic" operas, or did nothing of the kind, will become apparent if I relate in detail the history of the origin of these three works.

The mood in which I adopted the legend of the "Flying Dutchman," I have already stated

in general terms: the adoption (*Empfängniss*) was exactly as old as the mood itself which, at first merely brooding within me and battling against more seductive impressions, at last attained the power of outwardly expressing itself in a cognate work of art.—The figure of the "Flying Dutchman" is a mythical creation of the Folk: a primal trait of human nature speaks out from it with heart-enthraling force. This trait, in its most universal meaning, is the longing after rest from amid the storms of life. In the blithe world of Greece we meet with it in the wanderings of Ulysses and his longing after home, house, hearth and—wife: the attainable, and at last attained reward of the city-loving son of ancient Hellas. The Christian; without a home on earth, embodied this trait in the figure of the "Wandering Jew": for that wanderer, forever doomed to a long-since outlived life, without an aim, without a joy, there bloomed no earthly ransom; death was the sole remaining goal of all his strivings; his only hope, the laying-down of being. At the close of the Middle Ages a new, more active impulse led the nations to fresh *life*: in the world-historical direction its most important result was the bent to voyages of discovery. The sea, in its turn, became the soil of Life; yet no longer the narrow land-locked sea of the Grecian world, but the great ocean that engirdles all the earth. The fetters of the older world were broken; the longing of Ulysses, back to home and hearth and wedded wife, after feeding on the sufferings of the "never-dying Jew" until it became a yearning for Death, had mounted to the craving for a new, an unknown home, invisible as yet, but dimly boded. This vast-spread feature fronts us in the mythos of the "Flying Dutchman"; that seaman's poem from the world-historical age of journeys of discovery. Here we light upon a remarkable mixture, a [308] blend, effected by the spirit of the Folk, of the character of Ulysses with that of the Wandering Jew. The Hollandic mariner, in punishment for his temerity, is condemned by the Devil (here, obviously, the element of Flood and Storm (17)) to do battle with the unresting waves, to all eternity. Like Ahasuerus, he yearns for his sufferings to be ended by Death; the Dutchman, however, may gain this redemption, denied to the undying Jew, at the hands of—a *Woman* who, of very love, shall sacrifice herself for him. The yearning for death thus spurs him on to seek this *Woman*; but she is no longer the home-tending Penelope of Ulysses, as courted in the days of old, but the quintessence of womankind; and yet the still unmanifest, the longed-for, the dreamt-of, the infinitely womanly *Woman*,—let me out with it in one word: *the Woman of the Future*.

This was that "Flying Dutchman" who arose so often from the swamps and billows of my life, and drew me to him with such resistless might; this was the first *Folk-poem* that forced its way into my heart, and called on me as man and artist to point its meaning, and mould it in a work of art.

From here begins my career as *poet*, and my farewell to the mere concoctor of opera-texts. And yet I took no sudden leap. In no wise was I influenced by reflection; for reflection comes only from the mental combination of existing models: whereas I nowhere found the specimens which might have served as beacons on my road. My course was new; it was bidden me by my inner mood (*Stimmung*), and forced upon me by the pressing need to impart this mood to others. In order to enfranchise myself from within outwards, i.e. to address myself to the understanding of like-feeling men, I was driven to strike out for myself as artist, a path as yet not pointed me by any outward [309] experience; and that which drives a man hereto is Necessity deeply felt, incognisable by the practical reason, but overmastering Necessity.

In thus introducing myself to my Friends, as a poet, I almost ought to hesitate before making my bow with a work like the *Flying Dutchman*. In it there is so much as yet inchoate, the joinery of the situations is for the most part so imperfect, the verse and diction so often bare of individual stamp, that our modern playwrights—who construct everything according to a prescribed formula, and, boastful of their formal aptitude, start out to glean that matter which shall best lend itself to handling in the lesson-ed form—will be the first to count my denomination of this "poem" as a piece of impudence that calls for strenuous castigation. My dread of such prospective punishment would weigh less with me than my own scruples as to the poetical form of the *Dutchman*, were it my intention to pose therewith as a fixed and finished entity; on the contrary, I find a private relish in here showing my friends myself in process of 'becoming' (*in meinem Werden*). The form of the poem of the *Flying Dutchman*, however, as that of all my later poems, down even to the minutiae of their musical setting, was dictated to me by the subject-matter alone, insomuch as that had become absorbed into a definite colouring of my life, and in so far as I had gained by practice and experience on my own adopted path any general aptitude for artistic construction.—To the characteristics of such construction I purpose, as said above, to return later on. For the present, having satisfied my wish to indicate the decisive turning-point of my evolutionary career, alike in its formal as in its material bearings, I will return to the history of the origin of my dramatic poems.—

Amid outward circumstances which I have already described elsewhere, (18) I rapidly composed the verse and music for my *Flying Dutchman*. I had withdrawn from [310] Paris into the country, and it was there that I was once more brought into contact with my German home. My *Rienzi* had been at last accepted for production in Dresden. This acceptance, broadly speaking, meant for me an almost amazingly encouraging omen, and withal a friendly greeting from Germany that made my feelings all the warmer for my native home as the worldly blast of Paris was daily freezing me the more. Already, with all my hopes and all my thoughts, I lived in Germany alone. An ardent, yearning patriotism awoke within me, such as I had never dreamt before. This patriotism was free from any political tinge; for I was alive, at any rate, to the fact that political Germany had not the slightest attraction to offer me, as compared with, say, political France. It was the feeling of utter homelessness in Paris, that aroused my yearning for the German home-land; yet this longing was not directed to any old familiar haunt that I must win my way *back* to, but onward to a country pictured in my dreams, an unknown and still-to-be-discovered haven, of which I knew this thing alone: that I should certainly *never* find it here in Paris. It was the longing of my Flying Dutchman for "*das Weib*,"—not, as I have said before, for the wife who waited for Ulysses, but for the redeeming Woman, whose features had never presented themselves to me in any clear-marked outline, but who hovered before my vision as the element of Womanhood in its widest sense. This element here found expression in the idea: one's *Native Home*, i.e. the encirclement by a wide community of kindred and familiar souls; by a community, however, which as yet I knew not in the flesh, which I only learnt to yearn for after I had realised what is generally meant by "home" (19) whereas in my [311] former straitened lot it was the remote and alien that had hovered before me as the redeeming element, and the stress to find it had driven me to Paris. Just as I had been undeceived in Paris, so was I doomed to disappointment in Germany. My Flying Dutchman, sure enough, had not as yet unveiled the *newer* world: *his* Wife could only redeem him by plunging together with him beneath the waves of life.—But to proceed!

After completing the *Flying Dutchman*, although entirely pre-occupied with my return to Germany and with getting together the necessary wherewithal, I was obliged, for very sake of the latter, to betake myself once more to hack-work for the music-sellers. I made

arrangements from Halévy's operas. Yet a new-won pride already saved me from the bitterness with which this humiliation had erstwhile filled me. I kept of good cheer, and corresponded with the home-hand about the advancing preparations for the production of *Rienzi*; while I was further encouraged by the news that my *Flying Dutchman* itself had been accepted for Berlin. Already I lived entirely in the longed-for, now soon to be entered world of Home.—

In this mood, the German Folk's-book (20) of "Tannhäuser" fell into my hands. This wonderful creation of the Folk at once usurped my liveliest emotions: indeed it was now that it first *could* do so. Tannhäuser, however, was by no means a figure completely new to me: I had early made his acquaintance through Tieck's narration. He had then aroused my interest in the same fantastically mystic manner in which Hoffmann's stories had worked upon my young imagination; but this domain of romance had never exercised any influence upon my art-productive powers. I now read through again the utterly modern poem of Tieck, and understood at once why his coquettish [312] mysticism and catholic frivolity had not appealed in any definite way to my sympathy; the Folk's-book and the homely *Tannhäuserlied* explained this point to me, as they showed me the simple genuine inspiration of the Tannhäuser-legend in such swiftly-seizable and undisfigured traits.—But what most irresistibly attracted me was the connection, however loose, between Tannhäuser and the "Singers'-Tourney in the Wartburg," which I found established in that Folk's-book. With this second poetic subject also I had already made an earlier acquaintance, in a tale of Hoffmann's; but, as with Tieck's Tannhäuser, it had left me without the slightest incitation to dramatic treatment. I now decided to trace this Singers'-Tourney, whose whole entourage breathed on me the air of home, to its simplest and most genuine source; this led me to the study of the *mittelhochdeutsch* (21) (middle-high-German) poem of the "*Sängerkrieg*," into which one of my friends, a German philologist who happened to possess a copy, was fortunately able to induct me.—This poem, as is well known, is set in direct connection with a larger epos, that of "*Lohengrin*." That also I studied, and thus with one blow a whole new world of poetic stuff was opened out to me; a world of which in my previous search, mostly for ready-made material adapted to the genre of Opera, I had not had the slightest conception.—I must describe a little more minutely the impressions I derived therefrom.

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To many a hanger-on of the historico-poetical school it will appear of some weight that, between the completion of the *Flying Dutchman* and the conception of *Tannhäuser*, I had busied myself with the sketch for a *historical* opera-text; but it will be a disappointment for him, and another proof of my incapacity, when I inform him that I discarded this sketch in favour of that for *Tannhäuser*. For the present I will merely narrate the incident, since I shall have occasion to treat more fully the aesthetical question therein involved when I come to discuss a later mental conflict of like kind.

I have said that my yearning for home had nothing of the character of political patriotism in it; yet I should be untruthful, did I not admit that a political interpretation of the German Home was among the objects of my indefinite longing. This I naturally could not find in the Present, and any justification of the wish for such a rendering I—like our whole historical school—could only seek-out in the Past. In order to assure myself of what it was, in particular, that I held dear in the German Home for which I was yearning, I recalled the image of the impressions of my youth, and, to conjure up a clearer vision, I turned the pages of the book of History. I also took advantage of this opportunity to *seek* again for an operatic subject: but nowhere in the ample outlines of the old German Kaiser-world could I find one; and, although without distinctly realising it, I felt that the features of this epoch were unfitted for a faithful and intelligible dramatisation in exact measure as they presented a dearth of seizable motive to my musical conception.—At last I fastened on *one* episode, since it seemed

to offer me the chance of giving a freer rein to my poetic fancy. This was a moment from the last days of the Hohenstaufian era. Manfred, the son of Friedrich II., tears himself from his lethargy and abandonment to lyric luxury, and, pressed by hot need, throws himself upon Luceria; which city, in the heart of the realms of Holy Church, had been assigned by his father to the Saracens, after their dislodgement [314] from Sicily. Chiefly by aid of these warlike and lightly kindled Sons of Araby, he wins back from the Pope and ruling Guelphs the whole of the disputed realm of Sicily and Apuleia; the dramatic sketch concluding with his coronation. Into this purely historical plot I wove an imaginary female figure: I now recall the fact that her form had taken shape in my mind from the memory of an engraving which I had seen long previously; this picture represented Friedrich II. surrounded by his almost exclusively Arabian court, amongst which my fancy was principally attracted by the oriental forms of singing and dancing women. The spirit of this Friedrich, my favourite hero, I now embodied in the person of a Saracen maiden, the fruit of the embraces of Friedrich and a daughter of Araby, during the Kaiser's peaceful sojourn in Palestine. Tidings of the downfall of the Ghibelline house had come to the girl in her native home; fired with that same Arabian enthusiasm which not long since gave the East its songs of ardent love for Bonaparte, she made her way to Apuleia. There, in the court of the dispirited Manfred, she appears as a prophetess, inspires him with fresh courage, and spurs him on to action; she kindles the hearts of the Arabs in Luceria, and, instilling enthusiasm whithersoever she goes, she leads the Emperor's son through victory on victory to throne. Her descent she has kept enwrapped in mystery, the better to work on Manfred's mind, by the riddle of her apparition; he loves her passionately, and fain would break the secret's seal: she waves him back with an oracular saying. His life being attempted, she receives the death - thrust in her own breast: dying, she confesses herself as Manfred's sister, and unveils the fulness of her love to him. Manfred, crowned, takes leave of happiness for ever.

This picture which my homesick phantasy had painted, not without some warmth of colour, in the departing light of a historical sunset, completely faded from my sight so soon as ever the figure of Tannhäuser revealed itself [315] to my inner eye. That picture was conjured from outside: this figure sprang from my inmost heart. In its infinitely simple traits, it was to me more wide-embracing, and alike more definite and plain, than the richly-coloured, shimmering tissue—half historical and half poetic—which like a showy cloak of many folds concealed the true, the supple human form my inner wish desired to look on, and which stepped at once before me in the new-found Tannhäuser. Here was the very essence of the *Folk's*-poem, that ever seizes on the *kernel* of the matter (*Erscheinung*), and brings it again to show (*Erscheinung*) in simple plastic outlines; whilst there, in the history—i.e. the event not such as it was, but such alone as it comes within *our* ken—this matter shows itself in endless trickery of outer facings, and never attains that fine plasticity of form until the eye of the Folk has plunged into its inner *soul*, and given it the artistic mould of Myth.

This Tannhäuser was infinitely more than Manfred; for he was the spirit of the whole Ghibelline race for every age, embraced within one only, clearly cut and infinitely moving form; but in this form a *human being*, right down to our own day, right into the heart of a poor artist all athirst for life. But more of that anon!

For the moment I merely note that, in the choice of the Tannhäuser-stuff also, I acted entirely without reflection; and thus simply emphasise the fact that I had hitherto proceeded without any critical consciousness, following absolutely the dictates of instinctive feeling. My

recital alone will have shown how completely without an axiom I had commenced, in the *Flying Dutchman*, to strike out my new pathway. With the "*Sarazenin*" I was on the point of harking back, more or less, to the road of my *Rienzi*, and again writing a "historical Grand Opera in five acts"; only the overpowering subject of *Tannhäuser*, grappling my individual nature with far more energetic hold, kept my footsteps firm upon the path which Necessity had bid me strike. This happened, [316] as I will now relate, amid an active combat—not yet over—with accidental outer influences, which were destined to gradually enlighten my consciousness, also, as to the inner nature of that path itself.— —

At last, after a stay of well-nigh three years, I left Paris, nine-and-twenty years of age. The direct route to Dresden took me through the Thuringian valley from which one sees the Wartburg towering above. How unspeakably homelike and inspiring was the effect upon me of this castle, already hallowed to me, but which—strangely enough!—I was not to actually visit until seven years later when, already proscribed, I cast therefrom my last look upon that Germany which I had once entered with such warm affection: only to leave it in contumely, an exile fleeing from his native land!— —

I arrived in Dresden, to hasten forward the promised production of my *Rienzi*. Before the actual commencement of the rehearsals, I made an excursion into the Bohemian mountains; there I jotted down the complete dramatic sketch of *Tannhäuser*. Before I could proceed to its working out, however, I was doomed to be interrupted in a hundred ways. Preceded by many a trimming and paring of that excessively protracted composition, the practical study of my *Rienzi* began. Concernment with the long-awaited production of one of my operas, under conditions so sufficient as those the Dresden Court-theatre afforded me, was an entirely new element for me, and proved a source of active distraction from my inner thoughts. At this time, I felt myself so buoyantly lifted from out my fundamental nature, and attracted toward the practical, that I even took up again an earlier, long-since forgotten sketch for an opera founded on Königs romance "*die hohe Braut*," and cast it into racy opera-verse for my future colleague (22) in the office of Dresden *Hofkapellmeister*, who just then thought himself in need of an [317] opera-text, and whom I thus endeavoured to win over. (23) — The growing goodwill of the singers towards my *Rienzi*, and especially the amiable expressions of enthusiasm elicited from the pre-eminently gifted singer of the title-rôle, (24) affected me to an uncommonly pleasant degree. After long battling amid the paltriest surroundings, after severest struggles, sufferings and privations in the loveless commerce of Paris art and Paris life, I suddenly found myself surrounded by an appreciative, inspiring, and often quite affectionate group. How pardonable, if I began to yield to illusions from which, however, I was doomed to wake with poignant pain! But if one thing was more calculated than another to deceive me as to my true position towards the existing state of affairs, it was the remarkable success of the production of my *Rienzi* in Dresden:—I, a lonely, homeless waif, found myself suddenly beloved, admired, nay, by many looked on with amazement; and, according to our general notion of things, this success was to win me for my whole span of life a solid basis of social and artistic well-being,—for, to cap it all, I was nominated to the post of *Kapellmeister* of the Royal Saxon Court-band.

It was here that a great self-delusion, forced upon me by circumstances, though not completely unawares to myself; became the cause of a fresh development, painful but decisive, of my character both as artist and as man. My earliest experiences, then those of Paris, and lastly those already made in Dresden, had not left me in the dark as to the real nature of our entire public art, especially as regards its practice in our official institutions. My repugnance to any concernment with it, farther than what was absolutely called-for by the production of my operas, had already [318] developed to a considerable pitch. It had been brought plainly enough before my own eyes that it was not Art such as I had learnt to know it, but a completely different set of interests, which only cloaked themselves with an artistic

semblance, that was ministered-to in the daily traffic of our public art-affairs. But I had not as yet thrust down to the fundamental cause of this phenomenon, and therefore rather held it as a mere accident, remediable by a little pains. It was now that I was first to gradually and sorrowfully discover the cause itself.

To a few more intimate friends I openly declared my inner aversion, and consequent hesitation, to take up the proffered post of *Hofkapellmeister* (Conductor of the Royal orchestra). They could not understand me; and this was natural, for I myself could only express my inner distaste, without being able to assign any reasons in terms of the practical understanding. A glance back to my quondam troublous and disjointed outer circumstances, which henceforth promised to take on a surer ordering; and further, the assumption that, in the favourable mood of my surroundings, and especially considering the brilliant nature of the artistic forces at my disposal, I should at any rate be able to do many a good stroke of work for art, soon conquered my avowed disinclination: a result explicable enough, in view of my still scanty stock of experience in the last regard. My recognition of the high opinion that is customarily held of such a post; (25) and finally the signal honour which my selection appeared to represent in the eyes of all the rest of you, ended by dazzling me also, and making me behold an unwonted piece of good fortune in what was but too soon to be for me the source of gnawing pain. I became—in highest spirits!—a Royal Kapellmeister.—

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The sense of physical comfort, which stole over me in consequence of the rebound in my outward lot, and grew into a pleasurable feeling of self-content through my first taste of a settled position in life—and especially of public favour and admiration—soon betrayed me into a more and more complete repudiation and abuse of my inner nature, such as it had hitherto evolved in necessary consecution. I was chiefly deceived by the not altogether unreasonable assumption of a speedy—or, if more tardy, yet bound to come at last—pecuniary success of my operas through their gaining themselves a footing on the wider German stage. While this obstinate belief betrayed me, in the long run, into ever-increasing sacrifices and undertakings, which were destined, in the absence of success, to dislocate afresh my outward circumstances: its mainspring, a more or less impatient quest for pleasure, for a long time led my steps astray from the artistic path I had already struck out. This episode seems worth narrating, as it affords a not unweighty contribution to the developmental history of an artist's individuality.

Immediately after the success of *Rienzi* at the Dresden Court-theatre, the management determined to bring out at once my *Flying Dutchman*. The acceptance of this opera by the Berlin Court-theatre directorate had been nothing more nor less than a cheap compliment, devoid of any serious meaning. The Dresden directorate being in earnest, I willingly accepted their proposal and rehearsed the opera as quickly as possible, without any special care about the material for its production; the work seemed to me so immeasurably simpler for performance than its predecessor *Rienzi*, its scenic arrangements so much easier to grasp. The chief male rôle I almost forced upon a singer who had sufficient experience and self-knowledge to declare himself unfitted for the part.—The main point of the representation was completely missed. This performance the public felt all the less inclined to applaud as it was disappointed in the *genre* of the work itself; having expected and desired something akin to *Rienzi*, not something [320] directly opposite in style. My friends were crestfallen at the result; almost all they could think about, was to wipe out its impression upon themselves and the public, and that by an eager resumption of *Rienzi*. I myself was so disconcerted, that I held my peace and left the *Dutchman* undefended. In the mood described above, it was natural that I should prefer the sweets of immediate success, and benumb my conscience with the hopes held out by that earlier successful path. Under the influence of these outward impressions I again began to vacillate, and my unrest was largely increased by my intercourse with the

*Schröder-Devrient.*—

I have already alluded to the extraordinary and lasting impression which the artistic genius of this in every respect exceptional woman had made upon me in my youth. Now, after an interval of eight years, I came into personal contact with her, a contact prompted and governed by the deep significance of her art to me. I found this gifted nature involved in the most manifold contradictions, which were as disquieting to myself as in her they took the form of passionate unrest. The motley hollowness of our modern theatrical life had the less remained without influence on this artist as, neither as artist nor woman, did she possess that cold and egoistic composure with which, for example, a Jenny Lind can place herself entirely outside the frame of the modern stage and keep free from any compromising intercourse therewith. The Schröder-Devrient was neither in life nor art an embodiment of that virtuosodom which flourishes alone in isolation, in it alone can shine: here as there, she was dramatic through and through, in the fullest meaning of the word. She was born for intercourse, for blending with the Whole; and yet this Whole was, both in life and art, *our* social life, and *our* theatric art. I have never seen a greater-hearted human being, nor one in battle with more trivial conceptions, than this woman with those ideas which she had imbibed from her contact, necessary as her nature made it, with her surroundings. Upon myself the effect of my deep [321] sympathy with this artistic woman was less stimulating than tormenting; and tormenting because it roused, without contenting me. She studied the "Senta" of my *Flying Dutchman*, and gave this rôle with such creative perfection of finish, that her performance alone saved the opera from being completely misunderstood by the public, and even evoked the liveliest enthusiasm. This inspired me with the wish to write a piece expressly for her, and with this object I reached back to my abandoned sketch for the "*Sarazenin*," the scenic draft of which I now hastily completed. But this poem, when submitted, had but little attraction for her; chiefly on account of certain references which, in her situation at that time, she would not allow to pass current. One typical feature of my heroine was expressed in the sentence: "the *Prophetess* can never more become a *woman*." This artist, however—without putting it in so many words—would not completely throw aside the woman; and it is only at the present that I have learnt to rightly value her instinctive judgment, now that those circumstances which brought that instinct into play have faded from my sight; whereas at that time their utter triviality jarred on me to such a degree that, looking from them to the artist herself; I could not help regarding her as caught in the toils of a desire unworthy of her. (26)

Under such impressions, I fell into a conflict with myself; a conflict peculiar to our modern evolution, and only not experienced, or regarded as already out of date, by those who have not a vestige of evolutionary force within them and, for their philosophy of life, content themselves with borrowed plumes—however new—of theory. I will attempt to describe, in brief; this conflict, and the mode in which it expressed itself in my relations to the outer world.

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Through the happy change in the aspect of my outward lot; through the hopes I cherished, of its even still more favourable development in the future; and finally through my personal and, in a sense, intoxicating contact with a new and well-inclined surrounding, a passion for enjoyment had sprung up within me, that led my inner nature, formed amid the struggles and impressions of a painful past, astray from its own peculiar path. A general instinct that urges every man to take life as he finds it, now pointed me, in my particular relations as Artist, to a path which, on the other hand, must soon and bitterly disgust me. This instinct could only have been appeased in Life on condition of my seeking, as artist, to wrest myself renown and pleasure by a complete subordination of my true nature to the demands of the public taste in Art. I should have had to submit myself to the Mode, and to speculation on its weaknesses;

and here, on this point at least, my feeling showed me clearly that, with an actual entry on that path, I must inevitably be engulfed in my own loathing. Thus the pleasures of life presented themselves to my feeling in the shape alone of what *our modern world* can offer to the senses; and this again appeared attainable by me, as artist, solely along the direction which I had already learnt to recognise as the exploitation of our public art-morass. In actual life I was at like time confronted—in the person of a woman for whom I had a sincere admiration—with the phenomenon that a longing akin to my own could only imagine itself contented with the paltriest return of trivial love; a delusion so completely threadbare, that it could never really mask its nature from the inner need.

If at last I turned impatiently away, and owed the strength of my repugnance to the independence already developed in my nature, both as artist and as man: so did that double revolt, of man and artist, inevitably take-on the form of a yearning for appeasement in a higher, nobler element; an element which, in its contrast to the only pleasures that the material Present spreads in modern Life and modern Art, could but appear to me in the guise of [323] a pure, chaste, virginal, unseizable and unapproachable ideal of Love. What, in fine, could this love-yearning, the noblest thing my heart could feel—what other could it be than a longing for release from the Present, for absorption into an element of endless Love, a love denied to earth and reachable through the gates of Death alone? (27) And what, again, at bottom, could such a longing be, but the yearning of Love; aye, of a real love seeded in the soil of fullest sentience (*Sinnlichkeit*),—yet a love that could *never* come to fruition on the loathsome soil of *modern* sentience?—How absurd, then, must those critics seem to me, who, drawing all their wit from modern wantonness, insist on reading into my "Tannhäuser" a specifically Christian and impotently pietistic drift! They recognise nothing but the fable of their own incompetence, in the story of a man whom they are utterly unable to comprehend.—

The above is an exact account of the mood in which I was, when the unladen ghost of Tannhäuser returned again, and urged me to complete his poem. When I reached the sketch and working-out of the *Tannhäuser* music, it was in a state of burning exaltation (*verzehrend üppige Erregtheit*) that held my blood and every nerve in fevered throbbing. My true nature—which, in my loathing of the modern world and ardour to discover something nobler and beyond-all noblest, had quite returned to me—now seized, as in a passionate embrace, the opposing channels of my being, and disembouched them both into *one* stream: a longing for the highest form of Love.—With this work I penned my death-warrant: before the world of Modern Art, I now could hope no more for life. This I *felt*; but as yet I *knew* it not with full distinctness:—that knowledge I was not to gain till later.

I have meanwhile to relate how I was confirmed in my tendency by further experiences from outside.—My hopes of a rapid success, through the circulation of my operas on the German stage, remained entirely unfulfilled; my scores [324] were returned to me by the principal Theatrical Directors, unaccepted—often with even their wrappers unopened. It was only the patient toil of personal friendship, that brought *Rienzi* to a production in Hamburg: an utterly unsuitable singer played havoc with the title-role, and the Director found his hopes and all his persevering efforts demolished by the inadequate result. I then saw, to my astonishment, that even this "Rienzi" was above folk's heads. Yet, however coldly I may now look back upon this earlier work of mine, I cannot shut my eyes to the youthful, heroic strain of enthusiasm that breathes throughout it. Our public, however, nourished on the masterpieces of modern operatic manufacture, has accustomed itself to seek the object of its stage-enthusiasm in something very different to the dominant mood of a dramatic work. In Dresden I was succoured by something quite aloof from this; to wit, the purely physical *verve* of the whole thing, which there, under circumstances favourable in this respect, and especially by reason of the brilliance of the stage-material and the personal characteristics of the chief singer, worked in an intoxicating fashion on the public.

On the other hand, I had quite a different experience with my *Flying Dutchman*. The old master *Spohr* had already produced this opera at Cassel, almost immediately after its original appearance. This happened without any overtures on my side; nevertheless I feared that I must remain a stranger to *Spohr*, since I could not see how my novel bent could fall in with his taste. What, then, was my astonishment and glad surprise, when this grey-haired master, although wrapt in a cold but honourable seclusion from the world of modern music, expressed to me by letter his unqualified approval, and explained it simply by his heart-felt joy at meeting with a young artist who plainly showed that he was taking art in earnest! *Spohr*, the aged *Spohr*, remained the only German Kapellmeister who received me with any warmth of affection, who nursed my works as far as he was able, and who, [325] amid all changes, preserved for me a true and faithful friendship.

At Berlin, also, the *Flying Dutchman* was placed upon the boards; I had no grounds for absolute discontent with this affair. My experience of the effect upon the public, however, was here most significant: the mistrustful Berlin chill, only too prone to fault-finding, lasted throughout the whole First Act, but gave way in the course of the Second to the fullest warmth of emotion; in fact, I could not but regard the result as completely favourable. Yet the opera very soon disappeared from the repertory. A keen instinct for matters theatrical must have prompted the management, when, even though this opera pleased, they looked upon it as unfitted for the regular routine. I recognise today how correct a verdict upon the general nature of our theatric art was herewith expressed. A piece intended for the operatic repertoire, to be played before the public throughout a long season, perhaps for ever, in alternation with other pieces of its like, must have no *Stimmung*, (28) and require for its understanding no *Stimmung*, that is of any markedly individual character. To this end, one must provide pieces which are either of a generally-current *Stimmung* or, in fact, of none at all, and therefore which do not pretend to arouse the feeling of the public to any particular mood, but afford a pleasurable distraction by the brilliance of their 'mounting' and the more or less personal interest taken in the performing virtuosi. The revival of earlier so-called "classical" works, which certainly cannot attain a real understanding without awaking such an individual *Stimmung*, is never due to the convictions of the Theatre-directors themselves, but both laborious revival and success are the artificial outcome of compliance with the demands of our æsthetical [326] critics. The 'stimmung,' however, which my *Flying Dutchman* was at times so fortunate as to arouse, was so pregnant, so unaccustomed, and so searching, that it was highly improbable that those who had experienced it most fully would place themselves in the way of its recurrence at frequent and brief intervals. An audience, in its every member, demands that such impressions shall take it *unawares*: the sudden *shock* of this surprise, and its lasting after-effects—which form the object of the artwork—constitute the elevating factor in any dramatic performance. But the same feeling of surprise either does not recur at all, or only after a considerable period has been allowed to intervene, and the events of daily life have gradually effaced the vividness of the first impression; whereas the deliberate attempt to galvanise oneself into this feeling, is one of the pathological symptoms of our modern art-debauchery. With men who follow in their lives the natural course of evolution, the same effect is—strictly speaking—never to be obtained from the performance of one and the same dramatic work; their renewed demand can be met alone by a fresh work of art, a work proceeding in its turn from a new developmental phase in the mind of the artist.—Here I touch on what I have said in the Introduction, with regard to the Monumental and its manifestments in our art-doings: for I adduce the logical result of investigation into the above phenomena as witness to the need of an ever fresh-born Artwork of the Future, springing directly from, and belonging only to the Present; an Artwork which shall not be fettered by the Monumental, but, mirroring the face of Life itself in all its countless traits, shall proclaim itself in infinitely changeful multiformity, and thus be understood.

Though I did not clearly formulate the notion at this time, yet it began to thrust itself upon my inner observation the more especially through my perception of the uncommonly strong impression which my *Flying Dutchman* had made on *individuals*. In Berlin, where for the rest I was entirely unknown, I received from two persons [327] —a gentleman and a lady, previously total strangers to me, whom the impressions produced by the *Flying Dutchman* had made my instant friends—the first definite expression of satisfaction at the new path which I had struck out, and the first exhortation to continue thereon. From that time forward I lost more and more the so-called "Public" from my view: the judgment of definite, individual human beings usurped, for me, the place of the never to be accurately gauged opinion of the Mass, which hitherto—without my own full consciousness—had floated before me, in vague outlines, as the object to which I should address myself as poet. The *understanding* of my aim became each day more clearly the chief thing to be striven for, and, to ensure myself this understanding, involuntarily I turned no longer to the stranger *Mass*, but to the individual persons whose moods and ways of thought were familiar to me.

Again, this better defined position toward those whom I wished to address, exercised a most weighty influence upon the future bent of my constructive faculties (*künstlerisches Gestaltungswesen*). If the impulse to *intelligibly* impart his aim be the true constructive standard of the artist, its exercise will necessarily be governed by the character of those *by whom* he wishes that aim to be understood. If he picture them as an indefinite, never plainly cognisable mass, whose tastes are never to be accurately gauged and whose character it is therefore impossible *for himself* to understand, in fact as the medley that constitutes our modern theatrical public : then, in his efforts to expound his aim, the artist must inevitably be driven to a hazy mode of treatment which often strays aside into purposeless generalities, nay—for the matter of that—to a choice of subject-matter dictated by naught else than its peculiar fitness for this washy treatment. The artistic defects resulting from such a position were now apparent to me, upon re-examining my earlier operas. As compared with the products of modern theatric art, I recognised, it is true, the greater significance of the subjects of my own [328] creations, but at like time the undecided, often unclear nature of the treatment of those subjects, which therefore still were lacking in the necessary features of a sharply-chiselled individuality. Thenceforward, by addressing myself instinctively to definite individuals allied to me by community of feeling, I at the same time won the power of casting my subjects in a more distinct and stable mould. Without going to work with any deliberate purpose, I divested myself more and more of the customary method of treating my characters in the gross; I drew a sharper line of demarcation between the surroundings and the main figure, which erewhile had frequently been swamped by them; I raised it into bolder relief, and thus attained the power of rescuing these surroundings themselves from their operative diffuseness, and condensing them into plastic forms.

It was under influences such as these, and proceeding as just stated, that I worked away at my *Tannhäuser*, and, after many and varied interruptions, completed it.—

With this work, I had passed another stage in the new evolutionary path that I had opened with the *Flying Dutchman*. My whole being had been so consumed with ardour for my task that, as I cannot but call to mind, the nearer I approached its completion the more was I haunted by the fancy that a sudden death would stay my hand from finishing it; so that, when at last I wrote its closing chord, I felt as joyful as though I had escaped some mortal danger.—

Immediately after the conclusion of this task, I obtained leave to visit a Bohemian wateringplace, for the benefit of my health. Here, as whenever I could snatch myself away from the footlights and my "duties" in their dense atmosphere, I soon felt light of heart and gay; and, for the first time in my life, the strain of cheerfulness (*Heiterkeit*) inherent in my disposition took visible shape in an artistic plan. Almost with wilful premeditation, I had already of late resolved to write a *comic* opera, so soon as I could set about it; I remember that

this determination had been [329] assisted by the well-meant advice of certain good friends of mine, who wished me to compose an opera of "lighter genre," since they believed that such a work would open the doors of most German theatres to me and thus effect a beneficial change in my outward circumstances, which had certainly begun to take on a threatening aspect owing to the obstinate default of that success. Just as a jovial Satyr-play was wont at Athens to follow on the Tragedy, so on that pleasure-trip there suddenly occurred to me the picture of a comic piece which well might form a Satyr-play as pendant to my "*Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg*" (i.e. Tannhäuser). This was "The Meistersingers of Nuremberg," with Hans Sachs at their head. I took Hans Sachs as the last manifestation of the art-productive spirit of the Folk (*Volksgeist*), and set him, in this sense, in contrast to the pettyfogging bombast of the other Meistersingers; to whose absurd pedanticism, of *tabulatur* and prosody, I gave a concrete personal expression in the figure of the "Marker." This "Marker," as is well-known (or as perhaps is *not* known to our critics), was the examiner appointed by the Singers' Guild to "mark" each breach of rule in the effusions of the members, and particularly of fresh candidates, noting them down with crosses: whosoever was adjudged a certain number of these crosses, had "out-sung" himself.—In my story, the oldest member of the guild offered the hand of his young daughter to that "Meister" who should win the prize at a forthcoming public singing-contest. The Marker himself had already paid his court to the damsel, but is now confronted by a rival in the person of a young nobleman who, inspired by the *Heldenbuch* and the songs of the ancient Minnesingers, forsakes the ruined castle of his ancestors to learn the Meistersingers' art at Nuremberg. He applies for admission into the guild, determined chiefly by a swiftly-kindled passion for the prize-maiden, "whom none but a Master of the Guild may win." Put to the test, he sings an enthusiastic song in praise of Woman; but from the first his verse offends the Marker's ear, so that when [330] the aspirant has got but halfway through his song, he is "plucked." Hans Sachs, who has taken a fancy to the young man, now frustrates—in the latter's best interest—his despairing attempt to elope with the damsel; Hans finds occasion, at like time, to mightily annoy the Marker. For the latter, who had before this made a savage attack upon Sachs on account of a never-finished pair of shoes, with the sole object of humiliating him, stations himself below the maiden's window at night, in order to serenade her with a foretaste of the song by which he hopes next day to win her; since he is most anxious to make sure of her casting-vote in the decision of the prize. At the first note of the Marker's lay, Sachs, whose cobbler's-stall lies opposite the house be-sung, begins in his turn to sing aloud, explaining to the indignant wooer that this is necessary to keep himself awake when he works so late at night; while no one can know better that the job is pressing than the Marker, who had rated him so roundly for the non-delivery of his shoes. At last Sachs promises the unhappy wretch to hold his peace, provided only that he be allowed to mark according to *his* mode—as cobbler—the faults which, according to *his* feeling, he may detect in the Marker's song: namely, to signal each by a hammer-stroke upon the lasted shoes. The Marker now sings on; Sachs strikes repeatedly upon the last. Out of all patience, the Marker makes a rush at him; the Cobbler calmly asks, Whether the song is done then? "Not by a long way yet," shouts the other. Sachs lays down the shoes upon the board, with a roar of laughter, and tells him that they have just been finished by the "Marker's-crosses." Of the rest of his song, which he bawls out without a pause, the Marker makes an utter bungle, in his despair at the violent head-shakings of the female figure at the window, In deepest dudgeon, he next day begs of Sachs a new song wherewith to woo the bridal prize; the Cobbler gives him a poem of the young noble's, pretending not to know how he has come thereby: only he warns him to be very careful in the selection of a fitting "tune" to which to sing [331] it. As to that, the conceited Marker is perfectly confident in himself, and proceeds to sing the poem before the full assembly of Meisters and Folk; but he chooses such an ill-suited and sense-confounding tune, that again

he comes to grief, and this time decisively. Boiling over with rage, he accuses Sachs of fraud, in having foisted upon him an infamous poem; the latter declares that the verse is good enough, but it must be sung to a becoming tune. It is then decided that whoever can fit it with the right tune, shall be the victor. The young noble performs this feat, and wins the bride; but he scorns admission to the Guild, now that it is proffered him. Sachs champions the Meistersingerhood in a humorous address, concluding with the couplet:

"Tho'                    Holy                    Roman                    Empire's                    pride                    depart,

We'll hold on high our holy German Art."—

Such was my swiftly planned, and swiftly traced design. But scarcely had I written it down, when peace forsook me until I had sketched-out the more detailed plan for *Lohengrin*. This was during the same brief visit to the baths, and despite the doctor's warnings against my engaging in any work of the kind. There is something strange in the fact that, at the very time when I made that refreshing little excursion into the realms of mirth, I was driven back so quickly to the earnest, yearning mood which impelled me to the absorbing task of *Lohengrin*. The reason now is clear to me, why the cheerful mood which sought to vent itself in the conception of the *Meistersinger* could make no lasting stay with me. At that time it took alone the shape of *Irony*, and, as such, was busied more with the purely formal side of my artistic views and aims, than with that core of Art whereof the roots lie hid in Life itself.

The only form of Mirth (*Heiterkeit*) which our public of today can understand, and thus the only form in which an underlying truth can appeal thereto, is that of Irony. It seizes the formal aspect of our public offences against Nature, and is in so far effective, as Form, being directly [332] cognisable by the senses, is the thing most patent to the ordinary understanding; whereas the Content of this form is that hidden mystery at which we fumble all perplexed, and wherefrom we are involuntarily thrust back again to utterance in that very form at which we jeer. Thus Irony is *that* form of Mirth through which the latter can never break to open revelation of its inner essence, to vivid, individual exposition as a vital force. But the core that lies beneath the unnatural semblance of our public intercourse, that kernel which all Irony must needs leave unexplored, is at like time unseizable by the power of Mirth, in the latter's purest, most specific manifestment; it is only to be seized by *that* power which expresses itself as resistance to an element of life whose very pressure suffocates the pure breath of Mirth. Thus when we feel this pressure, we are driven by the primal force of Mirth itself, and in our endeavour to regain its pristine purity, to a withstanding whose utterance, in face of modern life, can only proclaim itself in tones of yearning and finally of revolt, and therefore in a tragic mood.

My whole nature instantly reacted against the incomplete attempt to unburden myself of the contents of a mirthful mood by means of irony; and I must now consider the attempt itself as the last expression of that desire for enjoyment which fain would reconcile itself with the triviality of its surroundings, and from which I had already escaped, by a painful exercise of energy, in my *Tannhäuser*.—

If it is now clear to me, after reflection upon my then-prevailing frame of mind, why I so suddenly relinquished this attempt, and threw myself with such consuming passion upon the shaping of the *Lohengrin*- 'stuff': on the other hand, the peculiarity of that subject itself makes plain to me why it was that *it*, of all others, so irresistibly attracted and enthralled me. It was not the mere memory, how this stuff was first brought before me in intimate connection with *Tannhäuser*; least of all was it a frugal husbandry, which might forsooth have bidden me to make the most of gathered stores: for it is obvious, from the account of my artistic labours, that, if anything, I was [333] in this regard inclined to prodigality. On the contrary, I must here attest that at the time when I first learnt the story of *Lohengrin*, in connection with that of *Tannhäuser*, the tale indeed affected me, but in no wise prompted me to store the 'stuff' for

future working-up. Not only because I was then completely saturated with Tannhäuser, but also because the form in which Lohengrin first stepped before me made an almost disagreeable impression upon my feeling, did I not at that time keep a sharper eye upon him. The medieval poem presented Lohengrin in a mystic twilight, that filled me with suspicion and that haunting feeling of repugnance with which we look upon the carved and painted saints and martyrs on the highways, or in the churches, of Catholic lands. Only when the immediate impression of this reading had faded, did the shape of Lohengrin rise repeatedly, and with growing power of attraction, before my soul; and this power gathered fresh force to itself from outside, chiefly by reason that I learnt to know the myth of Lohengrin in its simpler traits, and alike its deeper meaning, as the genuine poem of the Folk, such as it has been laid bare to us by the discoveries of the newer searchers into Saga lore. After I had thus seen it as a noble poem of man's yearning and his longing—by no means merely seeded from the Christian's bent toward supernaturalism, but from the truest depths of universal human nature,—this figure became ever more endeared to me, and ever stronger grew the urgency to adopt it and thus give utterance to my own internal longing; so that, at the time of completing my *Tannhäuser*, it positively became a dominating need, which thrust back each alien effort to withdraw myself from its despotic mastery.

This "Lohengrin" is no mere outcome of Christian meditation (*Anschauung*), but one of man's earliest poetic ideals; just as, for the matter of that, it is a fundamental error of our modern superficialism, to consider the specific Christian legends as by any means original creations. Not one of the most affecting, not one of the most distinctive [334] Christian myths belongs by right of generation to the Christian spirit, such as we commonly understand it: it has inherited them all from the purely human intuitions (*Anschauungen*) of earlier times, and merely moulded them to fit its own peculiar tenets. To purge them of this heterogeneous influence, and thus enable us to look straight into the pure humanity of the eternal poem: such was the task of the more recent inquirer, (29) a task which it must necessarily remain for the poet to complete.

Just as the main feature of the mythos of the "Flying Dutchman" may be clearly traced to an earlier setting in the Hellenic Odyssey; just as this same Ulysses in his wrench from the arms of Calypso, in his flight from the charms of Circe, and in his yearning for the earthly wife of cherished home, embodied the Hellenic prototype of a longing such as we find in "Tannhäuser" immeasurably enhanced and widened in its meaning: so do we already meet in the Grecian mythos—nor is even this by any means its oldest form—the outlines of the myth of "Lohengrin." Who does not know the story of "Zeus and Semele"? The god loves a mortal woman, and for sake of this love, approaches her in human shape; but the mortal learns that she does not know her lover in his true estate, and, urged by Love's own ardour, demands that her spouse shall show himself to physical sense in the full substance of his being. Zeus knows that she can never grasp him, that the unveiling of his godhead must destroy her; him self, he suffers by this knowledge, beneath the stern compulsion to fulfill his loved one's dreaded wish: he signs his own death-warrant, when the fatal splendour of his godlike presence strikes Semele dead.—Was it, forsooth, some priestly fraud that shaped this myth? How insensate, to attempt to argue from the selfish state-religious, caste-like exploitation of the noblest human longing, back to the origin and the genuine meaning of ideals which [335] blossomed from a human fancy that stamped man first as Man! 'Twas no *God* that sang the meeting of Zeus and Semele; but *Man*, in his humanest of yearnings. Who had taught Man that a God could burn with love toward earthly Woman? For certain, only Man himself; who, however high the object of his yearning may soar above the limits of his earthly wont, can only stamp it with the imprint of his human nature. From the highest sphere to which the might of his desire may bear him up, he finally can only long again for what is purely human, can only crave the taste of his own nature, as the one thing worth desiring. What then is the inmost essence of this

Human Nature, whereto the desire which reaches forth to farthest distance turns back at last, for its only possible appeasement? It is the *Necessity of Love*; and the essence of this love, in its truest utterance, is the *longing for utmost physical reality*, for fruition in an object that can be grasped by all the senses, held fast with all the force of actual being. In this finite, physically sure embrace, must not the *God* dissolve and disappear? Is not the mortal, who had *yearned* for God, undone, annulled? Yet is not *Love*, in its truest, highest essence, herein *revealed*?—Marvel, ye erudite Critics, at the omnipotence of human minstrelsy, unfolded in the simple *Mythos of the Folk*! Things that all your Understanding can not so much as comprehend, are there laid bare to human Feeling, with such a physically perfect surety as *no other means could bring to pass*.—

The ethereal sphere, from which the god is yearning to descend to men, had stretched itself, through Christian longing, to inconceivable bounds of space. To the Hellenes, it was still the cloud-locked realm of thunder and the thunderbolt, from which the lusty Zeus moved down, to mix with men in expert likeness: to the Christian, the blue firmament dissolved into an infinite sea of yearning ecstasy, in which the forms of all the gods were melted, until at last it was the lonely image of his own person, the yearning Man, that alone was left to greet him from the ocean of his phantasy. One primal, manifold-repeated trait [336] runs through the Sagas of those peoples who dwelt beside the sea or sea-embouching rivers: upon the blue mirror of the waters there draws nigh an Unknown-being, of utmost grace and purest virtue, who moves and wins all hearts by charm resistless; he is the embodied wish of the yearner who dreams of happiness in that far-off land he can not sense. This Unknown-being vanishes across the ocean's waves, so soon as ever questioned on his nature. Thus—so goes the story—there once came in a swan-drawn skiff, over the sea to the banks of the Scheldt, an unknown hero: there he rescued downtrod innocence, and wedded a sweet maiden; but since she asked him who he was and whence he came, he needs must seek the sea once more and leave his All behind.—Why this Saga, when I learnt it in its simplest outlines, so irresistibly attracted me that, at the very time when I had but just completed *Tannhäuser*, I could concern myself with naught but it, was to be made clearer to my feeling by the immediately succeeding incidents of my life.—

With the finished sketch for the poem of *Lohengrin*, I returned to Dresden, in order to produce *Tannhäuser*. This production was prepared with no inconsiderable outlay on the part of the directorate, who cherished great hopes of the work. The public, by their enthusiastic reception of *Rienzi* and cooler welcome of the *Flying Dutchman*, had plainly shewn me what I must set before them if I sought to please. I completely undeceived their expectations: they left the theatre, after the first performance of *Tannhäuser*, in a confused and discontented mood.—The feeling of the utter loneliness in which I now found myself, quite unmanned me. The few friends who gave me hearty sympathy, felt so depressed by the painfulness of my situation, that the involuntary exhibition of their own disappointment was the only sign of friendly life around me. A week passed by, ere a second performance of *Tannhäuser* could take place; a thing so needed to correct erroneous impressions, and pave the way for better understanding. [337] To me this week was fraught with the burden of a lifetime. Not wounded vanity, but the shock of an utter disillusionment, chilled my very marrow. It became clear to me that my *Tannhäuser* had appealed to a handful of intimate friends alone, and not to the heart of a public to whom, nevertheless, I had instinctively turned in the production of this my work. Here was a contradiction which I could not but deem insoluble. There seemed but one possibility of winning the public also to my side, namely—to secure its *understanding*: but I here felt, for the first time with any great distinctness, that the character to which we have grown accustomed in operatic performances was completely at variance with what I

demanding of a representation.—In our Opera the *singer*, by virtue of the purely material attributes of his voice, usurps the first place; whilst the *actor* takes the second, or even a quite subsidiary rank. On the other side of the line, stands, logically enough, a public that looks chiefly for satisfaction of the purely sensuous demands of its nerve of hearing, and thus almost entirely abjures the enjoyment of a dramatic portrayal. My claim, however, was diametrically opposed to this whole state of affairs: I required the Actor (*Darsteller*) in the forefront, and the Singer only as the actor's aid; lastly, therefore, a public who should join me in this claim. For I was forced to see that not until such claim were met, could there be the remotest question of an impression by the story told; whereas any impression must be nothing but a chaos of confusion, when the fulfilment of that claim was disregarded upon every hand. Thus I could only look upon myself as a madman who speaks to the wind and expects it to understand him; for I was openly speaking of things which were all the more doomed to stay uncomprehended as not even the *tongue* in which I uttered them was understood. The gradually awakened interest in my work, displayed by a portion of the public, appeared to me like the good-natured sympathy shewn to a lunatic by his friends: this sympathy impels us to enter into the spirit of the sufferer's [338] wanderings, to try to unriddle some meaning therefrom, and in this unriddled sense at last to answer, in order thus to make his sad condition a little bearable to him; then throngs around the indifferent crowd, to whom it is a piquant entertainment to catch the utterances of a madman, and from the odds and ends of intelligible matter in his talk to fall into a pleasurable bewilderment as to whether the madman has suddenly become sane, or they themselves have lost their reason. This was the precise manner in which I thenceforth interpreted my position towards the general "public." The benevolent intentions of the directorate, and, above all, the friendly zeal and exceptional talent of the performers, succeeded in gradually establishing my opera in public favour. But no more could this success deceive me; I now *knew* what I and the public were to one another, and even if I had still been left in any doubt, my further experiences would have well enough dispelled it.

The consequences of my earlier blindness as to my true position toward the public now made themselves appallingly evident: the impossibility of procuring *Tannhäuser* a popular success, or even a circulation among the German theatres, was clear as day; and therewith I was confronted with the complete downfall of my outer circumstances. Almost solely to stave off that downfall, I still made further efforts to spread this opera; and, with that end in view, I turned towards Berlin. By the Intendant of the Royal Prussian Stage I was waved aside with the critical verdict that my opera was too "epically" constructed to be suitable for production in Berlin. The General-Intendant of the Royal Prussian Court-music, (30) however, appeared to be of another opinion. When, in order to gain the royal interest for the production of my work, I begged him induce the King to allow me to dedicate *Tannhäuser* to his Majesty, I received for reply the advice that—seeing, on the one hand, the King only [339] accepted works which were already known to him, but on the other, there were obstacles in the way of producing this opera upon the Berlin Court-stage—I had better assist His Majesty to an acquaintance with the work in question by arranging something from it for a military band, which something could then be played before the King during the 'change of guard.'—I could scarcely have been more deeply humbled, nor brought to a preciser knowledge of my situation! Henceforth our entire modern art-publicity began to vanish more and more completely from my purview.—But what, then, was my position? And what sort of a mood must that have been which, precisely at this time, and amid these facts and these impressions, urged me on with headlong haste to carry out the project of my *Lohengrin*?—I will endeavour to make it clear to myself and friends, in order to explain the meaning that the Lohengrin legend bore for me; and the light in which alone I could regard it, both as man and artist.

I was now so completely awoken to the utter *loneliness* of my position as an artist, that the

very feeling of this loneliness supplied me with the spur and the ability to address myself to my surroundings. Since this prompting spoke so loud within me that, even without any conscious prospect of compassing an intelligible message, I yet felt passionately impelled to unbosom myself,—this could only proceed from a mood of wellnigh fanatical yearning, which itself was born of that feeling of isolation.—In *Tannhäuser* I had yearned to flee a world of frivolous and repellent sensuousness,—the only form our modern Present has to offer; my impulse lay towards the unknown land of pure and chaste virginity, as toward the element that might allay a nobler, but still at bottom sensuous longing: only, a longing such as our frivolous Present can never satisfy. By the strength of my longing, I had mounted to the realms where purity and chastity abide: I felt myself out side the modern world, and mid a sacred, limpid aether which, in the transport of my solitude, filled me with that delicious awe we drink-in upon the summits of the Alps, [340] when, circled with a sea of azure air, we look down upon the lower hills and valleys. Such mountain-peaks the Thinker climbs, and on this height imagines he is "cleansed" from all that's "earthly," (31) the topmost branch upon the tree of man's omnipotence: here at last may he feed full upon himself, and, midst this self-repast, freeze finally beneath the Alpine chill into a monument of ice; as which, philosopher or critic, he stonily frowns down upon the warm and living world below. The desire, however, that had driven *me* to those heights, was a desire sprung from art and man's five senses: it was not the warmth of *Life*, I fain would flee, but the vaporous morass of trivial sensuousness whose exhalations form *one definite* shape of Life, the life of modern times. Upon those heights, more over, I was warmed by the sunny rays of Love, whose living impulse alone had sped me up. And so it was, that, hardly had this blessed solitude enwrapt me, when it woke a new and overpowering desire, the desire *from peak to valley*, from the dazzling brilliance of chaste Sanctity to the sweet shadows of Love's humanest caresses. From these heights my longing glance beheld at last—*das Weib*: the woman for whom the "Flying Dutch man" yearned, from out the ocean of his misery; the woman who, star-like, showed to "Tannhäuser" the way that led from the hot passion of the Venusberg to Heaven; [341] the woman who now drew Lohengrin from sunny heights to the depths of Earth's warm breast.—

Lohengrin sought the woman who should *trust* in him; who should not ask how he was hight or whence he came, but love him as he was, and because he was whate'er she deemed him. He sought the woman who would not call for explanations or defence, but who should *love* him with an unconditioned love. Therefore must he cloak his higher nature, for only in the non-revealing of this higher (*höheren*)—or more correctly, heightened (*erhöhten*)—essence, could there lie the surety that he was not adored because of it alone, or humbly worshipped as a Being past all under standing—whereas his longing was *not* for worship nor for adoration, but for the only thing sufficient to redeem him from his loneliness, to still his deep desire,—for *Love*, for *being loved*, for *being understood through Love*. With the highest powers of his senses, with his fullest fill of consciousness, he would fain become and be none other than a warmly-feeling, warmth-inspiring Man; in a word, a *Man* and not a God—i.e. no 'absolute' artist. Thus yearned he for Woman,—for the human Heart. And thus did he step down from out his loneliness of sterile bliss, when he heard this woman's cry for succour, this heart-cry from humanity below. But there clings to him the tell-tale halo of his 'heightened' nature; he can not appear as aught but suprahuman; the gaping of the common herd, the poisoned trail of envy, throw their shadows even across the loving maiden's heart; doubt and jealousy convince him that he has not been *understood*, but only *worshipped*, and force from him the avowal of his divinity, wherewith, undone, he returns into his loneliness.—

It seemed then to me, and still it seems, most hard to comprehend, how the deep tragedy of

this subject and this character should have stayed unfelt; and how the story should have been so misunderstood that Lohengrin was looked on as a cold, forbidding figure, more prone to rouse dislike than sympathy. This reproach was first made [342] to me by an intimate friend, whose knowledge and whose intellectual gifts I highly prize. (32) In his case, however, I reaped an experience which has since been verified by repetition: namely, that upon the first direct acquaintance with my poem the impression produced is thoroughly affecting, and that this reproach only enters when the impression of the artwork itself has faded, and given place to cold, reflective criticism. (33) Thus this reproach was not an instinctive act of the immediate-feeling heart, but a purposed act of mediate reflection. In this occurrence I therefore found the tragedy of Lohengrin's character and situation confirmed, as one deep-rooted in our modern life: it was reproduced upon the artwork and its author, just in the same way as it had borne down upon the hero of the poem. The character and situation of this Lohengrin I now recognise, with clearest sureness, as the *type of the only absolute tragedy*, in fine, of the *tragic element of modern life*; and that of just as great significance for the *Present*, as was the "Antigone"—though in another relation—for the life of the Hellenic State. (34) From out this sternest tragic moment of the Present one path alone can lead: the full reunion of sense and soul, the only genuinely *gladsome* element of the Future's Life and Art, each in its utmost consummation.—

I must admit that I myself was so far infected with the doubting spirit of Criticism, that I seriously thought of forcing [343] on my poem a complete change of motive. Through my sharing in this criticism, I had fallen, for a short time, so far out of touch with the essence of the story, that I actually strayed into the sketch of a new denouement, according to which Lohengrin should be allowed to put aside his higher nature, so soon as revealed, in favour of a sojourn upon earth with Elsa. The utterly unsatisfactory, and in the highest sense unnatural character of this denouement, however, not only was felt by myself—who had conceived it in a moment of variance with my inner being—but also by my critical friend. We came to the joint conclusion, that That which jarred upon our modern critical conscience lay in the unalterable idiosyncrasy of the *Stuff* itself; but on the other hand, that this 'stuff' exerted so precise and stimulating an effect upon our Feeling that, in truth, it must have for us a meaning sufficient to make its artistic exposition a desirable enrichment of our emotional impressions, and therewith of our powers of emotion.—

In effect, this "Lohengrin" is an entirely new phenomenon to the modern mind; for it could only issue from the *Stimmung* and the life-views of an artist who, at none other than the present time, and amid no other relations to Art and Life than those which had sprung from my own peculiar situation, had developed to exactly that point where this legend faced me with an imperative demand for treatment. Wherefore, only he who is able to free himself from all our modern abstract generalisms, and look Life straight into the eyes, can understand this Lohengrin. Whoso can *only* class under one general category the manifold phenomena that spring from the individual fashioning-force of Life's most active interactions, can comprehend as good as nothing of them: to wit, not the phenomenon itself, but only the mere category; whereto—as to an order laid down in advance—it in truth does not belong. He to whom there seems nothing comprehensible in Lohengrin beyond the category "Christian-Romantic," comprehends alone an accidental surface, but not its underlying essence. This essence, the essence of [344] a strictly new and hitherto unbroached phenomenon, can be comprehended by that faculty alone whereby is brought to man, in every instance, the fodder for his categorical understanding: and this is the purely physical faculty of Feeling. But only an artwork that presents itself in fullest physical show, can convey the new 'stuff,' with due insistence, to this emotional faculty; and only he who has taken-in this artwork in that complete embodiment—i.e. the emotional-man who has thus experienced an entire satisfaction of his highest powers of receiving—can also compass the new 'stuff' in all its

bearings.

Here I touch the tragic feature in the situation of the true Artist towards the life of the Present, that very situation to which I gave artistic effect in the Lohengrin story.—The most natural and urgent longing of such an artist is, to be taken up without reserve into the Feeling, and by it understood; and the *impossibility*—under the modern conditions of our art-life—of meeting with this Feeling in such a state of freedom and undoubting sureness as he needs for being fully understood,—the *compulsion* to address himself almost solely to the critical Understanding, instead of to the Feeling: this it is, that forms the tragic element in his situation; this it is, that, as an artist made of flesh and blood, I could not help but feel; and this, that, on the pathway of my further evolution, was to be forced so on my consciousness that I broke at last into open revolt against the burden of that situation.—

I now approach the account of my latest evolutionary period, which I must treat at somewhat greater length; since the chief aim of this Communication has been to correct the apparent contradictions which might be discovered betwixt the nature of my artistic works and the character of my recently-uttered views on Art and its true position toward Life,—contradictions which have already, in part, been held up to opprobrium by superficial critics. In strict connection with what I have already said, I shall proceed to this account, by way of the unbroken history of my artistic doings and the moods of mind from which they sprang.—

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Criticism had proved itself unequal to alter the denouement of my *Lohengrin*, and by this victorious issue of the encounter between my instinctive artistic Feeling and the modern Critical conscience, my zeal for its artistic completion was kindled to yet brighter flame. In this *completion*, I felt, would lie the *demonstration* of the rightness of my feeling. It was clear to my inner sense, that an essential ground of misunderstanding of the tragical significance of my hero had lain in the assumption that Lohengrin, having descended from a glittering realm of painlessly-uneared and cold magnificence, and in obedience to an unnatural law that bound him will-lessly thereto, now turned his back upon the strife of earthly passions, to taste again the pleasures of divinity. As the chief lesson that this taught me, was the wilfulness of the modern critical mode of viewing things, which looks away from the instinctive aspect and twists them round to suit its purpose; and as it was easy for me to see that this misunderstanding had simply sprung from a wilful interpretation of that binding law, which in truth was no outwardly-imposed decree, but the expression of the necessary inner nature of one who, from the midst of lonely splendour, is athirst for being understood through *Love*: so, to ensure the desired correct impression, I held all the faster to the original outlines of the legend, whose naïve innocence had made so irresistible an impression upon myself. In order to artistically convey these outlines in entire accordance with the effect that they had made on me, I observed a still greater fidelity than in the case of "Tannhäuser," in my presentment of those half-historical, half-legendary features by which alone a subject so out of the beaten path could be brought with due conviction to the answering senses. This led me, in the conduct of the scenes (*scenische Haltung*) and dialogue (*sprachlichen Ausdruck*), to a path which brought me later to the discovery of possibilities whose logical sequence was certainly to point me out an utter revolution in the adjustment of those factors which have hitherto made up our [346] operatic mode of speech. But toward this path, also, I was led by *one* sole impulse, namely to convey to others as vividly and intelligibly as possible, what my own mind's eye had seen; and here, again, it was always the subject-matter that governed me in my every choice of form. Utmost clearness was the chief endeavour of my working-out; and that not the superficial clearness wherewith a shallow object greets us, but the rich and many-coloured light wherein alone a comprehensive, broad-related subject can intelligibly display itself, and yet which cannot help but seem superficial, and often downright obscure, to

those accustomed to mere form without contents.—

It was midst this struggle for clearness of exposition, as I remember, that the essence of the heart of Woman, such as I had to picture in the loving *Elsa*, first dawned upon me with more and more distinctness. The artist can only attain the power of convincing portraiture, when he has been able to sink himself with fullest sympathy into the essence of the character to be portrayed. (35) In "Elsa" I saw, from the commencement, my desired antithesis to Lohengrin,—yet naturally, not so absolute an antithesis as should lie far removed from his own nature, but rather the *other half* of his being,—the antithesis which is included in his general nature (36) and forms the necessarily longed-for complement of his specific man-hood. *Elsa* is the Unconscious, the Undeliberate (*Unwillkürliche*), into which Lohengrin's conscious, deliberate (*willkürliche*) being yearns to be redeemed; but this *yearning*, again, is itself the unconscious, undeliberate Necessity in Lohengrin, whereby he feels himself akin to *Elsa*'s being. Through the capability of this "unconscious consciousness," such as I myself now felt [347] alike with Lohengrin, the nature of Woman also—and that precisely as I felt impelled to the faithfullest portrayal of its essence—came to ever clearer understanding in my inner mind. Through this power I succeeded in so completely transferring myself to this female principle, that I came to an entire agreement with its utterance by my loving *Elsa*. I grew to find her so justified in the final outburst of her jealousy, that from this very outburst I learnt first to thoroughly understand the purely-human element of love; and I suffered deep and actual grief—often welling into bitter tears—as I saw the tragical necessity of the parting, the unavoidable undoing of this pair of lovers. This woman, who with clear foreknowledge rushes on her doom, for sake of Love's imperative behest,—who, amid the ecstasy of adoration, wills yet to lose her all, if so be she cannot all-embrace her loved one; this woman, who in her contact with this Lohengrin, of all men, must founder, and in doing so, must shipwreck her beloved too; this woman, who can love but thus and not otherwise, who, by the very outburst of her jealousy, wakes first from out the thrill of worship into the full reality of Love, and by her wreck reveals its essence to him who had not fathomed it as yet; this glorious woman, before whom Lohengrin must vanish, for reason that his own specific nature could not understand her,—I had found her *now*: and the random shaft that I had shot towards the treasure dreamt but hitherto *unknown*, was my own Lohengrin, whom now I must give up as lost; to track more certainly the footsteps of that *true Woman-hood*, which should one day bring to me and all the world redemption, after Man-hood's egoism, even in its noblest form, had shivered into self-crushed dust before her.—*Elsa*, the Woman,—Woman hitherto un-understood by me, and understood at last,—that most positive expression of the purest instinct of the senses, (37) —made me a Revolutionary at one blow. She was the Spirit of the [348] Folk, for whose redeeming hand I too, as artist-man, was longing.—

But this treasure trove of Knowledge lay hid, at first, within the silence of my lonely heart: only slowly did it ripen into loud avowal.—

I must now recall the outward situation of my life, at that time when—with long and frequent interruptions—I was working out my *Lohengrin*. This situation was at the utmost variance with my inner mood. I drew back into ever greater seclusion, and lived in intimate communion almost solely with one friend, (38) who went so far in his sympathy with *my* artistic evolution as to quell the natural impulse to develop, and gain credit for, his own artistic talents—as he himself confessed to me. Nothing could I wish so much, as to create in undisturbed retirement; the possibility of intelligibly conveying the result to others, albeit the one thing needful, then scarcely troubled me at all. I consoled myself by saying that my loneliness was no egoistic, self-sought thing, but absolutely imposed upon me by the

wilderness around. But *one* distasteful bond still chained me to our public art-affairs,— the obligation of taking thought for pecuniary profit from my works, in order to eke out my ways and means. Thus had I still to care for outer success, although I had already renounced it for myself and inner needs.

Berlin had declined my *Tannhäuser*: no longer for my self, but for the sake of others, (39) I bestirred myself to secure the production there of my *Rienzi*, a work I had long since done with. My sole reason for this step was the experience of this opera's success in Dresden, and a calculation of the outward advantage which a like success in Berlin would bring me, in the shape of the *tantièmes* I should there secure from the receipts of the performances. [349] —I remember with horror, into what a sludge of contradictions of the vilest sort I was plunged by this sheer solicitude for outward gain, amid my already fixed ideas regarding human-things artistic. I was forced to yield myself to the entire modern crime of hypocrisy and deceit: people whom I despised from the bottom of my heart, I flattered, or at least sedulously concealed from them my inner sentiments, because, as circumstances were, they had within their hands the success or failure of my enterprise; crafty men, who were ranged upon the side the farthest from my own true nature, and of whom I knew that they as mistrustfully disliked me as they themselves were repugnant to my inner feeling, I sought by an assumed ingenuousness to rob of their suspicion,—though with small chance of actually effecting this, as I pretty soon discovered. Naturally, this whole behaviour stayed without its only intended result, since I was but a 'prentice hand at lying: my candid opinion, which had a knack of always breaking out, just simply turned me from a dangerous into a ridiculous being. For instance, nothing did me more harm than a remark which, conscious of the better work I now could do, I made in an address to the performers at the commencement of the general rehearsal; when I described the excessive demands made by *Rienzi* on their strength, and only to be met by great exertion, as an "art-crime of my youth." The reporters served this saying to the public steaming-hot, and gave it thus the cue for its demeanour towards a work which the composer himself had characterised as "a miserable failure" (*ein "durchaus verfehltes"*), and whose presentation to the art-cultured public of Berlin was therefore a piece of audacity that cried for chastisement.—Thus I had, in truth, to ascribe my ill success in Berlin more to my badly-acted rôle of diplomat, than to my opera itself; which, if I had only gone to work with a complete belief in its merits and in my own eagerness to bring them forward, would possibly have made as good a 'hit' in that city as other works of far less effectiveness (*Wirkungskraft*) have done.

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It was a hideous state of mind, in which I returned from Berlin. Only those who have misread my often lasting outbursts of unbridled ironical mirth, could shut their eyes to the fact that I now felt all the more wretched as I had made shipwreck with my enforced attempts at self-dishonouring—commonly called worldly wisdom. Never was the ghastly curb that the unbreakable connection of our modern Art and modern Life imposes on a man's free heart, and makes him bad, more clear to me than at that time. Was there any possible outlet for a single-handed man to find, but—Death? How laughable must seem to me those knowing gabies, who deemed it a point of honour to see nothing in the yearning for this Death but a "residue of Christian exaltation, already overcome by Science," and thus objectionable! If, in my longing to escape from the worthlessness of the modern world, I showed myself a *Christian*,—then I was a more honest Christian than any of those who now, with smug impertinence, upbraid me for my lapse from Christianity.—

One thing, only, kept me on end: *my art*, which for me was no mere mean to fame and gain, but to the proclamation of my thoughts to feeling hearts. When, therefore, I had exorcised that *outer* fiend which had lately tempted me to speculate on outward profit, I for the first time became plainly conscious of how imperative a necessity it was to me, to busy

myself about the formation of that artistic organ through which I might impart my aim to others. This organ was *the theatre*, or better still: the Art of Stage-portrayal, which I recognised each day more clearly as the only redeemer of the Poet, who through it alone can see the object of his Will contented in the certainty of physically-accomplished Deed. On this weightiest point of all, I had hitherto been yielding myself more and more to the hazards of Chance: *now* I felt that it was a question of here, at a definite place and under definite conditions, bringing the right and needful thing to pass; and that it never could be brought to pass, if one's hand were not stretched out at once to work that lay the closest. The [351] winning of the possibility of seeing my artistic views completely realised in the flesh, by the art of Stage-portrayal, no matter where—and therefore best at Dresden, where I was and worked,—seemed henceforth to me my nighest worthy goal; and in the struggle for its reach, I for the moment looked quite away from the constitution of that Public which I thought to gain myself by the mere fact of setting scenic performances so intellectually and physically complete before it, that the sympathy to be wrested from its purely-human Feeling would let it easily be led towards a higher plane.

In this sense I turned back to that art-institute in whose guidance I had already shared, as Kapellmeister, for nigh upon six years. I say: turned *back* to it; since my experiences, reaped thus far, had already reduced me to a state of hopeless indifference in its regard.—The ground of my inner repugnance to taking the post of Kapellmeister to any theatre, especially a Court theatre, had become ever clearer to my perception, in the course of my practical discharge of the duties of that office. Our theatrical institutions have, in general, no other end in view than to cater for a nightly entertainment, never energetically demanded, but forced down people's throats by the spirit of Speculation, and lazily swallowed by the social Ennui of the dwellers in our larger cities. Whatever, from a purely artistic standpoint, has rebelled against this mission of the stage, has always shown itself too weak for any good. The only regulator of distinctions, has been the *section* for whom this entertainment was to be provided: for the *rabble*, brought up in tutored grossness, coarse farces and crass monstrosities were served; the decorous *Philistines* of our bourgeoisie were treated to moral family-pieces; for the more delicately cultured, and art-spoilt *higher* and *highest classes*, only the most elegant art-viands were dished up, often garnished with aesthetic quips. The genuine Poet, who from time to time sought to make good his claim, among those of the three above-named classes, was always driven back with a taunt peculiar to our theatre-public, [352] the taunt of Ennui—at least until he had become an antiquarian morsel wherewith conveniently to grace that art-repast.

Now the special feature of our *greater* theatrical institutions consists in this, that they plan their performances to catch the taste of all three classes of the public; they are provided with an auditorium wherein those classes range themselves entirely apart, according to the figure of their entrance-money, thus placing the artist in the predicament of seeking-out his hearers now among the so-called 'Gods,' now in the Pit, and again in the Boxes. The Director of such institutions, who proximately has no other concern than to make money, has therefore to please each section of his public in its turn: this he arranges, generally with an eye to the business character of the day of the week, by furnishing the most diverse products of the playwright's art, giving today a vulgar burlesque, tomorrow a piece of Philistine sensationalism, and the day after, a toothsome delicacy for the epicures. This still left one thing to be aimed at, namely from all three mentioned *genera* to concoct a *genre* of stage-piece which should satisfy the whole public at one stroke. That task the modern Opera has with great energy fulfilled: it has thrown the vulgar, the philistinish, and the exquisite into one common pot, and now sets the broth before the entire public, crowded head on head. The Opera has thus succeeded in fining down the mob, in vulgarising the genteel, and finally in turning the whole conglomerate audience into a superfinely-mobbish Philistine; who now, in

the shape of the Theatre-public, flings his confused demands into the face of every man who undertakes the guidance of an Art-institute.

This position of affairs will not give a moment's uneasiness to *that* Stage-director whose only business is to charm the money out of the pockets of the "Public": the said problem is solved, even with great tact and never-failing certainty, by every Director of the un-subsidised theatres of our large or smaller cities. It operates confusingly, however, upon those who are called by a royal Court to [353] manage an exactly similar institution, differing only in that it is lent the Court aegis to cover any contingent deficiency in the 'takings.' In virtue of this protecting aegis, the Director of such a Court-theatre ought to feel bound to look aside from any speculation on the already corrupted taste of the masses, and rather to endeavour to improve that taste by seeing to it that the spirit of the stage performances be governed by the dictates of a higher art-intelligence. And, as a matter of fact, such was originally the good intention of enlightened princes, like Joseph II. of Austria, in founding their Court-theatres; as a tradition, it has also been transmitted to the Court-theatre Intendants even of our later days. Two practical obstacles, however, have stood in the way of realising this—in itself more munificently chimerical than actually attainable—object: firstly, the personal incapacity of the appointed Intendant, who is chosen from the ranks of court-officials mostly without any regard to acquired professional skill, or even so much as natural disposition to artistic sensibility; and secondly, the impossibility of really dispensing with speculation on the Public's taste. In fact, the ampler monetary support of the Court-theatres has only led to an increase in the price of the artistic *matériel*, the systematic cultivation whereof, so far as concerns theatric art, has never occurred to the else so education-rabid leaders of our State; and thus the expenses of these institutions have mounted so high, that it has become a sheer necessity to the Director of a Court theatre, beyond all others, to speculate upon the paying public, without whose active help the outlay could not possibly be met. But on the other hand, a successful pursuit of this speculation, in the same sense as that of any other theatrical manager, is made impossible to the distinguished Court-theatre-intendant by the feeling of his higher mission; a mission, however, which—in his personal incapacity for rightly fathoming its import—has been only taken in the sense of a shadowy Court dignity, and could be so interpreted that, for any particularly foolish arrangement, the Intendant [354] would excuse himself by saying that in a Court-theatre this was nobody's business. Thus a modern Court-theatre-intendant's skill can only, and inevitably, result in the perpetual exhibition of a conflict between a *second-rate* spirit of speculation and a courtier's red-tape arrogance. An insight into this dilemma is so easy to be gained, that I here have merely alluded to the situation, without any wish to throw its details into higher relief.

That no one, even the best intentioned, and—to give every man his due—the most accessible to good advice, can wrest himself from the iron grip of this unnatural situation, without he finally decide to give his office up for good: this could not but become perfectly plain to me from my Dresden experiences. These experiences, themselves, I scarcely think it necessary to describe more closely; hardly will it need assurance that, after constantly renewed, and as constantly proved fruitless, endeavours to gain from the good-will of my Intendant toward myself a definitely favourable influence on the affairs of the theatre, I at last fell into a quagmire of torturing cross-purposes, from which I could only free myself again by giving up the attempt entirely, and adhering strictly to the letter of my duties.—

When, then, I left this temporary reserve, and turned my thoughts again towards the Stage, this—in view of the proved fruitlessness of all detached attempts—could only be in the sense of a fundamental and *complete* reform thereof. I could but see that I here had not to do with isolated phenomena, but with a wide connexus of phenomena, whereof I was gradually forced to recognise that *it*, also, was inextricably involved in the endless-branching system of our whole social and political affairs. While pondering on the possibility of a thorough change in

our theatrical relations, I was insensibly driven to a full perception of *the worthlessness of that social and political system which, of its very nature, could beget no other public art-conditions than precisely those I then was grappling with.*—This knowledge was of decisive consequence for the further development of my whole life

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Never had I occupied myself with politics, strictly so called. I now remember that I only turned my attention to the phenomena of the political world in exact measure as in them was manifested the spirit of Revolution—*i.e.*, as pure Human Nature rebelled against politico-juristic Formalism. In this sense a criminal case had the same interest for me as a political action; I could only take the side of the suffering party, and, indeed, in exact measure of vehemence as it was engaged in resisting any kind of oppression. I have never been able to relinquish this manner of 'taking sides,' in favour of any politically constructive notion. Therefore was my interest in the world of politics always in so far of an artistic nature, as I looked beneath its formal expression into its purely human contents. Only when I could strip off from the phenomena their formal shell, fashioned from the traditions of Juristic Rights, and light upon their inward kernel of purely human essence, could they arouse my sympathy; for here I then saw the same impelling motive which drove myself, as artist-man, to wrest from the evil physical form of the Present a new physical mould which should correspond to the true essence of humanity—a mould which is only to be gained through destruction of the physical form of the Present, and therefore through Revolution.

Thus, from my artistic standpoint, and specially on the forementioned path of pondering on the reconstruction of the Stage, (40) I had arrived at a point where I was in a position to thoroughly recognise the necessity of the commencing Revolution of 1848. The formal political channel into which—particularly in Dresden—the stream of agitation first poured itself, did not indeed deceive me as to the true nature of the Revolution; still I held myself at first aloof from any manner of share therein. I set about drawing up a comprehensive plan for the reorganisation of the theatre, in order to be fully equipped so soon as ever [356] the revolutionary question should reach this institution also. It did not escape me that, in a new arrangement of the Civil List, such as was to be expected, the object of the subvention for the Theatre would be submitted to a searching criticism. As it was to be foreseen that, so soon as this question arose, the public utility of the employment of that money would be disputed, my proposed plan was to start with an admission of this uselessness and aimlessness, not only from the standpoint of political economy, but also from that of purely artistic interests; but it was at like time to show the true social aim of theatric art, and to bring the necessity of providing such an aim with all the needful means for its attainment before those who, with righteous indignation, could see nothing in our *existing* Theatre but a useless, or even harmful public institution.

