

From Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Mary Whitall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

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APPENDIX: relevant excerpts of Nietzsche's notebooks, cited by Dahlhaus. (Beginning p 12 of this pdf.)

Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, Eds., and Ladislaus Löb, Trans. *Nietzsche: Writings from the Early Notebooks* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

## The Twofold Truth in Wagner's Aesthetics: Nietzsche's Fragment "On Music and Words"



1

Friedrich Nietzsche's fragment "On Music and Words" ("Über Musik und Wort")<sup>1</sup> probably dates from 1871 and seems likely to have originated either as a section of *The Birth of Tragedy* which he decided to omit on publication, or as part of a projected book on ancient Greece which he never completed.<sup>2</sup> At all events—assuming that the dating is not out by half a decade, and its subject matter precludes so great a miscalculation—it was written at a time when Nietzsche's friendship with Wagner was still unclouded. This makes all the more remarkable the implicit polemic against some of the fundamental theses of Wagner's aesthetic theory, a polemic delivered in a tone which is given an offensive edge by Nietzsche's customary manner of taking for granted the meretriciousness of whatever he was arguing against. The fragment is one of the testimonies to his

1. F. Nietzsche, "Über Musik und Wort" (hereafter referred to as "Fragment"), in *Sprache, Dichtung, Musik*, ed. J. Knaus (Tübingen, 1973), pp. 20–32; English renderings of passages from the "Fragment" in this essay are by Walter Kaufmann, whose version of the entire "Fragment" is reprinted in the Appendix—all other translation is my own [Translator].

2. L. