On the Performing of "Tannhäuser."

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis

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Contents

About this Title 4
Translator's Note 5
On the Performing of "Tannhäuser." - (An Address to the Directors and Performers of this Opera.) 7
Notes 27
Summary 29

About this Title

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[168]

Translator's Note

Considerable portions of this "Address" were printed in the *Neue Zeitschrift* for December 3 and 24, 1852, and January 1, 7 and 14, 1853—the extracts being chosen by the editor of that journal and arranged in a sequence other than, that of the *Ges. Schr.*, vol. v, which latter would appear to have been also the order of the original pamphlet To the first extract the editor appended a footnote: "This brochure is neither obtainable from the book-trade, nor destined for publication. It lies before us with the author's permission to make a *partial* use of it in this journal." The reasons for the "partial" permission are evident, for all the merely personal and local allusions were omitted in the *Zeitschrift*.

In *'Letters to Uhlig'* (Letter 74, August 14, '52) we read: "I am busy working at a concise address, . . . Unfortunately I can only work very slowly, as any work now tries my head extremely. Yet I hope to have done in four or five days at latest"; and in Letter 75 (August 23, '52) "Only to-day have I finished the manuscript of my 'Address on the performance of *Tannhäuser*.' It had to be more detailed than I at first thought, and I am now glad that I hit upon this way of removing a great weight from my mind. I am again much exhausted by the work, and I must now try to thoroughly recover from the effects. After ripe reflection, I found it necessary to give the manuscript at once to be printed here, so as to be able to send as quickly as possible a sufficient quantity of copies to the theatres (*privatim* and *gratis*). I have ordered two hundred, of which I will at once send you a good share, so thatyoti may be able to deliver them to the theatres, together with the scores."—

[169]

On the Performing of "Tannhäuser."

(An Address to the Directors and Performers of this Opera.)

A CONSIDERABLE number of theatres are entertaining the idea of producing my "Tannhäuser" before long. This unexpected situation, by no means due to my own initiative, has made me so keenly feel the hurtfulness of my inability to personally attend the preparations for the performances proposed, that for a long time I was in doubt as to whether I ought not to refuse my sanction to those undertakings for the present.—If the artist's work first approaches its actual fulfilment, when it is in course of preparation for direct presentment to the senses; if, therefore, the dramatic poet or composer *there* first begins to exert his definitive influence, where he has to bring his aim to intimate knowledge of the artistic organs for its realisement, and through their perfect understanding to make possible an utmost intelligible re-presentment of it: then this influence is nowhere more indispensable to him, than in the case of works with whose composition he has looked aside from customary methods of performance by the sole artistic organs forthcoming, and for their needful method has kept in eye a hitherto unwonted and un-evolved conception of the nature of the art-genre in question. To none can this have been brought more clearly home, than to myself; and it is among my greatest torments of later years, that I have not been able to be present at the individual attempts already made to perform my dramatic works, so that I might have arranged with those concerned the infinite variety of details by [170] whose exact observance alone can the executant artists gain a thoroughly correct conception of the whole.

If paramount reasons have now inclined me to place no unconditional obstacles in the way of further performances of my earlier works, it has been in the belief that, so far as lay within my power, I might succeed in making-up for the impossibility of personal and oral intervention, by written communications to the respective managers and performers. But the number of the theatres which have announced themselves for "Tannhäuser" has so very much increased of late, that private correspondence with each several manager and performer would prove a task beyond my strength. Wherefore I seize on the expedient of the present summary, in pamphlet form, which I primarily address to all to whose understanding and goodwill I have to entrust my work.

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The *Musical Directors* of our theatres have accustomed themselves, almost without exception, to allow the inscenation, and everything connected with it, to be entirely withdrawn from their concernment; in correspondence herewith, our *Regisseurs* (Stage-managers) confine their attention to the scenery, leaving the orchestra wholly out of count. From this ill state of things results the want of inner harmony, and the dramatic inefficiency, of our operatic representations. In necessary sequence, the performer has lost the habit of observing the slightest connection with a whole, and, in his isolated position toward the public, has gradually evolved to what we see him now—the opera-singer pure and simple. Now, if the musical-director regards the orchestra as a thing entirely for itself, he can only take the measure for its understanding from works of absolute Instrumental-music, such as the Symphony, and everything which departs from the [171] forms of that genre must stay

ununderstood by him. But the very thing which departs from the said forms, is just *that* whose own particular form is conditioned by an action or an emotional incident of the play; thus it cannot possibly find its explanation in Absolute Instrumental-music, but solely in that scenic incident. The conductor, therefore, who omits a strict observance of the latter, will detect nothing but caprice in the corresponding musical passages, and by his own capricious, purely-musical interpretation of them, will make them prove as much in execution; for, as he lacks any standard whereby to measure out the purely-musical essence of such passages, he is also sure to go astray in their tempo and expression. This result, again, suffices to so mislead the stage-manager and performers in their part of the business, that, losing the thread of dramatic connection between the stage and orchestra, and at last giving up all continuity of any kind, they feel urged to caprices of another sort in their performance; to caprices which, in their whole wonderful concordance, make out the stereotype conventions of our modern operatic style.

It is manifest that spirited dramatic compositions must in this wise be crippled past all recognition; it is equally certain that even the sickliest of modern Italian operas would gain immeasurably in representation, were due heed paid to that coherence which subsists in even such operas (albeit in merely the grotesquest phase). But I declare that a dramatic composition like my "Tannhäuser," whose sole potentiality of effect rests simply on the said connec- tion between scene and music, must be ruined out and out if Musical and Scenic Directors apply to its performance the methods I have just denounced. I therefore beg that musical-director whom fancy or injunction has assigned the task of producing my work, to read through my score with the very closest attention to the poem, and finally to the countless special indications for the stage performance. When convinced of the necessity for a careful handling of the Scene, it will be for him to acquaint the Regisseur with [172] the full compass of his task. The latter will gain a most inadequate notion of that task by studying the "book" alone; were this otherwise, it would only prove the musical setting unneedful and superfluous. The majority of the stage-instructions are only to be found in the score, against the appropriate musical passages, and the Regisseur has therefore to gain a thorough knowledge of them by aid of the *Kapellmeister* (Conductor).

The Regisseur's next care will be, to come to the precisest agreement with the *Scene-painter*. In ordinary the latter, also, goes to work with no reference whatever to the musical and scenic directors; he has the "book" given him to look through, and he pays no heed to anything in it but what appears to touch himself alone, namely the bracketed passages bearing on his special work. In course of this Address, however, I shall shew how indispensable it is that this companion factor, too, should enter into the inmost intentions of the whole artwork, and how necessarily I must insist upon his reaching the clearest knowledge of those aims from the very outset.

For their dealings with the *Performers*, I have first to point out to the musical-director and stage-manager that the so-called "vocal rehearsals" should not begin until the players have become acquainted with the poem itself, in its whole extent and compass. To this end we must not content ourselves with the book's being sent to each member of the company, for his or her perusal; we desire on their part no critical knowledge of the subject, but a living, an artistic one. I must therefore press for a meeting of the whole body of performers, under conduct of the Regisseur and attended by the Kapellmeister, at which the poem shall be gone through in the fashion usual with a spoken play, each individual performer reading his rôle aloud; the chorus-singers should likewise attend this reading, and their passages are to be recited by either the Chorus-director himself or one of the chorus-leaders. Care should also be taken, that this trial-reading is given with full dramatic [173] accent; and if, from lack of

practice or understanding, the right expression proper to the subject as a poem is not attainable at once, then this rehearsal must be repeated until the needful expression is won from a thorough understanding both of the situations and the inner organism of the plot. Such a demand upon a modern opera-troupe, just as it is in fact a quite unusual one, will certainly be deemed exorbitant, pedantic, and altogether needless; but this very fear of mine throws light enough on the lamentable condition of our Opera affairs. Our singers are wont to busy themselves with the How of execution before they have learnt to know its What: they study the notes of their voice-parts at their own pianos, and, when got by heart, pick up the dramatic by-play in a few stage-rehearsals —too often, only at the dress-rehearsal—in whatever fashion may be dictated by operatic routine and certain fixed suggestions of the Regisseur's for their comings and goings. That they are to be Players in the first place, and only after adequate preparation for their office as such should they venture on concernment with the enhanced, the musical expression of their talk—this, at any rate in the present state of Opera, can by no means fall within their reckoning. Their habit may perhaps seem justified by the products of most opera-composers, yet I must state that my work demands a method of performance directly opposite to the customary. That singer who is not equal to reciting his "part" as a play-rôle, with an expression duly answering to the *poet's* aim, will certainly be neither able to sing it in accordance with the aim of the *composer*, to say nothing of representing the character in its general bearings. By this assertion of mine I stand so firmly, and I hold so definitely to the fulfilment of my stipulation for sufficient reading-rehearsals, that, as against this claim on my side, I once for all express the wish—nay, the will— that, should these reading-rehearsals fail to rouse among those concerned an all-round interest in the subject and its projected exposition, my work shall be laid on the shelf and its production given up.

[174]

Upon the results of the reading-rehearsals, and the spirit in which they have been carried out, I therefore make depend the happy outcome of all further study. It is in them that the performers and the ordainers of the performance have to come to an exact and exhaustive agreement upon *everything* which in usual course is left to the helter-skelter of the final stage-rehearsals. More especially will the musical- director have gained a fresh, an essentially heightened view-point for his later labours; led by the first material impression of the whole, as furnished him by the hearing of an expressive lection, in his subsequent rehearsing of the purely-musical detail he will go to work with needful knowledge of the artist's aim—as to which he must otherwise have cherished doubt and error of all kinds, however sincere his zeal for the enterprise.

As concerns the musical study with the Singers, I have the following general remarks to make. In my opera there exists no distinction between so-called "declaimed" phrases and phrases "sung," but my declamation is song withal, and my song declamation. A definite arrest of "song" and definite commencement of the usual "recitative"— whereby, in Opera, the singer's method of delivery is wont to be divided into two completely different kinds—does not take place with me. To the true Italian Recitative, in which the composer leaves the rhythm of the notes almost entirely undefined, and hands over its completion to the singer's good pleasure, I am an utter stranger; no, in passages where the poem drops from a more impassioned lyric flight, to the mere utterance of feeling discourse, I have never made away the right to prescribe the phrasing just as strictly as in the purely lyric measures. Whoever, therefore, confounds these passages with the customary Recitative, and in consequence transforms from pure caprice their stated rhythm, he defaces my music quite as

much as though he fathered other notes and harmonies upon my lyric Melody. As in the said recitative-like passages I have throughout laboured to denote their phrasing in exact [175] rhythmic accordance with the 'aim' of my Expression, so I crave of conductors and singers that they first should execute these passages in the strict value both of notes and bars, and in a tempo corresponding to the sense of the words. If I have been so fortunate, however, as to find rny indications for the delivery correctly felt, and thereafter definitely adopted, by the singers: then at last I urge an almost entire abandonment of the rigour of the musical beat, which was up to then a mere mechanical aid to agreement between composer and singer, but with the complete attainment of that agreement is to be thrown aside as a worn-out, useless, and thenceforth an irksome tool. From the moment when the singer has taken into his fullest knowledge my intentions for the rendering, let him give the freest play to his natural sensibility, nay, even to the physical necessities of his breath in the more agitated phrases; and the more creative he can become, through the fullest freedom of Feeling, the more will he pledge me to delighted thanks. The conductor will then have only to follow the singer, to keep untorn the bond which binds the vocal rendering with the orchestral accompaniment; on the other hand, this will be possible to him only when the orchestra itself is brought to exactest knowledge of the vocal phrasing—a result only to be brought about, on the one side, by the words and music for the voice being copied into each single orchestral part, and on the other, by sufficiently frequent rehearsals. The surest sign of the conductor's having completely solved his task in this respect would be the ultimate experience, at the production, that his active lead is scarcely noticeable. (I need hardly say that the mode of execution above-denoted—this highest point attainable in artistic phrasing—is not to be confounded with that too customary, where the conductor is held to have acquitted himself most ably when he places his whole intelligence and practised skill at the command of our prima-donnas' wayward whims, as their heedful, cringing lackey: here he is the bounden cloaker of revolting solecisms, but there the co-creative artist)

[176]

I now turn from these general observations on the chief lines of study, to impart my particular wishes as regards the special points in "Tannhäuser"; and here, again, I first shall keep in eye the functions of the Musical Director.

In view of certain circumstances unfavourable to the original production of "Tannhäuser," I saw myself forced at the time into various *omissions*. That most of them, however, were mere concessions wrung from me by utmost Want concessions, in truth, equivalent to a half surrender of my real artistic aim, this I would make clear to future conductors and performers of the opera, in order to convince them that, if they regard those concessions as conditions *sine quâ non*, I must necessarily assume withal their surrender of my intrinsic aim in crucial places.—

At Dresden, then, as early as the scene between *Tannhäuser* and *Venus* in the First Act I saw myself compelled (in the above sense) to plan an omission for the later representations: I cut the second verse of Tannhäuser's song and the immediately-preceding speech of Venus. This was by no means because these passages in themselves had proved flat, unpleasing, or ineffective, but the real reason was as follows: the whole scene failed in performance, above all because we had not succeeded in finding a thoroughly suitable representatrix for the difficult rôle of Venus; the rare and unwonted demands of this rôle were doomed to non-fulfilment by one of the greatest artists herself, because inexpugnable circumstances deprived her of the unconstraint required by her task. Thus the portrayal of the whole scene was involved in an embarrassment that became at last a positive torture, to the actress, to the

public, and most of all to myself. I therefore resolved to make that torture as short as possible, and consequently shortened the scene by omitting a passage which (if anything was to be cut at all) not only was the best adapted for excision, but was also of such a nature, in itself, that Its omission spared the principal male singer no insignificant exertion. This was the sole cause of the abbreviation, and every inducement to continue it would [177] vanish at once where there was no real ground for fear about the success of this scene as a whole. In fact, the very portion of this scene which failed at Dresden, despite the efforts of one of our greatest female artists, succeeded perfectly at Weimar later on, where Venus had a representatrix who certainly could not compare in general with my Dresdener, as artist, yet was so favourably disposed to this particular rôle, and discharged her task with such warmth and freedom from constraint, that this same distressing Dresden scene made the most profound impression here. Under like circumstances the said omission will become nothing less than a senseless mutilation, the verdict whereon I leave to whoever will take the trouble to closely examine the structure of the whole scene, with its gradual growth of mood and situation from their first beginnings to their final outburst; he will bear me witness, I trust, that that cut lops off an organically essential member from the natural body of this scene; and only where the effect of this extremely weighty scene must be given up in advance, could I consent again to its omission—though in such a case I would far rather advise the whole production being given up.

A second omission affects the orchestral postlude of the closing-scene of the First Act The passage struck-out was intended to accompany a scenic incident (the joyous tumult of the chase, as huntsmen fill the stage from every side) of such animation as I was unable to get enacted upon even the Dresden boards. Owing to the uncommon stiffness and conventionality of our usual stage-supers and such-like, the effect could not be brought to that exuberance of spirits which I had intended, and which should have offered the fitting climax to a mood (*Stimmung*) led over into keenest feeling of life's freshness. Where this effect cannot be brought about, then, the music also must keep to its shortened form. On the other hand, where a combination of favourable circumstances shall enable the regisseur to bring-out the full scenic effect intended by me, there [178] nothing but an undocked rendering of the postlude can realise my whole original aim: namely, through an entirely adequate impression of the scene, to raise to its utmost height the *Stimmung* roused by the previous situation—to a height whereon alone can a bustling passage for the violins, omitted from the prelude to the Second Act, be rightly understood.

In the scores sent to the theatres a third omission will be found marked down in the long closing-scene of the Second Act, from page 326 to 331. This bracketed passage comprises one of the weightiest moments in the drama. In its predecessor we had been shewn the effect of Elisabeth's sacrificial courage, her profoundly moving and assuaging plea for her lover, upon those to whom she had immediately addressed herself—the prince, the knights and minstrels in very act of hounding Tannhäuser to the death: Elisabeth and this surrounding, with their mutual attitude toward one another, took all our interest, which concerned itself but indirectly with Tannhäuser himself. But when this first imperative interest is satiated, our sympathy turns back at last to the chief figure in the whole complex situation, the outlawed knight of Venus; Elisabeth and all the rest become a mere surrounding of the man about whom our urgent Feeling demands to be in so far set at rest, as it shall gain clear knowledge of the impression made by this appalling catastrophe upon its prime originator. After his fanatical

defiance of the men's attack, *Tannhäuser*—most terribly affected by Elisabeth's intervention, the expression of her words, the tone of her voice, and the conscience of his hideous blasphemy against her— has fallen to the ground in final outbreak of the shattering sense of utter humiliation, thus plunging from the height of frenzied ecstasy to awful recognition of his present lot: as though unconscious, he has lain with face turned earthwards while we listened breathless to the effect proclaimed by his surrounding. Now Tannhäuser lifts up his head, his features blanched and seared by fearful suffering; [179] still lying on the ground and staring vacantly before him, he begins with more and more impetuous accents to vent the feelings of his bursting heart:
(01)

> To lead the sinner to salvation,
> God's messeng'ress to me drew nigh;
> but, ah! that vilest desecration
> should lift to her its scathing eye!
> O Mary Mother, high above earth's dwelling
> who sent'st to me the angel of my weal—
> have mercy on me, sunk in sin's compelling,
> who shamed the heavenly grace thou didst reveal!

These words, with the expression lent them by this situation, contain the pith of Tannhäuser's subsequent existence, and form the axis of his whole career; without our having received with absolute certainty the impression meant to be conveyed by them at this particular crisis, we are in no position to maintain any further interest in the hero of the drama. If we have not been here at last attuned to deepest fellow-suffering with Tannhäuser, the drama will run its whole remaining course without consistence, without necessity, and all our hitherto-aroused awaitings will halt unsatisfied. Even Tannhäuser's recital of his sufferings, in the Third Act, can never compensate us for the missed impression; for that recital can only make the full effect intended, when it links itself to our memory of this earlier, this decisory impression.

What could have determined me, then, to omit this very passage from the second, and all later Dresden performances? My answer might well include the history of all the troubles I have had to suffer, both as poet and musician, from our Opera-affairs; but I here will put the matter "briefly. The first representative of Tannhäuser—unable, in his capacity of eminently-gifted singer, to grasp anything beyond the "Opera" proper—could not succeed in seizing the characteristic nature of a claim which addressed itself more to his acting powers, than to his vocal talent In keeping with the situation, the aforesaid passage is accompanied [180] by whispered phrases for all the singers on the stage, their voices at times, however, threatening to hastily break short Tannhäuser's motif with warnings of their smothered anger: in the eyes of our singers, this gave the passage all the semblance of an ordinary concerted piece, in which no individual thinks himself entitled to take a prominent lead. Now the obstinacy of this error must bear the blame that this passage's true import, the high relief given to Tannhäuser's personality, was completely lost in the performance, and that the whole situation, with its needful breadth of musical treatment, acquired the character of one of those *Adagio-ensembles* which we are wont to hear precede the closing *Stretto* of an opera-Finale. In the light of such an Adagio-section, dragging itself along without a change, the whole thing must necessarily appear too spun-out and fatiguing; and when the question of a cut arose, to stem the manifest displeasure, it was just this passage that —seeing it had been robbed, in performance, of its proper import—appeared to me a tedious 'length', i.e., a *void*. But I ask any intelligent person to judge my humour toward the external success of my work at Dresden, and whether a twenty-fold performance, with regularly repeated "calls" for the author, could repay me for the gnawing consciousness that a large portion of the received applause was due to nothing but a misunderstanding, or at least a thoroughly defective

understanding, of my real artistic aim! If in future my intentions are to be better met, and my aim realised in fact, I must especially insist on a correct rendering of the passage just discussed at length, since it is no longer to be excised. In those days its omission, and the consequent abandonment of its whole import, resulted in all interest in Tannhäuser completely vanishing at the close of the Second Act, and centering simply in his environment and opposites—thus altogether nullifying my intrinsic aim. In the Third Act Tannhäuser was met by this lack of interest to such a point, that people troubled themselves about his subsequent fate merely insofar as the fate of Elisabeth and even Wolfram, now raised into the virtual [181] protagonists, appeared to hang upon it: only the truly marvellous ability and staying-power of the singer of the chief rôle, when in sonorous and energetic accents he told the story of his pilgrimage, could laboriously re-awaken interest in himself. Wherefore my prayer goes out to every future exponent of Tannhäuser, to lay utmost weight -on the passage in question; his delivery of it will not succeed till, even in midst of that delivery, he gets full feeling that at this moment he is master of the dramatic, as well as the musical situation, that the audience is listening exclusively to *his* utterance, and that this latter is of such a kind as to instil the deepest sense of awe. The cries: "*Ach! erbarm' dich mein!*" demand so piercing an accent, that he here will not get through as a merely well-trained singer; no, the highest dramatic art must yield him all the energy of grief and desperation, for tones which must seem to break from the very bottom of a heart distraught by fearful suffering, like an outcry for redemption. It must be the conductor's duty, to see to it that the desired effect be made possible to the chief performer through the most discreet accompaniment, on part alike of the other singers and the orchestra.—

Yet another omission was I obliged to make in this closing scene of the Second Act, namely of the passage occupying pages 348 to 356 of the score. It came about for precisely the same reasons as in the case of the passage last referred-to, and was merely a consequence of the prior cut having grown inevitable: i.e., I felt that any interest in Tannhäuser, in this Act, was past praying for. The essence of the present passage is the renewed assumption of supremacy by Elisabeth, and more especially by Tannhäuser, as they approach their surrounding, which hitherto has filled the centre of the stage: here the theme of the men, with its command to Rome, is taken up by Elisabeth in fashion of an ardent prayer for her lover; Tannhäuser adds to the song the impassioned cries of broken-hearted penitence, athirst for action; while the remainder of the men break [182] forth anew with threats and execrations. Whether this passage—which certainly belongs to the strictest sequence of the situation—shall be retained in future representations, I must make dependent on its outcome in the stage-rehearsals. If in the long run it should not entirely succeed, i.e., should it not bring about a heightening of the situation through the animation displayed by the surrounding; above all, if the singer of Tannhäuser should feel himself and his voice too sorely taxed by what has gone before, and especially by that aforesaid passage in *adagio*, to sing this too with fullest energy,—then I myself must strenuously advise that the cut shall here hold good: for only by the amplest force of acting and delivery, will the effect intended here be still attainable. In that event I must console myself that the chief matter, the focusing of the main interest on himself, has been compassed through Tannhäuser's enthralling effect in the Adagio, and must content myself with the further effect reserved for him to produce at the supreme moment of his exit. To that moment I should wish this performer's attention most emphatically directed. The men, affronted and incensed afresh at sight of the hated one's delay, are in act to carry out their threats with hand upon the sword-hilt; an adjuring gesture of Elisabeth's holds them back to the path which *she* has won: then suddenly there rings from out the valley the chant of the Younger Pilgrims, like a voice of promise and atonement; as it

enchains the rest, so it falls on Tannhäuser with a summons from the tempest of his blind remorse. Like a flash from heaven, a sudden ray of hope invades his tortured soul; tears of ineffable woe well from his eyes; an irresistible impulse carries him to the feet of Elisabeth; he dares not lift to her his look, but presses the hem of her garment to his lips with passionate ardour. Hastily he leaps to his feet once more; hurls from his breast the cry: "To Rome!" with an expression as though the whole swift-kindled hope of a new life were urged into the sound; and rushes from the stage with burning steps. This action, which must be carried out [183] with greatest sharpness and in briefest time, is of the most determinant weight for the final impression of the whole Act; and it is this impression that is absolutely indispensable, through the mood in which it leaves the public, for making possible the full effect of the difficult Third Act.—

The abridged version of the long instrumental introduction to the Third Act, as contained in the scores revised for the theatres, is the one I now wish kept-to. When first composing this piece, I allowed the subject of expression to betray me into almost recitative-like phrases for the orchestra; at the performance, however, I felt that their meaning might well be intelligible to myself, who carried in my head the fancy-picture of the incidents thus shadowed, but not to others. Nevertheless I must insist on a complete rendering of this tone-piece in its new shape, since I deem it indispensable for establishing the *Stimmung* needed by what follows.

For similar reasons to those given above, after the first representation I saw myself compelled to effect an omission in Elisabeth's Prayer, namely that marked on pages 396 to 398. That the weightiest motivation of Elisabeth's self-offering and death thus went by the board, must be obvious to anyone who will examine carefully the words and music here. Certainly, if the simple outlines of this tone-piece, completely bare of musical embroidery, are to avoid the effect of monotonous length for that of an outflow of sincere emotion, its delivery demands a conception and devotion to the task such as we can seldom hope to meet among our dainty opera-singeresses. Here the mere technical cultivation of even the most brilliant of voices will not suffice us; by no art of absolute-musical execution can this Prayer be made interesting; but *that* actress alone can satisfy my aim, who is able to feel-out Elisabeth's piteous situation, from the first quick budding of her affection for Tannhäuser, through all the phases of its growth, to the final efflorescence of the death-perfumed [184] bloom—as it unfolds itself in this prayer,—and to feel this with the finest organs of a true woman's sensibility. Yet that only the highest dramatic, and particularly the highest *vocal* art, can make it possible to bring this sensibility to outward operation this is a thing that just *those* lady-singers will be the first to recognise, who have erewhile been clever enough at tricking a feelingless heap of loungers out of their ennui through their own most blinding arts, but cannot help perceiving the utter futility of their juggling-feats when confronted with the present task. —The initial inexperience of my Dresden actress must bear the blame, that I was forced to immolate the passage here referred-to; in course of the later performances I had reason to hope for a successful issue of the *whole* Prayer, were I to restore it to its integrity. But another experience made me hold my hand, and I consider this a most appropriate place for imparting it to the conductors and performers of my opera, in form of the following exhortation. —Whatever characteristic feature of a dramatic work we deem expedient to omit from the first few representations, can never be restored in subsequent performances. The first impression, even when a faulty one, fixes itself alike for public and performers as a definite, a given thing; and any subsequent change, albeit for the better, will always take the light of a

derangement The performers in particular, after once getting over the worry and excitement of the first few nights, soon accustom themselves to holding their achievements, as set and moulded during this incubatory process, for something inviolable by any meddling hand; whilst carelessness and gradual indifference add their share, at last, toward making it impossible to deal afresh with a problem now considered solved. For this reason I entreat directors and performers to come to an agreement, upon everything I here am bringing under their notice, *before* the first production. What they are able to achieve, or not, must be definitely established in the stage-rehearsals, if not earlier; and, saving under utmost stress, one should therefore not decide upon omissions with [185] the sorry hope that what has been neglected may be made good again in later performances: for this it never comes to. In like manner one must not at once feel prompted to lop away this or that passage because of insufficient success at the first public performance, but rather have care that its success shall not be lacking in the next; for where one attempts to make an organically-coherent work more palatable through excisions, one merely bears witness to one's own incapacity, and the enjoyment that seems hereby brought within reach at last is no enjoyment of the work as such, but only a self-deception, inasmuch as the work is taken for something other than it really is.

Now the genuine triumph of the representress of Elisabeth would consist in this: that she not only should give due effect to the Prayer in its entirety, but should further maintain that effect at such a pitch, by the magic of her acting, as to make possible an unabridged performance of its pantomimic postlude. I am well aware that this task is no less difficult than the vocal rendering of the Prayer itself; therefore only where the actress feels quite confident of her effect in this solemn dumb-show, do I wish sanction given to the undocked execution of this scene.

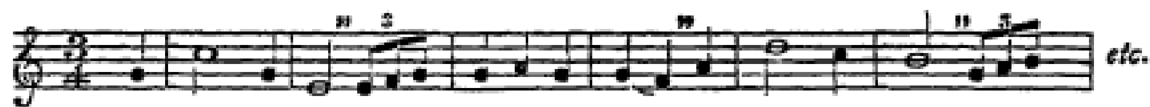
As regards the *revision of the opera's close*, upon whose observance I rigidly insist, I have first to beg all those who do not like this change—owing to impressions harboured from its earlier arrangement,—to consider what I have just said about first performances and repetitions. The revised Close stands towards its first version as the working-out to the sketch, and I soon experienced the pressing need of this working-out; whilst the very fact of my effecting it, may prove to every one that I do not obstinately abide by my first draughts, and therefore, when I press for the reinstatement of passages omitted earlier, that it is not from any blind affection for my works. When I first composed this closing scene I had just as complete an image of it in my brain, as I since have worked-out in its second version; [186] not an atom here is changed in the intention, but merely that intention is more distinctly realised. The truth is, I had built too much on certain scenic effects, which proved inadequate when brought to actual execution: the mere glowing of the Venusberg, in the farthest background, was not enough to produce the disquieting impression which I meant to lead up to the denouement; still less could the lighting of the windows of the Wartburg (also in the most distant background) and the far-off strains of the Dirge bring the catastrophic moment, which enters with Elisabeth's death, to instantaneous perception by an unbiased spectator not familiar with the literary and artistic details of the subject My experiences hereanent were so painfully convincing, that the very non-understanding of this situation afforded me a cogent reason for remodelling the closing-scene; and in no other way could this be accomplished, than by making Venus herself draw near, with witchcraft sensible to ear and eye, whilst Elisabeth's death is no longer merely hinted at, but the dying Tannhäuser sinks down upon her actual corse. Although the effect of this change was complete and decisive on the unbiased public,

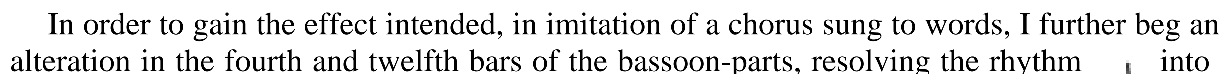
yet I can easily imagine how the art-connoisseur, already familiar with the earlier form—and that through his having acquired a clue to the situation by a study of the poem and music apart from representment,—must have found it disconcerting. This I the more readily comprehend, as the new Close could only be represented in a very halting style at Dresden: it had to be carried-out with the existing scenic material from the First Act, and with none of the fresh scenery which it required; moreover (as I have already mentioned) the rôle of Venus was one of the least satisfactorily rendered in that production, and thus her reappearance in itself could make no favourable impression. These grounds, however, are quite untenable against the validity of the new Close when it is a question, as now, of producing Tannhäuser for the first time on other stages and under quite other conditions, and therefore I cannot grant them the least regard.

[187]

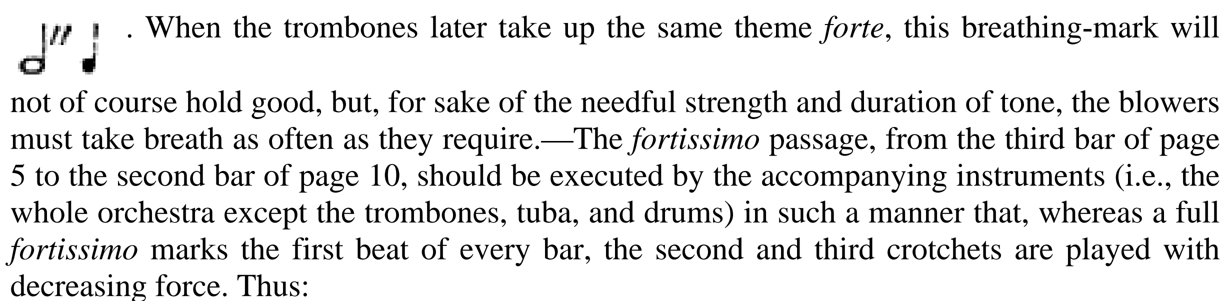
Still reserving my discussion of this closing-scene with the regisseur, and especially the scene-painter, I have next to inform the musical-director that I deemed necessary to omit from the second edition the final chorus of the Younger Pilgrims, occurring in the first arrangement; after what has gone before, it is easy for this chorus to appear a length too much, if by the amplest vocal forces, on the one side, and a striking portrayal of the scene on the other, it be not brought to a powerful effect of its own. The chant is sung exclusively by soprano and alto voices: these must be available in considerable number and great beauty of tone; the approach of the singers must be so contrived that, despite the mere gradual arrival of the whole choir upon the stage, yet the chant is sounded from the ver) r first with utmost possible fulness; and finally, the scene must very effectively reproduce the valley's glowing flush at break of dawn,—if the Director is to feel justified in carrying out this Close of the opera in its entirety. Only the largest and amplest-equipped theatres, however, can command the needful means for the effect last-named; but these alone, by supplying the conditions necessary for retaining this Pilgrims'-chant, could also fully meet my aim; for, with its announcement of the miracle, and as forming the counterpart to Tannhäuser's story of his reception in Rome, this chant at any rate rounds off the whole in a thoroughly satisfying manner. (02)

Before I quite turn my back on the musical-director, (03) I have a few things to discuss with him as regards the *Orchestra*, and chiefly in reference to the phrasing of the *Overture*.—The theme with which this tone-piece begins, [188] will at once be correctly grasped by the wind-instrumentists, if the conductor insists on their all taking breath together at the right caesura in the melody; this invariably precedes the upstroke leading to the 'good' bar of the rhythm, and thus occurs in the third, fifth, seventh, &c., of the melody, as follows:

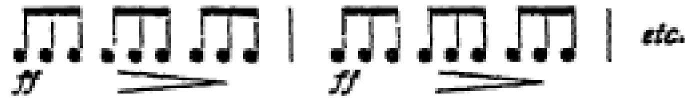


In order to gain the effect intended, in imitation of a chorus sung to words, I further beg an alteration in the fourth and twelfth bars of the bassoon-parts, resolving the rhythm  into

. When the trombones later take up the same theme *forte*, this breathing-mark will



not of course hold good, but, for sake of the needful strength and duration of tone, the blowers must take breath as often as they require.—The *fortissimo* passage, from the third bar of page 5 to the second bar of page 10, should be executed by the accompanying instruments (i.e., the whole orchestra except the trombones, tuba, and drums) in such a manner that, whereas a full *fortissimo* marks the first beat of every bar, the second and third crotchets are played with decreasing force. Thus:



Only the instruments named above, as directly occupied with the theme itself, must maintain an even strength.—At the sixth bar of page 22 the conductor should somewhat restrain the pace, which had shortly before grown almost too rapid, yet without causing any conspicuous retardation; the expression of this passage should merely be sharply contrasted with that of the former, through its obtaining a yearning— I might almost say, a panting—character, both in phrasing and in tempo. On page 23, bar 2, the accent is to be removed from the first note of the first violins; similarly in the first bar of page 24 the *fp* is to be changed to a simple *p*, for all the instruments. On page 25 the time is to be again taken [189] somewhat more briskly; only, the conductor must guard against the theme which enters with page 26 being played too fast: for all the fire with which it is to be rendered, a too rapid tempo would give it a certain taint of levity, which I should like kept very far away from it.—In the distribution of the violins into eight groups, from page 34 onwards, it must be seen-to that the six lower groups are of equal strength, while the two upper, from page 35 on, are manned in such a fashion that the second group is stronger than the first; the first part might even be entrusted to one solitary leader, whereas the second must be numerically stronger than all the others.—The clarinetist generally mistakes the 'slur' in the first bar of page 35, and connects the first note of the triplet with the preceding ¾ crotchet; it must, on the contrary, be emphasised apart. On page 36 particular heed should be paid to the clarinet's standing sharply out from all the other instruments; even the first violin must not overshadow it, and the clarinetist must fully realise that, from its first entry on this page down to the fifth bar of page 37, his instrument takes the absolutely leading part.—A moderately brisk accelerando must commence with page 39, and not slacken until the fifth bar of page 41, when it passes into the energetic tempo there required.—From the third bar of page 50 onwards, the conductor must maintain an unbroken body of fullest tone in all the instruments; any abatement in the first eight bars must be strenuously avoided.—It is of the greatest moment for an understanding of the whole closing section of the Overture, that from page 54 onwards the violins be played in utmost *piano*, so that above their wave-like figure—almost merely whispered—the theme of the wind-instruments may be heard with absolute distinctness; for this theme, albeit it is not to be played at all loud, must forthwith rivet the attention of the hearer.— Beginning with the third bar on page 66, the conductor must accelerate the pace in regular progression, though with marked effect—in such a way that with the entry of the *fortissimo* on page 68 that pitch of rapidity is reached [190] in which alone the trombone-theme, so greatly 'augmented' in rhythm, can be given an intelligible enunciation through its notes losing all appearance of detached and disconnected sounds.—Finally, I scarcely need lay to the heart of the conductor and band that it is only by expenditure of the utmost energy and force, that the intended effect of this unbroken *fortissimo* can be attained. After yet another acceleration of the six preceding them, the last four bars are to be slackened to a solemn breadth of measure.—

As to the "tempi" of the whole work in general, I here can only say that if conductor and singers are to depend for their time-measure on the metronomical marks alone, the spirit of their work must stand indeed in sorry case; only *then* will both discern the proper measure, when an understanding of the dramatic and musical situations, an understanding won by lively sympathy, shall let them find it as a thing that comes quite of itself, without their further seeking.

For what concerns the *manning of the orchestra*—seeing that the body of wind-instruments

in this opera exceeds in no essential the usual complement of all good German orchestras—I have only to draw attention to one point, though certainly of great importance to me: I mean, the requisite effective number of *string-instruments*. German orchestras are invariably too poorly manned with 'strings'; upon the grounds of this lack of fine feeling for the truest needs of good orchestral delivery much might be said, and that pretty decisive of any verdict on the state of Music in Germany; but, to be sure, it here would lead us too far afield. Thus much is certain, that the French—however we may cry out against their frivolity—keep their smallest orchestras better manned with 'strings' than we find in Germany, often in quite celebrated bands. Now in the instrumentation of "Tannhäuser" I so deliberately kept in view a particularly strong muster of strings, that I must positively insist on all the theatres increasing their string-instruments beyond the usual tally; and my requirements [191] may be measured by this very simple standard—I declare that an orchestra which cannot muster at least four good viola-players, can bring to hearing but a mutilation of my music.

For the musical equipment of the stage itself I have made still more unwonted demands. If I stand by the exactest observance of my instructions for the stage-music, I am justified by the knowledge that in all the more important cities of Germany there exist large and well-manned music-corps, especially belonging to the military, and from these the stage-music-corps required for "Tannhäuser" can readily be combined. Further, I know that any opposition to the fulfilment of my demand will come chiefly from the parsimony—often alas! most warrantable, as I admit—of the theatrical Directors. I must tell these Directors, however, that they can expect no manner of success from the production of my "Tannhäuser," saving when the representation is prepared with the most exceptional care in every respect; with a care such as needs must give this representation, when contrasted with customary operatic performances, the character of something quite Unwonted. And as this character has to be evinced by the whole thing, under its every aspect, it must be also shewn on the side of its external mounting; for which I count on no mere tinsel pomp and blinding juggleries, but precisely on a supplanting of these trumpery effects by a really rich and thoughtfully-planned artistic treatment of the whole alike with every detail.

I must now devote a few lines to the *Regisseur*, begging him to lay to heart what I hitherto have chiefly addressed to the Musical Director, and thence to derive a measure for my claims on the character of his own collaboration. Nothing I have said about the representation from the [192] musical side can succeed at all, unless the most punctilious carrying-out of every scenic detail makes possible a general prospering of the dramatic whole. The stage-directions in the score, to which I drew his marked attention in my opening statement, will mostly give him an exact idea of my aim; my circumstantial instructions, with reference to certain habitually-omitted passages, may shew him what unusual weight I lay on the precisest motivation of the situations through the dramatic action; and he thence may perceive the value I attach to his solicitous co-operation in the arrangement of even the most trifling scenic incidents. I therefore entreat the regisseur to cast to the winds that indulgence alas! too customarily shewn to operatic favourites, which leaves them almost solely in the hands of the musical-director. Though, in their general belittlement of Opera as a *genre*, people have thought fit to let a singer perpetrate any folly he pleases in his conception of a situation, because "an opera-singer isn't an actor, you know, and one goes to the opera simply to hear the singing, not to see a play,"—yet I declare that if this indulgence is applied to the present case, my work may as well be given up at once for lost. What I ask of the performer, will

certainly not be drummed into him by sheer weight of talk; and the whole course of study laid down by me, especially the holding of reading-rehearsals, aims at making the performer a fellow-feeling, a fellow-knowing, and finally, from his own convictions, a fellow-creative partner in the production: but it is just as certain that, under prevailing conditions, this result can only be brought about by the most active co-operation of the regisseur.

So I beg the stage-director to pay special heed to the scenic action's synchronising in the precisest fashion with the various features of the orchestral accompaniment. Often it has happened to me, that a piece of by-play—a gesture, a significant glance—has escaped the attention of the spectator because it came too early or too late, and at any rate did not exactly correspond in tempo or duration [193] with the correlated passage for the orchestra which was Influencing that same spectator in his capacity of listener. Not only does this heedlessness damage the effect of the performer's acting, but this inconsequence in the features of the orchestra confuses the spectator to such a pitch, that he can only deem them arbitrary caprices of the composer. What a chain of misunderstandings is hereby given rise to, it is easy enough to see.

I further urge the regisseur to guard against the processions in "Tannhäuser" being carried out by the stage-personnel in the manner of the customary March, now stereotyped in all our operatic productions. Marches, in the ordinary sense, are not to be found in my later operas; therefore if the entry of the guests into the Singers' Hall (Act II. Scene 4) be so effected that the choir and supers march upon the stage in double file, draw the favourite serpentine curve around it, and take possession of the wings like two regiments of well-drilled troops, in wait for further operatic business,—then I merely beg the band to play some march from "Norma" or "Belisario," but not my music. If on the contrary one thinks it as well to retain my music, the entry of the guests must be so ordered as to thoroughly imitate real life, in its noblest, freest forms. Away with that painful regularity of the traditional marching-order! The more varied and unconstrained are the groups of oncomers, divided into separate knots of friends or relatives, the more attractive will be the effect of the whole Entry. Each knight and dame must be greeted with friendly dignity, on arrival, by the Landgrave and Elisabeth; but, naturally, there must be no visible pretence of conversation—a thing that under any circumstances should be strictly prohibited in a musical drama.—A most important task, in this sense, will then be the ordering of the whole Singers'-Tourney, the easy grouping of its audience, and especially the portrayal of their changing and waxing interest in the main action. Here the regisseur must tax the full resources of his art; for only through his [194] most ingenious tactics can this complex scene attain its due effect.