All this was prompted by the assumption of a peaceful *solution* of the imminent, more reformatory than revolutionary questions, and of the serious will of those in power, to themselves set on foot an actual reform. The course of political events was soon to teach me a different lesson; Reaction and Revolution set themselves squarely face to face, and the necessity arose, to either return completely to the Old, or thoroughly break therewith. My observation of the utter haziness of the views of the contending parties, as to the essential contents of the Revolution, decided me one day to openly declare myself *against* the purely formal and political conception of this Revolution, and *for* the necessity of keeping its purely human kernel plainly in the eye. From the results of this step I now saw, for the first time unmistakably, how our politicians were situated with regard to a knowledge of the true spirit of Revolution, and that genuine Revolution could never come from Above, from the standpoint of erudite intellect, but only from Below, from the urgency of true human need. The lying and hypocrisy of the political parties filled me with a disgust that drove me back, at

first, into the most utter solitude.

Here my energy, unsatisfied without, consumed itself [357] once more in projects for artistic work.—Two such projects, which had occupied my thoughts for some time previously, now claimed my attention wellnigh at the same moment; indeed, the character of their subjects made them almost seem to me as one. Even during the musical composition of *Lohengrin*, midst which I had always felt as though resting by an oasis in the desert, *both* these subjects had usurped my poetic fancy: they were "Siegfried" and "Frederic Barbarossa."—

Once again, and that the last time, did Myth and History stand before me with opposing claims; this while, as good as forcing me to decide whether it was a musical drama, or a spoken play, that I had to write. A closer narration of the conflict that lay behind this question, I have purposely reserved until this stage, because it was *here* first that I arrived at its definite answer, and thus at a full consciousness of its true nature.

Since my return to Germany from Paris, my favourite study had been that of ancient German lore I have already dwelt on the deep longing for my native home that filled me then. This Home, however, in its actual reality, could nowise satisfy my longing; thus I felt that a deeper instinct lay behind my impulse, and one that needs must have its source in some other yearning than merely for the modern homeland. As though to get down to its root, I sank myself into the primal element of Home, that meets us in the legends of a Past which attracts us the more warmly as the Present repels us with its hostile chill. To all our wishes and warm impulses, which in truth transport us to the *Future*, we seek to give a physical token by means of pictures from the Past, and thus to win for them *a* form the modern Present never can provide In the struggle to give the wishes of my heart artistic shape, and in the ardour to discover *what* thing it was that drew me so resistlessly to the primal source of old home Sagas, I drove step by step into the deeper regions of antiquity, where at last to my delight, and truly in the *utmost* reaches of old time, I was to light upon the fair young form of [358] *Man*, in all the freshness of his force My studies thus bore me, through the legends of the Middle Ages, right down to their foundation in the old-Germanic Mythos; one swathing after another, which the later legendary lore had bound around it, I was able to unloose, and thus at last to gaze upon it in its chastest beauty. What here I saw, was no longer the Figure of conventional history, whose garment claims our interest more than does the actual shape inside; but the real naked Man, in whom I might spy each throbbing of his pulses, each stir within his mighty muscles, in uncramped, freest motion: the type of the true *human being*.

At like time I had sought this human being *in History too*. Here offered themselves *relations*, and nothing but relations; the *human being* I could only see in so far as the relations ordered him: and not as he had power to order *them*. To get to the bottom of these 'relations,' whose coercive force compelled the strongest man to squander all his powers on objectless and never-compassed aims, I turned afresh to the soil of Greek antiquity, and here, again, was pointed at the last *to Mythos*, in which alone I could touch the ground of even these *relations*: but in that Mythos, these social relations were drawn in lines as simple, plastic and distinct as I had earlier recognised therein the human shape itself. From this side, also, did Mythos lead me to this Man alone, as to the involuntary *creator* of those relations, which, in their documento-monumental perversion, as the excrescences of History (*Geschichtsmomente*), as traditional fictions and established rights, have at last usurped dominion over Man and ground to dust his freedom.

Although the splendid type of *Siegfried* had long attracted me, it first enthralled my every thought when I had come to see it in its purest human shape, set free from every later wrappage Now for the first time, also, did I recognise the possibility of making him the hero

of a drama; a possibility that had not occurred to me while I [359] only knew him from the medieval *Nibelungenlied*. But at like time with him, had *Friedrich I.* loomed on me from the study of our History: he appeared to me, just as he had appeared to the Saga-framing German Folk, a historical rebirth of the old-pagan Siegfried. When the wave of political commotion broke lately in upon us, and proclaimed itself at first, in Germany, as a longing for national unity, it could not but seem to me that Friedrich I. would lie nearer to the Folk, (41) and be more readily understood, than the downright human Siegfried. Already I had sketched the plan for a drama in five acts, which should depict this Friedrich's life, from the Roncalian Diet down to his entry on the Crusade. But ever and again I turned in discontentment from my plan. It was no mere desire to mirror detached historical events, that had prompted my sketch, but the wish to show a wide connexus of relations, in such a fashion that its unity might be embraced in easy survey, and understood at once. In order to make plainly understandable both my hero and the relations that with giant force he strives to master, only to be at last subdued by them, I should have felt compelled to adopt the method of Mythos, in the very teeth of the historic material: the vast mass of incidents and intricate associations, whereof no single link could be omitted if the connection of the whole was to be intelligibly set before the eye, was adapted neither to the form, nor to the spirit of Drama. Had I chosen to comply with the imperative demands of History, then had my drama become an unsurveyable conglomerate of pictured incidents, entirely crowding out from view the real and only thing I wished to show; and thus, as artist, I should have met precisely the same fate in my drama as [360] did its hero: to wit, I should myself have been crushed by the weight of the very *relations* that I fain would master—i.e. portray—, without ever having brought my *purpose* to an understanding; just as Friedrich could not bring his *will* to carrying-out To attain my purpose, I should therefore have had to reduce this mass of relations by *free* construction, and should have fallen into a treatment that would have absolutely violated History. (42) Yet I could not but see the contradiction involved herein; for it was the main characteristic of Friedrich, in my eyes, that he should be a *historical* hero. If, on the other hand, I wished to dabble in mythical construction, then, for its ultimate and highest form, but quite beyond the modern poet's reach, I must go back to the unadulterated Mythos, which up to now the Folk alone has hymned, and which I had already found in full perfection—in the "Siegfried."

I now returned to "Siegfried"—at the selfsame time as, disgusted with the empty formalistic tendency of the doings of our political parties, I withdrew from contact with our public life—and that with a full conviction of History's unsuitedness to Art. But at like time I had definitely solved for myself a problem of artistic formalism: namely, the question of the applicability of the pure, i.e. the merely spoken, Play (*Schauspiel*) to the Drama of the Future. This question by no means presented itself to me from the formal æsthetic standpoint, but I happened on it through the very character of the poetic 'stuff' to be portrayed; which character alone, henceforth, laid down my lines of treatment When outward instigations prompted me to take up the sketch of "Friedrich Rothbart," I did not for a moment doubt that it could only be dealt with as a spoken play, and by no manner of means as a drama to be set to music. In that [361] period of my life when I conceived *Rienzi*; it might perhaps have struck me to regard the "Rothbart," also, as an opera subject: now, when it was no longer my purpose to write operas, but before all to give forth my poetic thoughts (*Anschaungen*) in the most living of artistic forms, to wit in Drama, I had not the remotest idea of handling a historico-political subject otherwise than as a spoken play. Yet when I put aside this 'stuff,' it was nowise from any scruple that might perchance have come to me as opera-poet and composer, and forbidden me to leave the trade that I was versed in: no, it came about—as I have shown—simply because I learnt to see the general unfitness of the *Stuff for drama*; and

this, again, grew clear to me, not merely from any scruple as to the artistic form, but from dissatisfaction of that same sheer human feeling that in actual life was set on edge by the political formalism of our era. I felt that the highest of what I had seen from the purely human standpoint, and longed to show to others, could *not* be imparted in the treatment of a historico-political subject; that the mere intellectual exposition of *relations* made impossible to me the presentment of the purely human Individuality; that I should therefore have had to leave to be *unriddled* the only and essential thing I was concerned with, and not to bring it actually and sensibly before the Feeling. For these reasons, together with the historico-political *subject* I necessarily also cast aside that dramatic *art-form* with which alone it could have been invested: for I recognised that this form had issued only from that subject, and by it alone was justifiable, but that it was altogether incapable of convincingly imparting to the Feeling the purely-human subject on which alone my gaze was henceforth bent; and thus that, with the disappearance of the historico-political subject, there must also necessarily vanish, in the future, the spoken form of play (*die Schauspielform*), as inadequate to meet the novel subject, incongruous and halting.

I have said that it was not my profession of Opera-composer that caused me to give up a story merely fitted [362] for the Play: nevertheless I must avow, that a recognition of the essence of the spectacular play and of the historico-political subject that demands this form, such as had now arisen in me, could certainly *not* have come to any absolute playwright or dramatic litterateur, but only to a man and artist who had passed through a development like mine, under the influence of the spirit of *music*.—Already in speaking of my Paris period, I have mentioned how I looked on Music as the good angel, who, amid my revolt against the baseness of modern public art, preserved me as an artist and saved me from the mere literary activity of the critic. In that paragraph, I reserved to myself the opportunity of describing somewhat more closely the influence that my musical predisposition (*Stimmung*) exerted on the fashioning of my artistic works. Although the character of this influence can scarcely have escaped anyone who has attentively followed the account of the origination of my poems, yet I must here return to the matter still more explicitly, since it was precisely now that, in forming an important artistic decision, this influence came to my full consciousness.

As far as my *Rienzi* I had it only in my mind to write an "opera." To this end I sought out my materials, and, merely concerned for "opera," I chose them from ready-made stories, and indeed from such as had already been fashioned with deliberate attention to artistic form: (43) a dramatic fairy-tale of Gozzi's, a play of Shakespeare's, and finally a romance of Bulwer's, I arranged for the sole end of Opera. With regard to the *Rienzi*, I have already said that I manipulated the story—as, for the matter of that, was unavoidable, from the very nature of a historical romance—according to my own impressions, and in such a manner as—to recall my expression—I had seen it through the "opera-glasses." With the *Flying Dutchman*, whose origin from specific moods of my own life I have already sufficiently [363] described, I struck out a new path; inasmuch as I became, myself; the artistic modeller of a 'stuff' that lay before me only in the blunt and simple outlines of Folk-Saga. Henceforward, with all my dramatic works, I was in the first instance *Poet*, and only in the complete working-out of the poem, did I become once more Musician. Only, I was a poet who was conscious in advance of the faculty of *musical* expression, for the working-out of his poems. This faculty I had exercised so far, that I was fully aware of my ability to employ it on the realisation of a poetic aim, and not only to reckon on its help when drafting a poetic sketch, but in that knowledge to draw such sketch itself more *freely*, and more in accordance with poetic necessity, than if I had designed merely with an eye to the musical effect. Before this, I had had to acquire facility of musical expression in the same manner as one learns a language. He who has not made himself thoroughly at home with a foreign, unaccustomed tongue, must pay heed to its idiosyncrasies in everything he says; to express himself intelligibly, he must keep a constant

watch upon this mode of utterance itself, and deliberately reckon for it *What* he desires to say. Wherefore, for every sentence he is entangled in the formal rules of speech, and cannot as yet speak out from his instinctive Feeling, and altogether *how* he means to, *what* he feels and what he sees. The rather, for their utterance, he must model his feelings and seeings, themselves, on a form of expression whereof he is not so completely master as of his mother-tongue; in which latter, entirely careless of expression, he finds the correct expression without an effort.

Now, however, I had completely learnt the speech of Music; I was at home with it, as with a genuine mother-tongue; in what I wished to utter, I need no more be careful for the formal mode: it stood ready at my call, exactly as I needed it, to impart a definite impression or emotion (*Anschauung oder Empfindung*) in keeping with my inner impulse. But one can never speak a foreign tongue without fatigue, and at like time thoroughly correctly, until one has taken up its spirit into oneself; until one feels [364] and thinks in this tongue, and thus desires to utter nothing but that which can be uttered in its spirit. When, however, we have arrived at speaking entirely from out the spirit of a tongue, at feeling and thinking quite instinctively therein, there also springs up in us the power of broadening this very spirit, of enriching and extending at once the mode of utterance and the utter-able in that tongue. Yet that which is utterable in the speech of Music, is limited to *feelings* and *emotions*: it expresses, in abundance, that which has been cast adrift from our Word-speech (*Wortsprache*) at its conversion into a mere organ of the Intellect, namely, the emotional contents of Purely-human speech. What thus remains unutterable in the absolute-musical tongue, is the exact definition of the *object* of the feeling and emotion, whereby the latter reach themselves a surer definition. The broadening and extension of the Musical form of speech (*musikalischer Sprachausdruck*), as called for by this Object, therefore consists in the attainment of the power to outline sharply and distinctly the Individual and the Particular; and this it gains alone by being wed to Word-speech. But then only can this marriage prove a fruitful one, when the Musical-speech allies itself directly to its kindred elements in Word-speech; the union must take place precisely *there*, where in Word-speech itself there is evinced a mastering desire for real utterance of Feeling to the senses. This, again, is governed by the *matter* to be uttered (*Inhalt des Auszudrückenden*), and the degree in which it becomes, from a matter of the intellect, a matter of the feeling. A Matter that is only seizable by the Understanding, can be conveyed alone by means of Word-speech; but the more it expands into a phase of Feeling, the more definitely does it also need a mode of expression that Tone-speech alone can, at the last, confer on it with answering fulness. Herewith is laid down, quite of itself; the Matter of what the Word-Tone poet has to utter: it is, *the Purely-human, freed from every shackle of Convention*.

With the attained facility of speaking in this Tone-speech [365] freely from my heart, I naturally could only have to give my message also in the spirit of that speech; and where, as artist-man, I felt the most peremptorily urged to its delivery, the Matter of my message was necessarily dictated by the Spirit of the means of expression that I had made my own. The poetic 'stuffs' which urged me to artistic fashioning, could only be of such a nature that, before all else, they usurped my emotional, and not my intellectual being: only the Purely-human (*Reinmenschliche*), loosed from all historical formality, could—once it came before my vision in its genuine natural shape, unruffled from outside—arouse my interest, and spur me on to impart what I beheld. What I beheld, I now looked at solely with the eyes of Music; though not of *that* music whose formal maxims might have held me still embarrassed for expression, but of the music which I had within my heart, and wherein I might express myself as in a mother-tongue. With this freedom of faculty, I now might

address myself without a hindrance to *that to be expressed*; henceforth the *object* of expression was the sole matter for regard in all my workmanship. Thus, precisely by the acquirement of facility in musical expression, did I become a *poet*; inasmuch as I no longer had, as fashioning artist, to refer to the mode of expression itself, but only to its object. Yet, without deliberately setting about an enrichment of the means of musical expression, I was absolutely driven to expand them, by the very nature of the objects I was seeking to express.

Now it lay conditioned in the nature of an advance from musical emotionalism (*Empfindungswesen*) to the shaping of poetic stuffs, that I should condense (44) the vague, more general emotional contents of these stuffs to an ever clearer and more individual precision, and thus at last arrive at the point where the poet, in his direct concern with Life, takes a firmer hold of the matter to be conveyed through musical expression, and stamps it with his own intent Whosoever, [366] therefore, will carefully consider the construction (*Bildung*) of the three accompanying poems, will find that what I drew in haziest outline in the *Flying Dutchman*, I brought with ever plainer definition into stabler form in *Tannhäuser*, and finally in *Lohengrin*. Since by such a procedure I was enabled to draw nearer and nearer to actual Life, I must inevitably reach a point of time at last, when, under certain external impressions, a poetic subject such as that of "*Friedrich Rothbart*" would present itself to me, for whose modelling I should have had to downright renounce all musical expression. But it was precisely here, that my hitherto *unconscious* procedure came to my *consciousness* as an artistic Necessity. With this 'stuff,' which would have made me altogether forget my music, I became aware of the bearings of true poetic stuffs in general; and *there, where I must have left unused my faculty of musical expression, I also found that I should have had to subordinate my poetic attainments to political abstractions, and thus to radically forswear my artistic nature.*—Here was it, also, that I had the most urgent occasion to clear my mind as to the essential difference between the historico-political, and the purely-human life; and when I knowingly and willingly gave up the "*Friedrich*," in which I had approached the closest to that political life, and—by so much the clearer as to what I wished—gave preference to the "*Siegfried*," I had entered a new and most decisive period of my evolution, both as artist and as man the period of *conscious artistic will* to continue on an altogether novel path, which I had struck with unconscious necessity, and whereon I now, as man and artist, press on to meet a newer world. (45)

I have here described the influence that my possession with the spirit of Music exerted on the choice of my poetic stuffs, and therewith on their poetic fashioning. I have next to show the reaction that my poetic procedure, thus influenced, exercised in turn upon my musical expression and its form.—This reaction manifested itself chiefly in [367] *two* departments: in the *dramatic-musical form* in general, and in the *melody* in particular.

Seeing that, onward from the said turning-point of my artistic course, I was once for all determined by *the stuff*, and by that stuff as seen with the eye of Music: so in its fashioning, I must necessarily pass forward to a gradual but complete upheaval of the traditional *operatic form*. This opera-form was never, of its very nature, a form embracing the whole Drama, but the rather an arbitrary conglomerate of separate smaller forms of song, whose fortuitous concatenation of Arias, Duos, Trios, &c., with Choruses and so-called ensemble-pieces, made out the actual edifice of Opera. In the poetic fashioning of my stuffs, it was henceforth impossible for me to contemplate a filling of these ready-moulded forms, but solely a bringing of the drama's broader Object to the cognisance of the Feeling. In the whole course of the drama I saw no possibility of division or demarcation, other than the Acts in which the place or time, or the Scenes in which the *dramatis personae* change. Moreover, the plastic unity of the Mythic Stuff brought with it this advantage, that, in the arrangement of my Scenes, all those minor details, which the modern playwright finds so indispensable for the elucidation of involved historical occurrences, were quite unnecessary, and the whole strength

of the portrayal could be concentrated upon a few weighty and decisive moments of development. Upon the working-out of these fewer scenes, in each of which a decisive *stimmung* was to be given its full play, I might linger with an exhaustiveness already reckoned-for in the original draft; I was not compelled to make shift with mere suggestions, and—for sake of the outward economy—to hasten on from one suggestion to another; but with needful repose, I could display the simple object in the very last connections required to bring it clearly home to the dramatic understanding. Through this natural attribute of the Stuff, I was not in the least coerced to strain the planning of my scenes into any preconceived conformity with given musical forms, [368] since they dictated of themselves their mode of musical completion. In the ever surer feeling hereof, it thus could no more occur to me to rack with wilful outward canons the musical form that sprang self-bidden from the very nature of these scenes, to break its natural mould by violent grafting-in of conventional slips of operatic song. Thus I by no means set out with the fixed purpose of a deliberate iconoclast (*Formumänderer*— lit: changer of forms) (46) to destroy, forsooth, the prevailing operatic forms, of Aria, Duet, &c.; but the omission of these forms followed from the very nature of the Stuff, with whose intelligible presentment to the Feeling through an adequate vehicle, I had alone to do. A mechanical reflex (*unwillkürliches Wissen*) of those traditional forms still influenced me so much in my *Flying Dutchman*, that any attentive investigator will recognise how often there it governed even the arrangement of my scenes; and only gradually, in *Tannhäuser*, and yet more decisively in *Lohengrin*—accordingly, with a more and more practised knowledge of the nature of my Stuff and the means necessary for its presentment—did I extricate myself from that form-al influence, and more and more definitely rule the Form of portrayal by the requirements and peculiarities of the Stuff and Situation.