He must treat in a similar fashion the bands of Pilgrims in the First and Third Acts; the freer the play, and the more natural the groupings, the better will my aim be answered. As to the close of the First Act, where (in fact during this whole scene, albeit unobtrusively at first) the stage is gradually occupied by the full hunting retinue; and as to the close of the Third Act, where I have been obliged to make the giving of the Younger Pilgrims' chorus depend in great measure on a skilful handling of the stage—I believe I have already said enough. But one most weighty matter still remains for me to clear up with the regisseur: the execution of the opera's first scene, the *dance*—if so I may call it—in the Venusberg. I need scarcely point out that we here have nothing to do with a dance such as is usual in our operas and ballets; the

ballet-master, whom one should ask to arrange such a dance-set for this music, would soon send us to the right-about and declare the music quite unsuitable. No, what I have in mind is an epitome of everything the highest choreographic and pantomimic art can offer: a wild, and yet seductive chaos of movements and groupings, of soft delight, of yearning and burning, carried to the most delirious pitch of frenzied riot. For sure, the problem is not an easy one to solve, and to pro- duce the desired chaotic effect undoubtedly requires most careful and artistic treatment of the smallest details. The 'argument' of this wild scene is plainly set forth in the score, as concerns its essential features, and I must entreat whoever undertakes its carrying out, for all the freedom I concede to his invention, to strictly maintain the prescribed chief-moments; a frequent hearing of the music, rendered by the orchestra, will be the best means of inspiring any person in the least expert with the devices whereby to make the action correspond therewith.—

This scene now brings me into contact with the *Scene-painter*, [195] whom I shall henceforth figure to myself as in close alliance with the Machinist Only through an accurate knowledge of the whole poetic subject, and after a careful agreement as to the scheme of its portrayal with the Regisseur—and the Kapellmeister—too will the scene-painter and machinist succeed in giving the stage its needful aspect In the absence of such an agreement, how often must it happen that, for mere sake of employing work already executed by the scene-painter and machinist after a one-sided acquaintance with the subject, one is forced at the last moment to embark on violent distortions of the intrinsic aim!

The main features of the Venusberg scenery, whose mechanical structure must accurately fit-in with that for the Wartburg valley set in readiness behind it (an arrangement favoured by the mountainous projections common to both), are sufficiently indicated in the score. However, the shrouding of this scene with a veil of rosy mist, to narrow down its space, Is a somewhat difficult matter: all the intended witchery would be destroyed, if this were clumsily effected by pushing forward, and dropping down, a massive cloud-piece. After many a careful trial, this veiling was most effectively carried-out at Dresden by gradually lowering a number of vaporous sheets of painted gauze, let slowly fall behind each other; so that not until the contours of the previous scene had become quite unrecognisable, was a massive rose-tinted canvas back-cloth let down behind these veils, thus completely shutting-in the scene. The tempo also was accurately reckoned, so as to coincide with the music.—The main change of scene is then effected at one stroke, as follows: the stage is suddenly plunged in darkness, and first the massive cloud-cloth, and immediately thereafter the veils of gauze, are drawn swiftly up; where-upon the light is instantly turned on again, revealing the new scene, the valley bathed in brilliant sunshine. The effect of this valley-picture—which must be mounted in strict accordance with the directions in the score—should be so [196] overpoweringly fresh, so invitingly serene, that the poet and musician may be allowed to leave the spectator to its impression for a while.

The decorations for the Second Act, shewing the Singers'-Hall in the Wartburg, were so admirably designed for the Dresden production, by an eminent French artist, that I can only advise each theatre to procure a copy and mount this scene in accordance with it. The arrangement of the stage, as regards the tiers of seats for the guests at the Singers'-tourney, was also so happily effected there, that I have only to urge an employment of the plans, which

may easily be obtained from Dresden.

Less happily did the scenery for the Third Act turn out at Dresden; not until after the production of the opera did it become evident that a special canvas should have been painted for this Act, whereas I had fancied we could manage with the second back-cloth from the First But it proved beyond the most ingenious artifice of lighting, to give to the same canvas, previously reckoned for the brightest eifect of a spring morning, the autumn-evening aspect so needful to the Third Act Above all, the magic apparition of the Venusberg could not be effectually rendered with this scenery, so that—as already said —for the second version I had to content myself with somewhat mconsequently letting drop once more the veilings of the First Act; whereby the whole apparition of Venus was driven much too much into the foreground, and thus quite missed its effect of a beckoning from afar. I therefore engage the scene-painter, to whom the mounting of this opera is confided, to insist on a special canvas being provided for the Third Act, and to treat it in such a way that it shall reproduce the last scene of the First Act in the tones of autumn and evening, but with strict observance of the fact that the valley is eventually to be shewn in the glowing flush of dawn.—Then for the spectral apparition of the Venusberg something like the following mode might [197] be adopted. At the passage indicated in the score the lights should be very much lowered, while half-way up the stage two veils are dropped, one after the other, completely concealing the contours of the valley in the background; immediately afterwards the distant Venusberg, now painted as a transparency, must be lit with a roseate glow. The inventive talent of the scene-painter and machinist should next devise some means whereby the effect may be produced as though the glowing Venusberg were drawing nearer, and stretching wide enough—now that we can see through it—to hold within it groups of dancing figures, whose whirling movements must be plainly visible to the spectator. When the whole hinder stage is occupied by this apparition, Venus herself will then be seen, reclining on a litter. The perspective, however, must still appear as distant as is consistent with the size of actual human figures. The phantom's vanishing will then be brought about by a rapid diminution and final extinction of the rosy lighting of the background, which till then had grown more and more vivid—therefore by the stage being momentarily plunged in total darkness, during which the whole apparatus required by this vision of the Venusberg is to be speedily removed. Next, and while the dirge is being chanted, one perceives through the two still-hanging veils the lights and torches of the funeral train, as it descends from the heights at the back. Then the veils are drawn slowly up, one after the other, and at like time the gradual grey of early morn fills all the scene; to pass at last, as said, into the glowing flush of dawn.

The scene-painter may see, then, how infinitely important to me is his intelligent collaboration—nay, how alone enabling—and that I assign to him a certainly not un-decisive share in the success of the whole; a success only to be won through a clear and instant understanding of the most unwonted situations. But only a close and genuinely artistic acquaintance with my inmost aims, on his part, can secure me that collaboration.

[198]

After this somewhat circumstantial disquisition, I must turn at last to the *Actors* in particular. I cannot, however, attempt to discuss with them the minutiæ of their rôles; to gain a full and fitting opportunity for this, I should need to enter on a personal and friendly intercourse with each performer. Therefore I must confine myself to what I have already said about the needful mode of approaching the general study, in the hope that through familiarity

with my intentions the performers will of themselves attain the power of executing them. But in all that I have addressed to the Musical Director, in the first place, my claims upon the players are so markedly involved, and in dealing with individual situations I have found occasion to so exactly motivate these claims, that I need only add that my requirements for the conception of those single passages must hold good for every other detail of the performance.—

Yet I deem it as well to go a little deeper into the character of the principal rôles.

Indisputably the hardest rôle is that of *Tannhäuser* himself, and I must admit that it may be one of the hardest problems ever set before an actor. The essentials of this character, in my eyes, are an ever prompt and active, nay, a brimming-over saturation with the emotion woken by the passing incident, and the lively contrasts which the swift changes of situation produce in the utter- ance of this fill of feeling. Tannhäuser is nowhere and never "a little" anything, but each thing fully and entirely. With fullest transport has he revelled in the arms of Venus; with keenest feeling of the necessity for his breaking from her, does he tear the bonds that bound him to Love's Goddess, without one moment's railing at her. With fullest unreserve he gives himself to the overpowering impression of re-entered homely Nature, to the familiar round of old sensations, and lastly to the tearful outburst of a childlike feeling of religious penitence; the cry: "Almighty, Thine the praise! Great are the wonders of Thy grace!" is the instinctive outpour of an emotion [199] which usurps his heart with might resistless, down to its deepest root. So strong and upright is this emotion, and the felt need of reconciliation with the world—with the World in its widest, grandest sense—that he sullenly draws back from the encounter with his former comrades, and shuns their proffered reconcilement: no turning-back will he hear of, but only thrusting-on towards a thing as great and lofty as his new-won feeling of the World itself. This one, this nameless thing, that alone can satisfy his present longing, is suddenly named for him with the name "Elisabeth": Past and Future stream together, with lightning quickness, at mention of this name; while he listens to the story of Elisabeth's love they melt in one great flood of flame, and light the path that leads him to new life. Wholly and entirely mastered by this latest, this impression never felt before, he shouts for very joy of life, and rushes forth to meet the loved one. The whole Past now lies behind him like a dim and distant dream; scarce can he call it back to mind: one thing alone he knows of, a tender, gracious woman, a sweet maid who loves him; and one thing alone lies bare to him within this love, one thing alone in its rejoinder,—the burning, all-consuming fire of Life.—With this fire, this fervour, he tasted once the love of Venus, and instinctively must he fulfil what he had freely pledged her at his parting: "'gainst all the world, henceforth, her doughty knight to be." This World tarries not in challenging him to the combat In it—where the Strong brims full the sacrifice demanded of it by the Weak—man finds his only passport to survival in an endless accommodation of his instinctive feelings to the all-ruling mould of use and wont (*Sitte*). Tannhäuser, who is capable of nothing but the most direct expression of his frankest, most instinctive feelings, must find himself in crying contrast with this world; and so strongly must this be driven home upon his Feeling, that for sake of sheer existence, he has to battle with this his opposite in a struggle for life or death. It is this one necessity that absorbs his soul, when matters come to open [200] combat in the "Singers'-tourney"; to content it he forgets his whole surrounding, and casts discretion to the winds: and yet his heart is simply fighting for his love to Elisabeth, when at last he flaunts his colours openly as Venus' knight. Here stands he on the summit of his life-glad ardour, and naught can dash him from the pinnacle of transport whereon he plants his solitary standard 'gainst the whole wide world,—nothing but the one experience whose utter newness, whose variance with all his past, now suddenly usurps the field of his emotions: the woman who *offers up herself* for love of him.—Forth from that excess of bliss on which he fed in Venus' arms, he had yearned for—Sorrow: this profoundly human yearning was to lead him to the woman who *suffers* with

him, whilst Venus had but joyed. His claim is now fulfilled, and no longer can he live aloof from griefs as overwhelming as were once his joys. Yet these are no sought-for, no arbitrarily chosen griefs; with irresistible might have they forced an entrance to his heart through fellow-feeling, and it nurtures them with all the energy of his being, even to self-annihilation. It is here that his love for Elisabeth proclaims the vastness of its difference from that for Venus: her whose gaze he can no longer bear, whose words pierce his breast like a sword—to her must he atone, and expiate by fearsome tortures the torture of her love for him, though Death's most bitter pang should only let him distantly forebode that last atonement—Where is the suffering that he would not gladly bear? Before that world, confronting which he stood but now its jubilant foe, he casts himself with willing fervour in the dust, to let it tread him under foot No likeness shews he to his fellow-pilgrims, who lay upon themselves convenient penance for healing of their own souls: only "*her* tears to sweeten, the tears she weeps o'er his great sin," seeks he the path of healing, amid the horriblest of torments; for this healing can consist in nothing but the knowledge that those tears are dried. We must believe him, that never did a pilgrim pray for pardon with such ardour. But the more sincere and total his prostration, [201] his remorse and craving for purification, the more terribly must he be overcome with loathing at the heartless lie that reared itself upon his journey's goal It is just his utter singlemindedness, recking naught of self, of welfare for his individual soul, but solely of his love towards another being, and thus of that beloved being's weal—it is just this feeling that at last must kindle into brightest flame his hate against this world, which must break from off its axis or ever it absolved his love and him; and these are the flames whose embers of despair scorch up his heart When he returns from Rome, he is nothing but embodied wrath against a world that refuses him the right of Being for simple reason of the wholeness of his feelings; and not from any thirst for joy or pleasure, seeks he once more the Venusberg; but despair and hatred of this world he needs must flout now drive him thither, to hide him from his "angel's" look, whose "tears to sweeten" the wide world could not afford to him the balm.—Thus does he love Elisabeth; and this love it is that she returns. What the whole moral world could not, that could she when, defying all the world, she clothed her lover in her prayer, and in hallowed knowledge of the puissance of her death she dying set the culprit free. And Tannhäuser's last breath goes up to her, in thanks for this supernal gift of Love. Beside his lifeless body stands no man but must envy him; the whole world, and God Himself—must call him blessed.—

Now I declare that not even the most eminent *actor*, of our own or bygone times, could solve the task of a perfect portrayal of Tannhäuser's character on the lines laid down in the above analysis; and I meet the question: "How could I hold it possible for an opera-singer to fulfil it?" by the simple answer that to *Music* alone could the draft of such a task be offered, and only a dramatic *singer*, just through the aid of Music, can be in the position to fulfil it Where a Player would seek in vain among the means of recitation, for the expression wherewithal to give [202] this character success, to the Singer that expression is self-offered in the music; I therefore merely beg the latter to approach his task with unrestricted warmth, and he may be certain also of achieving it.—But above all, I must ask the singer of Tannhäuser to completely give over and forget his quondam standing as Opera-singer; *as such* he cannot even dream of a possibility of solving this task. To our *tenors*, in particular, there cleaves a downright curse as outcome of their rendering of the usual tenor-rôles—giving them for the most part an unmanly, vapid, and utterly invertebrate appearance. Under the influence, and in consequence, of the positively criminal school of singing now in vogue, during the whole of their theatrical career they are accustomed to so exclusively devote their attention to the paltriest details of vocal trickery, that they seldom attain to anything beyond

the care whether that G or A-flat will come out roundly, or the delight that this G-sharp or A has "taken" well. Besides this care and this delight, they generally know nothing but the pleasure of fine clothes, and the toil to make their finery and voice together bring-in as much applause as possible—above all with an eye to higher wages. (04) I grant, then, that the mere attempt to handle such a task as that of my Tannhäuser will be sufficient in itself to ruffle the composure of the singer, and that this very disquietude will induce him to alter many of his old stage habits; in fact I go so far as to hope that, if the study of Tannhäuser is conducted on the lines laid down by me, so great a change will come over the habits and notions of the singer, in favour of his task, that of itself it will lead him to the right and needful thing. But a thoroughly successful issue of his labours I can only expect when this change shall compass a total revolution in himself and his former methods of conception and portrayal—a revolution such [203] as to make him conscious that for this project he has to become something entirely different from what he has been, the diametric opposite of his earlier self. Let him not reply that already he has had tasks set before him which made unusual demands on his gift for acting: I can prove to him that what he haply has made his own in the so-called dramatic-tenor rôles of latter days will by no means help him out with Tannhäuser; for I could shew him that in the operas of Meyerbeer, for instance, the character for which I have blamed the modern tenor is regarded as unalterable, from top to toe, in means and end, and with the utmost shrewdness. Whoever, then, relying on his previous successes in the said operas, should attempt to play Tannhäuser with merely the same expenditure on the art of portrayal as has sufficed to make those operas both widely given and universally popular, would turn this rôle into the very opposite of what it is. Above all, he would not grasp the energy of Tannhäuser's nature, and thus would turn him into an undecided, vacillating, a weak and unmanly character; since for the *superficial* observer there certainly might exist temptation to such a false conception of the part (lending it somewhat of a resemblance to "Robert the Devil"). But nothing could make the whole drama less intelligible and more disfigure the chief character, than if Tannhäuser were displayed weak, or even by fits and starts "well-meaning," bourgeoisely devout, and at most afflicted with a few reprehensible cravings. This I believe I have substantiated by the foregoing characterisation of his nature; and as I can await no understanding of my work if its chief rôle be not conceived and rendered in consonance with that characterisation, so the singer of Tannhäuser may perceive not only what an unwonted demand I make upon him, but also to what joyful thanks he'll pledge me should he fully realise my aim. I do not hesitate to say that a completely successful impersonation of Tannhäuser will be the highest achievement in the record of his art.—

After this exhaustive talk with the singer of Tannhäuser, [204] I have but little to tell the interpreters of the remaining rôles; the main gist of what I have said to him concerns them all. The hardest tasks, after that of Tannhäuser himself, are certainly those which fall to the two ladies, the exponents of *Venus* and *Elisabeth*. As to Venus, this rôle will only succeed when to a favourable exterior the actress joins a full belief in her part; and this will come to her so soon as she is able to hold Venus completely justified in her every utterance,—so justified that she can 3 r ield to no one but the woman who offers up herself for Love. The difficulty in the rôle of Elisabeth, on the other hand, is for the actress to give the impression of the most youthful and virginal unconstraint, without betraying how experienced, how refined a womanly feeling it is, that alone can fit her for the task.—The other male parts are less exacting, and even *Wolfram*—whose rôle I can by no means hold for unconditionally easy—needs little more than to address himself to the sympathy of the finer-feeling section of our public, to be sure of winning its interest. The lesser vehemence of his directly physical instincts has allowed him to make the impressions of Life a matter of meditation; he thus is pre-eminently Poet and Artist, whereas Tannhäuser is before all Man. His standing toward Elisabeth, which a noble manly pride enables him to bear so worthily, no less than his final

deep fellow-feeling for Tannhäuser—whom he certainly can never comprehend —will make him one of the most prepossessing figures. Let the singer of this part, however, be on his guard against imagining the music as easy as might at first appear: more particularly his first song in the "Singers'-tourney"—comprising, as it does, the story of the whole evolution of Wolfram's life-views, both as artist and as man—will demand a phrasing (*Vortrag*) thought-out with the most sensitive care, after a minutest pondering of the poetic subject, while it will need the greatest practice to pitch the voice to that variety of expression which alone can give this piece the right effect.—In conclusion I would gladly turn from the "Performers" to the "Singers" in particular, [205] did I not on the one hand fear to weary, and on the other, venture to assume that what I have already said will suffice to make clear my wishes to the representants in their function, too, of vocal artists.—