This procedure, dictated by the nature of the poetic [369] subject, exercised a quite specific influence on the *tissue* of my music, as regards the characteristic *combination and ramification of the Thematic Motifs*. Just as the joinery of my individual Scenes excluded every alien and unnecessary detail, and led all interest to the dominant Chief-mood (*vorwaltende Hauptstimmung*), so did the whole building of my drama join itself into one organic unity, whose easily-surveyed members were made-out by those fewer scenes and situations which set the passing mood: no mood (*Stimmung*) could be permitted to be struck in any one of these scenes, that did not stand in a weighty relation to the moods of all the other scenes, so that the development of the moods from out each other, and the constant obviousness of this development, should establish the unity of the drama in its very mode of expression. Each of these chief moods, in keeping with the nature of the Stuff, must also gain a definite musical expression, which should display itself to the sense of hearing as a definite musical Theme. Just as, in the progress of the drama, the intended climax of a decisory Chief-mood was only to be reached through a development, continuously present to the Feeling, of the individual moods already roused: so must the musical expression, which directly influences the physical feeling, necessarily take a decisive share in this development to a climax; and this was brought about, quite of itself, in the shape of a characteristic tissue of principal themes, that spread itself not over *one* scene only (as heretofore in separate operatic 'numbers'), but *over the whole drama*, and that in *intimate connection with the poetic aim*.

The characteristic peculiarity of this thematic method, and its weighty consequences for the emotional understanding of a poetic aim, I have minutely described and vindicated, from the theoretic standpoint, in the third part of my book: *Opera and Drama*. While referring my readers to that work, I have only, in keeping with the object of the present Communication, to underline the fact that in *this* procedure also, which had never before [370] been systematically extended over the whole drama, I was not prompted by reflection, but solely by

practical experience and the nature of my artistic aim. I remember, before I set about the actual working-out of the *Flying Dutchman*, to have drafted first the Ballad of Senta in the second act, and completed both its verse and melody. In this piece, I unconsciously laid the thematic germ of the whole music of the opera: it was the picture *in petto* of the whole drama, such as it stood before my soul; and when I was about to betitle the finished work, I felt strongly tempted to call it a "dramatic ballad." In the eventual composition of the music, the thematic picture, thus evoked, spread itself quite instinctively over the whole drama, as one continuous tissue; I had only, without further initiative, to take the various thematic germs included in the Ballad and develop them to their legitimate conclusions, and I had all the Chief-moods of this poem, quite of themselves, in definite thematic shapes before me. I should have had stubbornly to follow the example of the self-willed opera-composer, had I chosen to invent a fresh motif for each recurrence of one and the same mood in different scenes; a course whereto I naturally did not feel the smallest inclination, since I had only in my mind the most intelligible portrayal of the subject-matter, and not a mere conglomerate of operatic numbers.

*Tannhäuser* I treated in a similar fashion, and finally *Lohengrin*; only that I here had not a finished musical piece before me in advance, such as that Ballad, but from the aspect of the scenes and their organic growth out of one another I first created the picture itself on which the thematic rays should all converge, and then let them fall in changeful play *wherever* necessary for the understanding of the main situations. Moreover my treatment gained a more definite artistic form, especially in *Lohengrin*, through a continual re-modelling of the thematic material to fit the character of the passing situation; and thus the music won a greater variety of appearance than was the case, for instance, in the *Flying Dutchman*, where the reappearance [371] of a Theme had often the mere character of an absolute Reminiscence—a device that had already been employed, before myself, by other composers.—

I have still to indicate the influence of my general poetic method upon the shaping of my Themes themselves, upon *the Melody*.

From the 'absolute-music' period of my youth, I recall that I had often posed myself the question: How must I set about, to invent thoroughly original Melodies, which should bear a stamp peculiar to myself? The more I approached the period when I based my musical construction upon the poetic Stuff the more completely vanished this anxiety for a special style of melody, until at last I lost it altogether. In my earlier operas I was purely governed by traditional or modern Melody, whose character I imitated and, from the solicitude just mentioned, merely sought to trick with rhythmic and harmonic artifices, and thus to model in a fashion of my own. I had always, however, a greater leaning to broad and long-spun melodies than to the short, broken and contrapuntal *melismus* proper to Instrumental Chamber-music: in my *Liebesverbot*, indeed, I had openly thrown myself into the arms of the modern Italian *cantilena*. In *Rienzi*, wherever the Stuff itself did not already begin to govern my invention, I was governed by the Franco-Italian Melismus, especially in the form in which it appealed to me from *Spontini's* operas. But the Operatic Melody, as stamped upon the modern ear, lost more and more its influence over me, and at last entirely, when I took in hand the *Flying Dutchman*.

While the putting-off of that outer influence followed chiefly from the nature of the general course I opened with this work, on the other hand I derived a reimbursement for my melody from the spirit of the Folk-song, to which I there approached. Already in that Ballad, I was

governed by an instinctive feeling (*unwillkürliches Innehaben*) of the peculiarities of national Folk-melismus; yet [372] more decisively in the Spinning-Chorus, and most of all in the Sailors' Song.

That which most palpably distinguishes the Folk-melody from the modern Italian melismus, is principally its sharp and lively *rhythm*, a family feature from the Folk-dance. Our *absolute* melody loses all popular intelligibility, in exact measure as it departs from this rhythmic quality; and, seeing that the history of modern operatic music is nothing else than that of Absolute Melody, (47) it seems easy to explain why the newer, especially the French composers and their imitators, have been compelled to turn back to the sheer Dance-melody, and now-a-days the *contredanse*, with its derivatives, inspires the whole of modern Opera-melody. For myself, however, I had now no more to do with *operatic melodies*, but with the most fitting vehicle for my subject of portrayal. In the *Flying Dutchman*, therefore, I touched indeed the rhythmic melody of the Folk, but only where the Stuff itself brought me at all into contact with the Folk-element, here taking more or less a National form. Wherever I had to give utterance to the emotions of my dramatis personae, as shown by them in feeling discourse, I was forced to entirely abstain from this rhythmic melody of the Folk: or rather, it could not so much as occur to me, to employ that method of expression; nay, here the dialogue itself, conformably to the emotional contents, was to be rendered in such a fashion that, *not the melodic Expression, per se, but the expressed Emotion* should rouse the interest of the hearer. The melody must therefore spring, quite of itself, from out the verse; in itself, as sheer melody, it could not be permitted to attract attention, but only in so far as it was the most expressive vehicle for an emotion already plainly outlined in the words. With this strict (*nothwendig*) conception of the melodic element, I now completely left the usual operatic mode of composition; inasmuch as I no longer tried intentionally for customary melody, or, in a sense, for Melody at all, but absolutely *let it take its rise* from feeling utterance of the words.

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How very gradually this came about, however, as waned the influence of accustomed operatic melody, will be obvious from a consideration of my music to the *Flying Dutchman*. Here I was still so governed by the wonted Melismus, that I even retained the Cadenza, here and there, in all its nakedness; and to any one who, on the other hand, must admit that with this *Flying Dutchman* I commenced my new departure in the matter of melody, this may serve as proof with how little premeditation I swerved into that path.—In the further evolution of my melody, however un-deliberately I followed it in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, at all events I freed myself more and more definitely from that influence, and that in exact measure as the Emotion expressed *in the verbal phrase (Sprachvers)* alone dictated to me its mode of enhancement by musical expression; nevertheless, here also, and markedly in *Tannhäuser*, a preoccupation with melodic Form, i.e., the felt necessity of aiming at a *strictly melodic* garment for my dialogue, is still distinctly visible. It is clear to me *now*, that this aim was still thrust upon me by an *imperfection in our modern verse*, in which I could find no *sensible* trace of natural melodic source, or standard of musical expression.

Upon the nature of Modern Verse I have spoken at length, in Part III. of *Opera and Drama*; here, therefore, I shall only touch upon it in so far as concerns its utter lack of *genuine Rhythm*. The rhythm of Modern Verse is a mere *indoctrination*; and no one could feel this more plainly, than that composer who fain would take from such verse alone the matter wherewithal to build his melody. In face of this Verse, I saw myself compelled either to dispense with melodic rhythm altogether, or, so soon as from the standpoint of sheer Music I felt a need thereof, to borrow wilfully the rhythmic structure of my melody from just that of absolute Opera-melody, and often artificially to bolster it upon the verse. Thus, whenever the expression of the poetry so gained the upper hand, that I could only justify the melody to my

Feeling by appeal thereto, this [374] melody must needs lose almost all rhythmic character, if it were not to bear a forced relation to the verse; and in treating it so, I was infinitely more conscientious and true to my purpose, than when contrariwise I sought to enliven my melody by a capricious rhythm.

I was hereby brought into the most intimate, and eventually fruitful concernment with Verse and *Speech*, wherefrom alone a sound Dramatic melody can gain its vindication. My melody's loss in rhythmic definition, or better: *strikingness*, I now made good by a *harmonic* livening of the expression, such as only a man in *my* situation towards melody could feel a need of. Whereas modern opera-composers had merely sought to make the wonted Opera-melody, in its final utter pauperism and stereotyped immutability, just new and piquant by far-fetched artifices, (48) the harmonic suppleness (*Beweglichkeit*) that I gave my melody had its mainspring in the feeling of a quite other need. I had now completely given up Traditional Melody, with its want of any prop, or vindication of its rhythmic structure, in the spoken text; in place of that *false* rhythmic garb, I gave my melody a harmonic characterisation, which, with its determinant effect upon the sense of hearing, made it the answering expression of each emotion pictured in the verse. Further, I heightened the individuality of this expression by a more and more symbolic treatment of the *instrumental orchestra*, to which latter I assigned the special office of making plain the harmonic 'motivation' of the melody. This method of procedure, at bottom directed to *dramatic* melody alone, I followed with the most decision in my *Lohengrin*, in which I have thus pursued to its necessary consequences the course struck-out in the *Flying Dutchman*.—One thing alone remained to be discovered, in this quest for artistic Form: namely, a new *rhythmical* enlivenment of the melody, to be won from its justification *by the verse*, by the *speech* itself. This also, I was to attain; [375] and that by no turning back upon my road, but by logical pursuit of a course whose idiosyncrasy consisted herein: that I derived my artistic bent, not from the *Form*—as almost all our modern artists have—but from the poetic *Stuff*.—

When I sketched my "*Siegfried*"—for the moment leaving altogether out of count its form of musical completion—I felt the impossibility, or at least the utter unsuitability, of carrying-out that poem in modern verse. With the conception of "*Siegfried*," I had pressed forward to where I saw before me the Human Being in the most natural and blithest fulness of his physical life. No historic garment more, confined his limbs; no outwardly-imposed relation hemmed his movements, which, springing from, the inner fount of Joy-in-life, so bore themselves in face of all encounter, that error and bewilderment, though nurtured on the wildest play of passions, might heap themselves around until they threatened to destroy him, without the hero checking for a moment, even in the face of death, the welling outflow of that inner fount; or ever holding anything the rightful master of himself and his own movements, but alone the natural outstreaming of his restless fount of Life. It was "*Elsa*" who had taught me to unearth this man: to me, he was the male-embodied spirit of perennial and sole creative Instinct (*Unwillkür*), of the doer of true Deeds, of *Manhood* in the utmost fulness of its inborn strength and proved loveliness. Here, in the promptings of this Man, Love's brooding Wish had no more place; but bodily lived it there, swelled every vein, and stirred each muscle of the gladsome being, to all-enthraling practice of its essence.

Just so as this Human Being moved, must his spoken utterance need to be. Here sufficed no more the merely *thought-out* verse, with its hazy, limbless body; the fantastic cheat of terminal Rhyme could no longer throw its cloak of seeming flesh above the total lack of living bony framework, above the viscid cartilage, here stretched capriciously [376] and there compressed, that verse's hulk still holds within as makeshift I must have straightway let my "*Siegfried*" go, could I have dressed it only in such verse. Thus I must needs bethink me of a

Speech-melody quite other. And yet, in truth, I had not to bethink, but merely to resolve me; for at the primal mythic spring where I had found the fair young Siegfried-man, I also lit, led by his hand, upon the physically-perfect mode of utterance wherein alone that man could speak his feelings. This was the *alliterative* verse, bending itself in natural and lively rhythm to the actual accents of our speech, yielding itself so readily to every shade of manifold expression,—that *Stabreim* (49) which the Folk itself once sang, when *it* was still both Poet and Myth-Maker. (50)

Upon the nature of this verse, how it wins its shape from the deep begetting force of *Speech* itself, and how it pours that force again into the female element of Music, to bring forth there the perfect melody of Rhythmic Tone, I have likewise dwelt in the said Part III. of *Opera and Drama*; and, now that I have shown the discovery of this form-al innovation, too, as being a necessary consequence of my artistic labours, I might perhaps consider the general aim of this Communication reached. Since I cannot as yet lay "Siegfried's Death" before the public, all further reference thereto must needs to me seem objectless, or at any rate [377] exposed to every kind of mis-understanding. Only in so far as an allusion to my remaining poetic drafts, and the life-moods whence they sprang, seems still to me of some importance for the explanation or vindication of my since-published theoretic writings, do I hold it of any use to continue this narration.

This I shall do—in brief—all the more gladly, since in this Communication, besides the aim I mentioned at the beginning, I have another and a special one: namely, to make my friends so far acquainted with the course of my development right down to the present day, that whenever I shall next come openly before them with a new dramatic work, I may hope to then address myself to folk entirely familiar. For sortie time past, I have been utterly cut off from this direct artistic intercourse; I could only address my friends from time to time, and now again, as Essayist. Of the pain this kind of address inflicts upon me, I scarcely need assure those who know me as Artist; they will recognise it in the very style of my literary works, where I must torture myself with circumstantial details to express That which I might show so tersely, easily and trimly in the work of art itself, were only its fitting physical presentment so ready to my hand as is its technical description with the pen on paper. But so hateful to me is the scribblers' art, and the Want that has driven me into their ranks, that I fain would make this Communication my last literary appearance before my friends: wherefore I here take stock of all that, under the prevailing difficulties of my lot, I still think necessary to say, in order to apprise them definitely what they have to expect from my newest dramatic work whenever it shall be set before them in performance; for *that* I wish to then induct to life *without* a Preface. (51)

I therefore proceed.—

My poem of "Siegfried's Death" I had sketched and [378] executed solely to satisfy my inner promptings, and nowise with the thought of a production on our theatric boards, or with the dramatic means to hand; which I could not but hold in every respect unsuitable thereto. Only quite recently has the hope been roused in me, that, under certain favouring conditions, and in due course of time, I may be able to bring this drama before the public; however, only after those preparations needful to guarantee as far as possible an effective production, shall have come to a happy issue. This is also the reason why I still keep back the poem.—In those days, in the autumn of 1848, I never dreamt of the possibility of a performance of "Siegfried's Death;" but merely regarded its technical completion in verse, and some fugitive attempts at

its musical composition, as an inner gratification, which I bestowed upon myself at that time of disgust at public affairs, and withdrawal from their contact.—This sad and solitary situation as man and artist, however, could not but be hereby forced all the more painfully upon my consciousness; and the gnawing torments of that pain I could only quiet by giving rein to my restless impulse towards fresh schemes. I was burning to write Something that should take the message of my tortured brain, and speak it in a fashion to be understood by present life. Just as with my Siegfried," the force of my desire had borne me to the fount of the Eternal Human: so now, when I found this desire cut off by Modern Life from all appeasement, and saw afresh that the sole redemption lay in flight from out this life, in casting-off its claims on me by self-destruction, did I come to the fount of every modern rendering of such a situation—to *Jesus of Nazareth* the Man.

While pondering on the wondrous apparition of this Jesus, I arrived at a judgment particularly resultful for the Artist, inasmuch as I distinguished between the symbolical Christ and *Him* who, thought-of as existing at a certain time and amid definite surroundings, presents so easily embraced an image to our hearts and minds. When I considered the epoch and the general life-conditions in [379] which so loving and so love-athirst a soul, as that of Jesus, unfolded itself, nothing seemed to me more natural than that this *solitary* One—who, fronted with a materialism (*Sinnlichkeit*) so honourless, so hollow, and so pitiful as that of the Roman world, and still more of the world subjected to the Roman's, could not demolish it and build upon its wrack an order answering to his soul's desire—should straightway long from out that world, from out the wider world at large, towards a better land Beyond,—toward Death. Since I saw the modern world of nowadays a prey to worthlessness akin to that which then surrounded Jesus, so did I now recognise this longing, in correspondence with the characteristics of our present state of things, as in truth deep-rooted in man's sentient nature, which yearns from out an evil and dishonoured world-of-sense (*Sinnlichkeit*) towards a nobler reality (52) that shall answer to his nature purified. Here Death is but the moment of despair; it is the act of demolition that we discharge upon ourselves, since—as solitary units—we can not discharge it on the evil order of the tyrant world. But the actual destruction of the outer, visible bonds of that honourless materialism, is the duty which devolves on *us*, as the healthy proclamation of a stress turned heretofore toward self-destruction.—So the thought attracted me, to present the nature of Jesus—such as it has gained a meaning for *our*, for the consciousness directed to the stir of Life—in such a fashion that his self-offering should be the but imperfect utterance of that human instinct which drives the individual into revolt against a loveless whole, into a revolt which the altogether Isolated can certainly [380] only seal by self-destruction; but yet which in this very self-destruction proclaims its own true nature, in that it was not directed to the personal death, but to a disowning of the lovelessness around (*der lieblosen Allgemeinheit*). (53)

In this sense did I seek to vent my rebellious feelings in the sketch of a drama, "*Jesus of Nazareth*." Two overpowering objections, however, held me back from filling up the preliminary draft: the one arose from the contradictory nature of the subject-matter, in the guise in which it lies before us; the other, from the recognised impossibility of bringing this work, either, to a public hearing. The story, such as it has stamped itself once and for all on the mind of the Folk, through religious dogma and popular conception, must be done too grievous a violence, if I fain would give therein my modern reading of its nature; its popular features must be touched, and altered with a deliberation more philosophic than artistic, in order to insensibly withdraw them from the customary point of view and show them in the light that I had seen them in. Now, even if I had been able to overcome *this*, yet I could not shut my eyes to the fact, that the only thing which could give this subject the meaning I intended, was just our modern life-conditions; and that this meaning could only have a due effect, provided it were set *precisely now* before the Folk, and not *hereafter*, when these same

conditions should have been demolished by that very Revolution which at like time—on the shore beyond—should open out the only possibility of publicly producing to the Folk this drama.

For I had already so far come to an agreement with myself, concerning the character of the movement around me, that I deemed we must either remain completely rooted in the Old, or completely bring the New to burst its swathings. A clear glance upon the outer world, freed from all illusions, taught me conclusively that I must altogether give up my *Jesus of Nazareth*. This glance, which, from [381] within my brooding solitude, I cast upon the political world outside, showed me now the near approaching catastrophe, that must inevitably engulf each man who was in earnest for a fundamental change of existing bad conditions, if, even amid such bad conditions, he loved his own existence above all else. In face of the open and shamelessly outspoken insolence of the outlived Old, which would fain maintain itself at any price, my earlier plans, such as that for a Stage reform, could not but now take for me a childish light. I gave them up, like all besides that had filled me with hope, and thus deceived me as to the true state of affairs. With a foreboding of the unavoidable decisions which, do what I might, must soon confront me also, if only I remained true to my nature and my opinions, I now shunned all drafting of artistic projects; every stroke of the pen that I might have driven, seemed laughable to me now, when I could no longer belie or numb myself with any artistic aspiration. Of a morning I left my chamber with its empty writing-table, and wandered alone in the open, to sun myself in the waking Spring; and midst its waxing warmth to cast aside all self-seeking wishes that might still have enchained me, with their cheating visions, to a world of conditions from which all my longing was tumultuously urging me forth.