So I will now close this Address, albeit with a mournful feeling that I have most imperfectly attained my object: namely, to make good by it a thing denied me, and yet the thing I deem so needful—a personal and word-of-mouth address to all concerned. (05) Amid my deep feeling of the insufficience of this by-way that I have struck, my only solace is a firm reliance on the good will of my artistic comrades; a good will such as never an artist needed more for making possible his artwork, than I need in my present plight May all whom I have addressed take thought on my peculiar lot, and above all ascribe to the mood which consequently has grown upon me any stray sentence wherein I may have shewn myself too exacting, too anxious, or even too mistrustful, rigorous and harsh.—In view of the unwontedness of such an Address as the preceding, I certainly must prepare myself for its being wholly or for the most part disregarded— perhaps not even understood—by many of those to whom it is directed. With this knowledge I therefore can only regard it as an experiment, which I cast like a die on the world, uncertain whether it shall win or lose. Yet if merely among a handful of individuals I fully reach my aim, that attainment will richly compensate me for all mischanced besides; and cordially do I grasp in anticipation the hand of those valiant artists who shall not have been ashamed to concern themselves more closely with me, and more familiarly to befriend me, than is wonted In our modern Art-world's intercourse.

Notes

Note 01 on page 12

"*Zum Heil den Sündiger zu führen,*" &c.

Note 02 on page 16

The theatres must apply to me for the music of this chorus.—R. WAGNER.

Note 03 on page 16

Touching the vocal parts, I must mate one more request to the Kapellmeister: viz., if the singer of *Walther*, whose solos in the "Minstrel's Tourney" are pitched somewhat low (yet in any case are to be maintained in the key prescribed), should find any difficulty with the persistently high register of the concerted pieces,—to effect a change by having the notes assigned to *Heinrich der Schreiber* copied into the music-part of the former, in addition to his own solo-passages, while the higher voice is made over to Heinrich.—R. WAGNER.

Note 04 on page 24

As I direct these remarks to a whole class, and in such general terms, it naturally is impossible for me to take notice of the manifold varieties which more or less depart from the generic character; wherefore in dealing with crying faults I here must necessarily employ superlatives, which, at any rate, can find no application to many an individual case.—R. WAGNER.

Note 05 on page 25

This "Address" was written when Wagner had already spent over three years in exile,—an exile destined to last for nearly ten years more.—TR.

[393]

Summary

Unexpectedly a number of theatres now (1852) applying for its performing-rights; one of my greatest torments that I cannot be present, but must convey instructions by pen; personal correspondence being beyond my strength, I print this pamphlet.

Anarchy among Conductors, Regisseurs and Scene-painters, each working independently at German theatres. Even the sickliest Italian opera would gain immensely by heed paid to "dramatic coherence; a work like "Tannhäuser" must be ruined out and out by present methods of performance (172). —The poem to be first read aloud by the assembled performers, in presence of chorus, with full dramatic accent; singers generally pick up their rdles at their own pianos, but until they can *recite* their parts they can never sing them in accord with even the *composer's* aim. If this not complied with, I withdraw my work. Advantage of the Conductor's attending these rehearsals. In *Tann.* no real Recitative; strict tempo to be observed by singers in the recitative-like phrases till they have mastered my aim, *then* they should give free play to natural feeling; for full agreement, words should be written out in each *orchestral part*.—Caution against misunderstanding—(175). The cuts [394] (to be restored) necessitated at Dresden: I, second strophe of T.'s song to Venus, because Fr. Devrient unsuited for rôle of Venus, and thus to shorten scene this entire scene at Weimar, however, made a good effect; 2, orchestral postlude to act i, because of stiffness of supers; 3, bustling violin-passage in prelude to act ii, consequent thereon (178). Cut 4, *Adagio* in act ii: this situation forms the axis of T.'s career, nothing can compensate us for missing its due impression; omitted because singers treated it as an ordinary ensemble, instead of simply accompanying in whispers; could a twenty-times-repeated performance at Dresden, with regular calls for author, repay me for the gnawing consciousness that my aim was misunderstood? T. must here feel that he is master of the *dramatic* situation, that the audience is listening to him alone: "*Ach! erbarm dich mein!*" (181). Cut 5, in closing ensemble of act ii, because all interest in T. past praying for—if this passage too sorely tries singer etc. cut must be maintained, and trust to supreme effect of exit, which is indispensable for the mood in which public approaches act iii; 6, abridged version of prelude to act iii—to remain; 7, in Elisabeth's Prayer, because of Johanna Wagner's inexperience, and could not be restored later at Dresden since first impressions fix themselves on public and performers as a definite unalterable thing—the dumb-show after Prayer difficult, but vital (185). Revision of opera's close: first version contains same idea, but merely sketched and thus not understood; public *v* art-connoisseurs. Younger Pilgrims' Chant only to be given where scenery quite satisfactory and voices good, full and ample in number; this chant at any rate rounds off the whole in a satisfactory manner (187). Tempi and dynamics of overture; in general an artistic understanding v metronomical marks. Manning of orchestra, usual deficiency of strings in German theatres compared with French; 'stage-music' to be recruited from military bands. Avoid parsimony, for performance must be unwonted, in character with work (191).

Duties of the Regisseur: "an opera-singer isn't an actor"; discard deference to operatic favourites, and make the performer a partner in the artist's creation from his own convictions; gesture and by-play to synchronise with orchestra. Freedom of grouping in the 'Processions': Entry of Guests and a march from *Norma*; usual serpentine curve, double file, and stage-conversation, prohibited; Minstrels' Tourney; entries and exits of Pilgrims; Dance in Venusberg, a wild and yet seductive chaos—freedom of invention to Regisseur, but must follow chief indications and strictly observe the music (194). *Scene-painter and Machinist*: necessity of intelligent acquaintance with subject, and agreement thereon with Conductor and Regisseur. The cloud-veilings in Venusberg scene; lighting of stage; Wartburg valley to be so

fresh that spectator may be left a while to its impression. French designs for Dresden mounting of act ii. Necessity of separate canvas for Wartburg valley in act iii; arrangements for making glowing Venusberg seem to draw nearer; funeral train and flush of dawn (197).

The rôles. That of Tannhäuser himself may be one of the hardest problems ever set before an actor: his saturation with the passing incident, and the dramatic contrasts hence arising. Never "a little" anything; naming of the nameless, 'Elisabeth;' the whole Past now lies behind him like a dream; [395] one thing alone in this love, the all-consuming fire of Life. The moral world and how it treats the strong; a struggle for life or death; his colours flaunted openly; only one thing can daunt him—the woman who *offers up herself* for love of him. Sorrow, once yearned for, now drunk deep, "her tears to sweeten"; unlike his self-saving fellow-pilgrims. The heartless lie at his journey's end; in despair and hatred of this self-righteous world, he seeks again the Venusbcrg, to hide him from his "angel's" look. Her love-death sets the culprit free; the world, and God Himself, must call him blessed (201). To Music alone could such a task be proposed, and only a dramatic *singer* could fulfil it, but not as *opera-singer*. Curse that cleaves to tenors, through present criminal school of singing; vocal trickery, fine clothes, applause and high wages. This rôle will ruffle singer's composure, and force him to change his habits; but a *total* revolution needed. Not a bit like Meyerbeer's so popular "dramatic-tenor" rôles, neither vapid and unmanly like *Robert*, nor "well-meaning" with a few reprehensible cravings. A completely successful impersonation will be the highest triumph of his art (203). Venus must have a full *belief* in her part; so justified, that she can yield to none but the *self-offering* woman. Elisabeth needs virginal unconstraint, without betraying how much experience that requires. Wolfram addresses sympathy of more refined section of audience; pre-eminently Poet and Artist—Tannhäuser being before all Man. Performers as singers also.— Valediction: a die cast on the world, unknowing whether it shall win or lose; cordially do I giasp the hands of valiant artists who shall not be ashamed to realise my aim (205).