Thus did the Dresden rising come upon me; a rising which I, with many others, regarded as the beginning of a general upheaval in Germany. After what I have said, who can be so intentionally blind as not to see that I had *there* no longer any choice, where I could only now determinately turn my back upon a world to which, in my inmost nature, I had long since ceased to belong?—

With nothing can I compare the feeling of wellbeing that invaded me—after the first painful impressions had been effaced—when I felt myself free: free from the world of torturing and never-granted wishes, free from the relations in which those wishes had been my sole, my heart-consuming sustenance! When I, the outlawed and proscribed, [382] was bound no more to any lie of any kind; when I had cast behind me every wish and every hope from this now triumphant world, and with unrestrained downrightness could cry aloud and open to it, that I, the Artist, despised it, this world of canting care for Art and Culture, from the bottom of my heart; when I could tell it that in all its life-veins there flowed no single drop of true artistic blood, that it could not draw one breath of human sentiment, breathe out one whiff of human beauty:—then did I, for the first time in my life, feel free from crown to sole, feel hale and blithe in every limb, though I did not even know what hidingplace the morrow might afford me, in which to dare respire the air of heaven.

Like a dark shadow from a long done with, hideous past, did *Paris* once more pass before me; that Paris to which my steps were next guided by the well-meant advice of a friend, who, in this instance, took more thought for my outward fortune than my inward contentment; that Paris which now, on my first re-survey of its mocking features, I put behind me like a midnight spectre, as I fled panting to the fresh Swiss highlands, to shun at least the pestilential

breath of modern Babylon. Here, in the shelter of swift-won sterling friends, I first gathered up my strength to publicly protest against the momentary conquerors of the Revolution, from whom I had to strip at least *that* title of their rulership by which they styled themselves as *Art's* defenders. Thus did I become once more a Writer, as heretofore in Paris when I cast behind my wishes for Parisian fame, and took arms against the formalism of its ruling art: but now I had to direct my blows against this whole art-system, *in its coherence with the whole politico-social status of the modern world*; and the breath that I must draw herefor, had to be deeper in its draught.

In a shorter essay, *Art and the Revolution*, I devoted myself to unmasking *this coherence*, and did my best to snatch the name of Art from That which nowadays, protected by such title, exploits the misery and baseness of [383] our modern "Public." In a somewhat more detailed treatise, which appeared under the name of *The Art-work of the Future*, I showed the fatal influence of that connexion upon the character of Art herself, and how, in her egoistic parcelling into the modern separate arts, she had become incapable of bringing forth the genuine artwork—the only admissible, because the only *intelligible* and alone capable of holding a purely human content. In my latest literary work, *Opera and Drama*, I then showed, in a preciser handling of the sheer artistic aspect of the matter, how *Opera* had been hitherto mistaken by critics and artists for that artwork in which the seeds, nay even the fruitage of the Artwork of the Future, as I conceived it, had already come to light of day; and I proved that alone by a complete reversal of the procedure hitherto adopted in *Opera*, could the artistic Right be done, inasmuch as I based upon my own artistic experiences my demonstration of the logical and only fit relation between the Poet and Musician. With that work, and with the present Communication, I now feel that I have done enough for the impulse which lately made me take the Writer's pen; for I think I may venture to say, that whoso does not even yet understand me, can never in any circumstances understand me,—because he *will* not.

During this literary period; however, I had never bidden entire farewell to my artistic sketches. Though my eyes were so far open to my general outlook, that I believed the less in a possibility of *now* seeing one of my works produced, as I myself, from personal conviction, had given up all hope of, and therefore all attempt at, successful dealings of any kind with our theatres; and though I thus no longer cherished inwardly the intention, but rather the utmost disinclination, to make possible the Impossible by fresh endeavours: yet at first there was outward motive in plenty, to place myself at least in a remoter contact with our public art. I had gone completely helpless into exile; and a possible success in Paris as *Opera*-composer must needs appear to my friends, and even to myself eventually, [384] the only promise of a lasting guarantee of my existence. Never, in my inner heart, could I conceive the possibility of such a success; and that the less, as even the bare thought of a concernment with Parisian operatic ways revolted me to the core: yet, in face of outer want, and since even my most devoted friends could not view my repugnance to this plan as altogether justified, I at last resigned myself to a final and exhausting war against my nature. However, even here I refused to budge one inch from my path; and I sketched for my Parisian opera-poet the draft for a "*Wieland the Smith*," on lines which my friends already know from the close of *The Art-work of the Future*. (54)

So once again I went to Paris. This was, and will be, the last time that I have ever permitted outward considerations to coerce my inner nature. That coercion weighed so terribly and crushingly upon me, that this while, through the mere burden of its strain, I came nigh to my undoing: an illness, racking all my nerves, attacked me so severely on my arrival in Paris, that even for this cause alone, I was obliged to abandon every step required by my undertaking. My bodily and mental pain grew soon so insupportable, that, driven by one of Life's blind instincts, I was about to seek relief in desperate measures, to break with everything that yet

was friendly toward me, to rush out into God knows what wild unknown world. But in this extremity, at which I had arrived, I was grasped by truest friends; with a hand of infinitely tender love, they led my footsteps back. Thanks be to those who know alone of whom I speak!

Yes! I now learnt to know the fullest, noblest, fairest love, the only genuine love; which sets up no conditions, but takes its object altogether as it is, and as it cannot else be, of its very nature. *It* has held me, too, to art!

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Returned, I took up afresh with the thought of completely carrying out the music for "*Siegfried's Death*." Yet still there lurked a half despair in this resolve; for I knew that this music, now, could only have a paper life. That unbearable conviction lamed anew my purpose; and feeling that, in all my endeavours hitherto, I had for the most part been so utterly misunderstood, (55) I reached back to pen and ink, and wrote my "*Opera and Drama*."—Again, then, was I completely disheartened for the embracing of any artistic project: fresh-gotten proofs of the impossibility of my now addressing any artistic message to the understanding of the public, brought in their train an access of distaste for fresh dramatic labours; and I believed that I must openly avow the End of all my art-creation.—Then rose *one Friend*, and lifted me from out my deepest discontent. Through the most searching and overpowering proof that I did not stand alone, nay, that I was profoundly understood—even by those who else had almost stood the farthest from me—, did he make me anew, and now entirely, an Artist. This wondrous Friend of mine is

FRANZ LISZT.—

I here must touch a little closer on the character of this friendship, since to many it may seem a paradox. I have been unfortunate enough to earn the reputation of being not only on many sides forbidding (*abstossend*), but right-down malignant (*feindselig*); so that the account of an affectionate relationship becomes, in a certain sense, a pressing need to me.—

I met *Liszt*, for the first time in my life, during my [386] earliest stay in Paris; indeed, not until the second period of that stay, and at a time when—humiliated and disgusted—I had given up every hope, nay, all mind for a Paris success, and was involved in that inward rebellion against this art-world which I have characterised above. In this encounter, Liszt came before me as the completest antithesis of my nature and my lot. In that world which I had longed to tread with lustre, when, I yearned from petty things to grand, Liszt had unconsciously grown up from tenderest youth, to be its wonder and its charm at a time when I, already so far repulsed by the lovelessness and coldness of its contact, could recognise its void and nullity with all the bitterness of a disillusioned man. Thus Liszt was more to me than a mere object of my jealousy. I had no opportunity to make him know me in myself and doings: superficial, therefore, as was the only knowledge he could gain of me, equally so was the manner of our interview; and while this was quite explicable on his part—to wit, from a man who was daily thronged by the most kaleidoscopic of affairs—, I, on the other hand, was just then not in the mood to seek quietly and fairly for the simplest explanation of a behaviour which, friendly and obliging in itself, was of all others the kind to ruffle *me*. Beyond that first time, I visited Liszt no more; and—in like manner without my knowing *him*, nay with an utter disinclination on *my* side, to even the attempt—he remained for me one of those phenomena that one considers foreign and hostile to one's nature.

What I repeatedly expressed to others, in this continued mood, came later to the ears of Liszt, and indeed at the time when I had so suddenly attracted notice by the Dresden

production of my *Rienzi*. He was concerned at having been so hastily misunderstood, as he clearly saw from those expressions, by a man whose acquaintance he had scarcely made, and whom to know seemed now not quite unworth the while.—When I now think back to it, there is to me something exceedingly touching in the strenuous attempts, renewed with a positive patience, with [387] which Liszt troubled himself in order to bring me to another opinion of him. As yet he had not heard a note of my works, and therefore there could be no question of any artistic sympathy, in his endeavour to come into closer contact with me. No, it was simply the purely-human wish to put an end to any chance-arisen discord in his relations with another man; coupled, perhaps, with an infinitely tender misgiving that he might, after all, have really wounded me. Whoso in all our social relations, and especially in the bearing of modern artists to one another, knows the appalling self-seeking and the loveless disregard of others' feelings, as manifested in such intercourse, must be filled with more than astonishment, with the highest admiration, when he hears of personal advances such as those thrust on me by that extraordinary man.

But I was not then in a position to feel as yet the uncommon charm and fascination of these tokens of Liszt's pre-eminently lovable and loving nature: I at first regarded his overtures with a lingering tinge of wonder, to which, doubter that I was, I felt often inclined to give an almost trivial food.—Liszt, however, had attended a performance of *Rienzi*, which he wellnigh had to extort; and from all the ends of the earth, whithersoever his virtuoso-tour had borne him, I received witness, now from this person, and now from that, of Liszt's restless ardour to impart to others the delight he had experienced in my music, and thus—as I almost prefer to believe—quite unintentionally to set on foot a crusade for me. This happened at a time when, on the other side, it waxed more and more undoubtable to me, that I and my dramatic works would remain without a ghost of external success. But in direct proportion as this utter failure grew more certain, and at the last quite obvious, did Liszt succeed in his personal efforts to found a fostering refuge for my art. He, the favoured guest of Europe's stateliest cities, gave up his royal progresses, and, settling down in modest little Weimar, took up the Musical Conductor's bâton. There did I last meet him, when—uncertain, still, as to the actual nature of [388] the prosecution hanging over me—I halted for a few days on Thuringian soil, in my at last necessitated flight from Germany. On the very day on which I received information that made it more and more indubitable, and at last quite positive, that my person was exposed to the most serious peril, I heard Liszt conduct a rehearsal of my *Tannhäuser*. I was astounded to recognise in him my second self: what I had felt when I conceived this music, he felt when he performed it; what I had wished to say when I wrote down the notes, he said when he made them sound. Miraculous! Through the Love of this rarest of all Friends, and at the moment when I became a *homeless* man, I won the true, long yearned for, ever sought amiss, ne'er happed-on *habitation for my art*. Whilst I was banned to wandering afar, the great world-wanderer had cast his anchor on a little spot of earth, to turn it into Home for me. Caring for me everywhere and everywhen, helping ever swiftly and decisively where help was needed, with heart wide opened to my every wish, with love the most devoted for my whole being,—did Liszt become what I had never found before, and in a measure whose fulness we can only then conceive, when it actually surrounds us with its own full compass.—

At the end of my latest stay in Paris, as I lay ill and wretched, gazing brooding into space, my eye fell on the score of my already almost quite forgotten *Lohengrin*. It filled me with a sudden grief, to think that these notes should never ring from off the death-wan paper. Two words I wrote to Liszt. His answer was none other than an announcement of preparations the most sumptuous—for the modest means of Weimar—for *Lohengrin's* production. What men and means could do, was done, to bring the work to understanding there. The only thing that—given the unavoidably halting nature of our present Stage representations—can bring

about a needful understanding, the active, willing Fancy of the public, could not, distracted by our modern wont, assert itself at once in helpful strength: mistake and misconception blocked the [389] path of hardly-strived success. What was there to do, to make good the lack, to help on every side to comprehension, and therewith to success? Liszt swiftly saw and *did* it: he laid before the public his personal views and feeling of the work, in a fashion unapproached before for convincing eloquence and potent charm. Success rewarded him; and, crowned with this success, he ran to meet me with the cry: *See! Thus far have we brought it. Do thou create for us anew a work, that we may bring it farther yet!*

In effect, it was this summons and this challenge, that woke in me the liveliest resolve to set myself to fresh artistic labour. I sketched a poem, and finished it in flying haste; my hand was already laid to its musical composition. For the production, to be promptly set on foot, I had only *Liszt* in view, together with those of my *friends* whom, after my late experiences, I have learnt to group under the local concept: *Weimar*.—If, then, I have quite recently been forced to change this resolution, in some very essential points, so that in truth it can no longer be carried out in the form in which it had already been publicly announced: the ground hereof lies chiefly in the *character of the poetic Stuff* itself, as to whose only fitting mode of exposition I have but now at last become thoroughly settled in my mind. I think it not unweighty to give my friends, in brief and in conclusion, a communication of my views hereon.

When, at every attempt to take it up in earnest, I was forced to look upon the composition of my "*Siegfried's Death*" as aimless and impossible, provided I held to my definite intention of immediately producing it upon the stage: I was weighted not only by my general knowledge of our present opera-singers' inability to fulfil a task such as I was setting before them in this drama, but in particular by the fear that my poetic purpose (*dichterische Absicht*)—as such—could not be conveyed in all its bearings to the only organ at which I aimed, namely, the Feeling's-understanding, [390] either in the case of our modern, or of any Public whatsoever. To begin with, I had set forth this wide-ranging purpose in a sketch of the Nibelungen-mythos, such as it had become my own poetic property. "*Siegfried's Death*" was, as I now recognise, only the first attempt to bring a most important feature of this myth to dramatic portrayal; in that drama I should have had, involuntarily, to tax myself to *suggest* a host of huge connexions (*Beziehungen*), in order to present a notion of the given feature in its strongest meaning. But these *suggestions*, naturally, could only be inlaid in *epic* form into the drama; and here was the point that filled me with misgiving as to the efficacy of my drama, in its proper sense of a scenic exposition. Tortured by this feeling, I fell upon the plan of carrying out as an independent drama a most attractive portion of the mythos, which in "*Siegfried's Death*" could only have been given in narrative fashion. Yet here again, it was the *Stuff* itself that so urged me to its dramatic moulding, that it only further needed Liszt's appeal, to call into being, with the swiftness of a lightning-flash, the "*Young Siegfried*," the Winner of the Hoard and Waker of Brünnhilde.

Again, however, I had to go through the same experience with this "*Junge Siegfried*" that had earlier been brought me in the train of "*Siegfried's Tod*." The richer and completer the means of imparting my purpose, that it offered me, all the more forcibly must I feel that, even with these two dramas, my myth had not as yet entirely passed over into the sensible reality of Drama; but that Connexions of the most vital importance had been left un realised, and relegated to the reflective and co-ordinating powers of the beholder. That these Connexions, however, in keeping with the unique character of genuine Mythos, were of such a nature that they could proclaim themselves alone *in actual physical situations* (*Handlungsmomenten*), and thus in 'moments' which can only be intelligibly displayed *in Drama*,—this quality it was, that, so soon as [391] ever I made its glad discovery, led me to find at last the final fitting form for the conveyance of my comprehensive purpose.

With the framework of this form I now may make my Friends acquainted, as being the substance of the project to which alone I shall address myself henceforward.

I propose to produce my myth *in three complete dramas*, (56) preceded by a lengthy *Prelude* (Vorspiel). With these dramas, however, although each is to constitute a self-included whole, I have in mind no "Repertory-piece," in the modern theatrical sense; but, for their performance, I shall abide by the following plan:—

At a specially-appointed Festival, I propose, some future time, to produce those three Dramas with their Prelude, *in the course of three days and a fore-evening*. The object of this production I shall consider thoroughly attained, if I and my artistic comrades, the actual performers, shall within these four evenings succeed in *artistically conveying my purpose to the true Emotional* (not the Critical) *Understanding* of spectators who shall have gathered together expressly to learn it. A further issue is as indifferent to me, as it cannot but seem superfluous.—

From this plan for the *representation*, every one of my Friends may now also deduce the nature of my plan for the poetic and musical *working-out*; while every one who approves thereof, will, *for the nonce*, be equally unconcerned with myself as to the How and When of the public realisation of this plan, since he will at least conceive one item, namely that with *this* undertaking I have nothing more to do with our Theatre of *to-day*. Then if my Friends take firmly up this certainty into themselves, they surely will end by taking also thought with me: *How and under what circumstances* a plan, such as that just named, can finally [392] be carried out; and thus, perhaps—will there also arise that help of theirs which alone can bring this thing to pass.—

So now I give You time and ease to think it out:—for only *with my Work*, will Ye see me again!

ZURICH, November 1851.



## Notes

### Note 01 on page 7

I must explain, once and for all, that whenever in the course of this Communication I speak of "understanding me" or "not understanding me," it is not as though I fancied myself a shade too lofty, too deep-meaning, or too high-soaring; but I simply demand of whosoever may desire to understand me, that he will look upon me no otherwise than as I am, and in my communications upon Art will only regard as essential precisely what, in accordance with my general aim and as far as lay within my powers of exposition, has been put forth in them by myself. R. WAGNER.—The latter portion of this sentence is somewhat ambiguous in the German, running thus: "und in meiner künstlerischen Mittheilungen genau eben nur Das als wesentlich erkenne, was meiner Absicht und meinem Darstellungsvermögen gemäss in ihnen von mir kundgegeben wurde." It will be seen that the expression "künstlerischen Mittheilungen" admits of two interpretations, viz : either "artistic communications,"—in other words, his operas,—or "communications upon the subject of Art." After some hesitation, I have chosen the latter, as it seems to me that Wagner is here referring to the distortions of his views promulgated by hostile critics—and nearly all his critics were both crafty and malicious—e.g. Professor Bischoff and his perversion of the title: "Artwork of the Future" into "Music of the Future," together with the consequences he deduced from this wilful misunderstanding of the author's aim.—TR.

### Note 02 on page 7

For the matter of that, they understand by the expression "Man," strictly speaking, nothing but a "Subject" ("*Unterthan*"); and perhaps also, in my particular case, one who has his own opinions and follows them without regard of consequences.—R. WAGNER.—Considerable light is thrown upon both these notes, when we reflect that Wagner, at the period of writing, was in exile for attempting to introduce ethical considerations into politics, whilst actually—think on it!—a court-salaried Musical conductor. As regards the present note, its second half (*i.e.* the words following "*Unterthan*") does not appear in the original edition, of the "Three Opera-Poems with a Preface;" and it should be added that the opening line of the essay referred, in that edition, to the necessity of publishing in self-defence the opera-poems themselves—not merely, as now, the "Communication."—TR.

### Note 03 on page 9

Thus, even now, our literary dilettantists know no more refreshing entertainment for themselves and their aestheto-political public of idling readers, than for ever and a day to jog round *Shakespeare* with their writings. It never occurs to them for a moment, that *that* Shakespeare whom they suck dry with their critical sponges, is not worth a rushlight, and serves at utmost as the sheet of foolscap for the exhibition of those proofs of their intellectual poverty which they take such desperate pains to air. The Shakespeare, who alone can be worth somewhat to us, is the ever new-creating poet who, now and in all ages, is That which Shakespeare once was to his age.—R. WAGNER.

### Note 04 on page 10

"Wie es bisher in Religion und Staat der Fall war, das Wesen der Individualität in die Gattung setzen, folgerichtig es dieser aufopfern."—In connection with [the footnote to \*Art and\*](#)

*Climate*, page 260, I would draw attention to page 552 of George Eliot's translation of *The Essence of Christianity* (Ludwig Feuerbach) "All divine attributes are attributes of the species, attributes which in the individual are limited, but the limits of which are abolished in the essence of the species. My knowledge, my will is limited; but my limit is not that of another man, to say nothing of mankind." In the first chapter of Feuerbach's book we also read, "Certainly the human individual—and herein consists his distinction from the animal—can and must feel himself confined by limits; but he can only become conscious of his limits in that he takes the perfection, the infinitude of the species as his 'object,' be it the object of his feeling, his conscious experience, or his reflection. That he nevertheless confounds *his* limits with the *limits of the species*, rests upon the illusion whereby he *directly* identifies himself with the species—an illusion which is intimately bound up with the indolence, the vanity, and the self-seeking of the individual."—TR.

#### Note 05 on page 15

We have here another instance of the unconscious identity of Wagner's thought with that of Schopenhauer, who has said in "*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*":—"It is as if, when genius appears in an individual, a far greater measure of the power of knowledge falls to his lot than is necessary for the service of an individual will; and this superfluity of knowledge, being free, now becomes *subject* purified from will, a clear mirror of the inner nature of the world. This explains the activity, amounting even to disquietude, of men of genius; for the present can seldom satisfy them, because it does not fill their consciousness. This gives them that longing for men of similar nature and of like stature to whom they might communicate themselves."—TR.

#### Note 06 on page 17

At this assertion, in his time, Professor Bischoff of Cologne waxed mighty wrath; he considered it a most unbecoming suggestion to make to himself and his friends.—R. WAGNER.—This sly little sarcasm does not appear in the original edition. As to our author's want of "education" (perhaps "bringing-up" would better express the idea), the statement in the next sentence must not be taken too literally; see the "*Autobiographic Sketch* ."—TR.

#### Note 07 on page 17

The author of this libretto (or sketch for a libretto?) was Heinrich Laube mentioned by Wagner on [page 9](#) of the present volume.—TR.

#### Note 08 on page 17

By an oversight, the title of this story was given by me, on [page 8](#) (*Autobiographic Sketch*) in the German form, instead of in the Italian; it should there read: "*La Donna Serpente*," in place of "*Die Frau als Schlange*."—W. A. E.

#### Note 09 on page 17

Note to the original edition:—"Whom people most unjustifiably take for a *mere* imitator of Weber."

#### Note 10 on page 19

Note to original edition.—"Delicious was the spirit of the negotiations upon which I was compelled to enter with the then-time Director of the Leipzig theatre, with a view to the

production of this opera. He declared that the Town Council would never grant permission for the representation of such things, and that he, as a father, would demolish all the principles in which he had brought his daughter up, should he allow her to appear in such an opera,—a condition upon which, for the rest, I by no means insisted."

#### [Note 11 on page 19](#)

Our author is here somewhat too hard upon himself, having apparently forgotten the exact bearing of an article, "*Pasticcio*," which he wrote at this period (1834) for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (see No. XVI. of *The Meister*). That article, though certainly advocating the Italian *method* of singing (with reservations), by no means looks upon Opera with a "frivolous" eye.—TR.

#### [Note 12 on page 20](#)

For an attempt at elucidation of the hypothesis of a Fitzball origin of Heine's version, see *The Meister*, No. XVII., Feb. 1892.—TR.

#### [Note 13 on page 21](#)

That this Pantomime has had to be omitted from all the stage-performances of *Rienzi*, has been a serious drawback to me; for the Ballet that replaced it has obscured my nobler intentions, and turned this scene into nothing more nor less than an ordinary operatic spectacle.—R. WAGNER.

#### [Note 14 on page 22](#)

In a letter to Ferd. Heine (*Wagner's Letters to Uhlig &c.*—H. Grevel & Co.) dated Paris, Jan. 4th, 1842, Wagner writes "If you or any other person exactly realised how my whole situation, all my plans, and all my resolutions were destroyed by such procrastination, some pity would he surely shown me.... I am truly quite exhausted! Alas, I meet with so little that is encouraging, that it would really be of untold import to me if at least in Dresden things should go according to my wish."—TR.

#### [Note 15 on page 23](#)

Note to the original edition (1852):—"Among these I may mention the articles which I wrote for Lewald's magazine, *Europa*, under the name of 'Freudenfeuer.'"—A translation of these articles is now (1892) appearing in "*The Meister*," and will be included, together with Wagner's other early writings, in the last volume of this present series. —TR.

#### [Note 16 on page 23](#)

In the revolt of Schleswig-Holstein against Denmark, General Willisen (a Prussian officer who had been unsuccessful in his dealings with Poland) was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Schleswig-Holstein army of volunteers, in April 1850. General Willisen's tactics were so ill-conceived and disastrous, that he was removed from the command in December of that year. Wagner, writing the *Mittheilung*—at all events, its first portion—only two or three months after these events, has fixed upon this particular Commander as a current representative of red-tape incapacity.—TR.

#### [Note 17 on page 24](#)

Note to the original edition:—"A critic recently considered this Devil and this Flying

Dutchman as an orthodox (*dogmatischer*) Devil and an orthodox ghost."

[Note 18 on page 25](#)

See the "[Autobiographic Sketch](#)."—R. WAGNER

[Note 19 on page 25](#)

As this passage is somewhat obscure, I append the original, in case that any German scholar might prefer to substitute another rendering for that which—after considerable pondering—I have here adopted:—"und diess Element gewann hier den Ausdruck *der Heimath*, d. h. des Umschlossenseins von einem innig vertrauten Allgemeinen, aber einem Allgemeinen, das ich noch nicht kannte, sondern eben erst mir ersehnte, nach der Verwirklichung des Begriffes 'Heimath.'"—TR.

[Note 20 on page 26](#)

This "Volksbuch," alluded to again a few lines lower down, can nowhere be traced. For the arguments for and against its existence, I must refer my readers to Dr. Wolfgang Golther's article in the "*Bayreuther Taschen-Kalender*" for 1891, and to my article on "The Tannhäuser Drama" in No. XIV. of *The Meister*."—W. A. E.

[Note 21 on page 26](#)

One of the three divisions into which the German literature and mode of speech are classified, in order of time, by literary historians; that preceding it being called the *Althochdeutsch*, and that following it the *Neuhochdeutsch*. According to *Brockhaus*, the integral distinction between the *M.h.d.* and its predecessor consisted in the weakening of the inflectional vowels, after the root-syllable, into a colourless 'e.' The period lasted from the commencement of the 12th century to about the middle of the 15th. As regards literature, however, the epoch best known as the *M.h.d.* is that covered chiefly by the 13th century and coincident with the glories of the Hohenstaufian reign. Its treasures are represented by the ballads of the strolling singers from among the Folk (*Der Nibelunger Not, Wolfdietrich &c.*), and by the lyrics and epics of the courtly minstrels, among whom Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Strassburg, Walther von der Vogelweide, and Albrecht von Scharffenberg are of special interest to the Wagnerian student.—TR.

[Note 22 on page 28](#)

Gottlieb Reissiger, successor to Carl Maria von Weber in that post.—TR.

[Note 23 on page 28](#)

This is the same text that—after my colleague had apparently found it beneath his dignity to carry out a cast-off project of mine—was set to music by *Kittl*, who could nowhere obtain a libretto more to his mind than just this one. It was brought to a hearing in Prag, after divers Royal-Imperial-Austrian alterations, under the title of "*die Franzosen vor Nizza*" (The French before Nice).—R. WAGNER.

[Note 24 on page 28](#)

Joseph Tichatschek.—TR.

[Note 25 on page 29](#)

The subordinate post of *Musikdirector*, i.e. conductor of the playhouse-music and the weekday church-music, was that which was first offered to Wagner, for a probationary year; this he declined, in a manly letter addressed to v. Lüttichau, Jan. 5, 1843, three days after the production of the *Flying Dutchman* (see R. Prölss' "*Beiträge zur Geschichte des Hoftheaters zu Dresden*"). Lüttichau thereupon offered him the higher post, in which he shared with Reissiger the supreme control of the Court orchestra.—TR.

#### Note 26 on page 30

Lest any misconception should arise, it may be as well to state that the unworthy object of Schröder-Devrient's affections was a certain Saxon officer, von Döring by name, who first inspired her with a passion for him in 1842, and for the next seven years dragged her from one 'starring' engagement to another, only to squander her money on the gaming-tables (vide—Glaser's "*Life of Wagner*").—TR.

#### Note 27 on page 31

One scarcely need emphasise this forecast of the poem of *Tristan und Isolde*, except to compare it with [page 116](#), *Art-work of the Future*.—TR.

#### Note 28 on page 32

We have no single word that will adequately replace the German "*Stimmung*"; the meaning being partly "drift" or "tendency," and partly "mood," "impression," or "frame of mind." The term is gradually finding its way into our conversation, wherefore I may perhaps be forgiven for occasionally adopting it in print.—TR.

#### Note 29 on page 36

In view of the author's preface to the two volumes in which this *Communication* was included (see [page 25](#) of the present volume), it would appear that the allusion is to Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*.—TR.

#### Note 30 on page 38

In view of the accusation so often levelled against Wagner, of *ingratitude* toward Meyerbeer, it is as well to bear in mind that Meyerbeer was at this time 'Generalmusikdirector' at the Berlin Court.—TR.

#### Note 31 on page 39

In a [foot-note to page 286](#), I drew attention to the similarity of Wagner's description of the "artistic temperament" to that given by Schopenhauer in Chapter 30 of Vol. II. "*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*"; in like manner he has here unconsciously approached, though by an opposite path, the same idea as Schopenhauer expounds in § 34, Vol. I. of that work, where he refers to the man "who has so plunged and lost himself in contemplation of Nature, that he is now nothing more than the sheer perceiving *Subject*, and thus becomes directly conscious that, as such, he is the bearer of the world and all *objective* existence, since it shows itself as dependent on his own. He draws all Nature into his own self, so that he now regards it as an *accidental* of his being [or essence]. In this sense it is, that Byron says: Are not the mountains, waves and skies, a part Of me and of my soul, as I of them?"—It is significant that to both these thinkers the solitude of the Alps should have suggested the same line of thought; but perhaps it may be carried farther back, to the idea underlying the Temptation on the

Mountain.—TR

[Note 32 on page 40](#)

According to the late Mr F. Praeger's "*Wagner as I knew him*" (page 145) this friend was August Roeckel; but it seems far more likely to have been Theodor Uhlig or Eduard Devrient.—TR.

[Note 33 on page 40](#)

Of this I have recently been assured again by a talented reporter, who *during* the performance of *Lohengrin* at Weimar—according to his own confession—felt nothing calling for an adverse criticism, but gave himself without restraint to the enjoyment of a touching story. The doubts that *afterwards* arose in him, I am delighted to say, in dearest self-defence, have never attacked the *actual artist*. The latter could *thoroughly* understand me: a thing that was impossible to the critic.—R. WAGNER.

[Note 34 on page 40](#)

Exactly as my critic, may the Athenian citizen have felt, who under the immediate influence of the artwork was seized with unquestioning sympathy for Antigone, yet in the Areopagus, upon the following day, would certainly have voted to death the living heroine.—R. WAGNER.

[Note 35 on page 42](#)

Compare *Art-work of the Future*, [page 149](#).—TR.

[Note 36 on page 42](#)

At first sight this looks as though it were written under the influence of the Hegelian doctrine, of every Reality being the "unification of two contradictory elements," and every true Idea containing a "coincidence of opposites"; but there is, so far as I can see, no warrant for believing that Wagner ever studied Hegel's system of philosophy, excepting in so far as it had been transformed by Feuerbach, who seems to have discarded the formula of "Thesis, antithesis, and synthesis."—TR.

[Note 37 on page 42](#)

"Diese nothwendigste Wesenäusserung der reinsten sinnlichen Unwillkür."

[Note 38 on page 42](#)

By all accounts, this "friend" was August Roeckel; and according to Ferdinand Praeger, he withdrew his opera "Farinelli" before its production, in humble recognition of the supremacy of Wagner's genius.—TR.

[Note 39 on page 43](#)

For his creditors, who had advanced money for the publication of the scores of *Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman*, and *Tannhäuser*. See the *Letters to Uhlig and Fischer*.—TR.

[Note 40 on page 46](#)

I lay stress on this, how tasteless soever it may appear to those who make merry over me as

"a revolutionary for the sake of the theatre."—R. WAGNER

[Note 41 on page 48](#)

The connection of this subject with the events of 1848 is made obvious by the prefatory note to the *Wibelungen* essay: "I, too, in the late arousing times, shared the ardent wishes of so many, for the re-awakening of *Frederick the Red-beard*." The tradition ran (though now proved to have been originally connected with Friedrich II.) that the first and greatest Hohenstaufian Kaiser was still sleeping in the heart of the Kyffhäuser hills, and would one day come again to free his people and knit them once more into a sovereign nation.—TR.

[Note 42 on page 48](#)

The studies that I made upon these lines, and whose very necessity decided me to abandon my proposal, I a short while since laid publicly before my friends—at least, not at the feet of historico-juristic criticism—in a little essay entitled "*Die Wibelungen*."—R. WAGNER.

[Note 43 on page 49](#)

Here I got no further in the formalities of my trade than did the skilful Lortzing, who likewise adapted ready-made stage-pieces for his opera-texts.—R. WAGNER.

[Note 44 on page 51](#)

Again we have the—logical—play of words between "*dichterisch*" (poetic) and "*verdichten*" (to condense). Compare [page 92](#).—TR.

[Note 45 on page 51](#)

To wit, that ideal condition of society which he still considered realisable in the near future.—TR.

[Note 46 on page 52](#)

Note to the original edition, of 1852:—"This bugbear of the generality of musical critics, is the rôle they think necessary to ascribe to me, whenever they pay me the honour of their notice. As they never concern themselves about a *whole*, it is only the *part*, the question of Form, that can become the object of *their* reflection; and the blame, that in matters of music they should be compelled to 'reflect,' they lay on *me*, for stepping before them with a 'reflected' music. But herein they make a changeling of me, keeping *only the musician* in view, and confound me with certain actual brain-grubbers of Absolute Music, who—as such—can only exercise their inventive ingenuity on a wilful variation and twisting-about of forms. In their agony lest I should upset the forms that keep our musical hotch-potch steady, they go at last so far, as to see in every new work projected by me an imminent disaster; and fan themselves into such a fury, that they end by fancying my operas, albeit entirely unknown to the directors, are deluging the German stage. So foolish maketh Fear!"

[Note 47 on page 54](#)

See *Opera and Drama*, [Part I](#).—R. WAGNER.

[Note 48 on page 55](#)

Take for instance the hideously contorted harmonic variations, wherewith folk have sought

to make the old and threadbare Rossinian Closing-cadence into something 'à part.'—R. WAGNER.

[Note 49 on page 56](#)

In a [footnote to page 132](#) I have endeavoured to give a slight idea of the meaning of this term.—TR.

[Note 50 on page 56](#)

Note to the first German edition:—"A newest critic, having by chance obtained a glimpse of its manuscript, has had the questionable taste to publish his opinion of my poem '*Siegfried's Tod*'; whereas I myself am here careful not to enter closer on the subject of that work, for the very reason that I cannot as yet present it to the public in the fashion I should like. Among other things, this unwarranted critic calls that verse 'old-Frankish rubbish.' Truly he could not have found a better term to characterise the blindness that makes him *there* see nothing but the Old, where we are already living and moving in the wholly *New*!"—The reference is to an unsigned critique in the *Grenzboten*, for the "24th week" of 1851 ; this article is also alluded to, by Wagner, in [the footnote to page 308](#) of the present volume. A reply, by "Bw" (?Hans von Bülow?), was printed in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* of Oct. 10 and 17, 1851.—TR.

[Note 51 on page 56](#)

Note to the edition of 1872:—"This wish, however, was not to be fulfilled."—It should be also remarked that, as noted earlier, the *Communication* originally formed a *preface* to the three Opera-poems.—TR.

[Note 52 on page 57](#)

*Wahrnehmbarkeit*—literally, 'the qualities that make an object perceptible.' It appears that, by opposing the terms *Sinnlichkeit* and *Wahrnehmbarkeit*, our author here seeks to draw a distinction between the faculties of the lower and the higher senses, and thus between the objects on which these faculties must be exercised. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out how intrinsically this passage differs from the views of Feuerbach and his circle, and how it already foreshadows the transcendentalism of Wagner's later period, as developed in the [Beethoven](#) essay, *Religion and Art*, and *Parsifal*.—TR.

[Note 53 on page 57](#)

It will scarcely fail to be noticed, how much the *artist* was alone concerned in this conception.—R. WAGNER ("The Editor"), 1872.

[Note 54 on page 59](#)

This, of course, is the summary given on [pages 210-13](#); the longer "Dramatic Sketch," though written about this time, was not printed until 1872, when it made its appearance in Vol. III. of the *Gesammelte Schriften*.—TR.

[Note 55 on page 60](#)

Nothing could more thoroughly reveal this—among other matters—to me, than a letter I received from a former friend, a noted composer, in which he adjured me to "leave politics aside, as they brought no good to any one" ("*doch von der Politik zu lassen, bei der im Ganzen doch nichts herauskäme*"). This obstinacy—I know not whether intentional or not—in

taking me sheerly as a politician, and studiously passing over the artistic tenour of my already promulgated views, had for me something exasperating.—R. WAGNER.—As may be seen by letter 59 to *Uhlig*, the "former friend" was Ferdinand Hiller.—TR.

[Note 56 on page 63](#)

I shall never write an *Opera* more. As I have no wish to invent an arbitrary title for my works, I will call them *Dramas*, since hereby will at least be clearest indicated the standpoint whence the thing I offer should be accepted.—R. WAGNER.



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## Appendix

Author's variants, in the original editions of the works included in this volume; omitting such as either are altogether insignificant, and would have called for no difference in translation, or have already been reproduced in the Footnotes to the text.

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The opening sentence in the edition of 1852 ran as follows: "*The reason that decided me to undertake this present publication of three of my opera-poems lay in the necessity I felt of explaining the apparent, or real, contradiction offered by the character and form of these opera-poems, and of the musical compositions which had sprung therefrom, to the views and principles which I have recently set down at considerable length and shall presently—perhaps simultaneously with them—lay before the public under the title of OPERA AND DRAMA.*"—The italicised words are those that differ from the 1872 edition (as translated on [page 269](#)), and are to be explained by the fact that the original *Communication*—as stated in the words: "which I set before the poems as a Preface"—formed an introduction to the poems of the *Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, and that the *Communication* and *Opera and Drama* were in the hands of two different publishing firms, J. J. Weber and Breitkopf und Härtel, at the same time. As a matter of fact, *Opera and Drama* was published in November '51 and the *Communication* at the end of the following month.

[Page 291](#), line 17, after "educators.—" appeared "Look ye! herein lies all Genius!" (*Seht, hierin liegt alles Genie!*)

[Page 294](#), line 8, after "horizon." appeared: "The timid reserve towards the female sex, that is inculcated into all of us—this ground of all the vices of the modern male generation, and no less of the stunting of Woman's nature (*Verkümmerung des Weibes*)—my natural temperament had only been able to break through by fits and starts, and in isolated utterances of a pert impetuosity (*kecke Heftigkeit*): a hasty, conscience-stinging snatch of pleasure must form the unrequiting substitute for instinctively-desired delight."

[Ibidem](#), line 15, after "social system" appeared "to wit, as—using a current expression: unfortunately to-be-put-up-with—vice."

[Page 306](#), line 10 from bottom ran as follows: "belong the three dramatic poems which, in this publication, I lay before my friends in the order wherein they arose: namely, besides the just-named *Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*."

[Page 309](#), line 2 from bottom, "in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*, 1843," for "elsewhere."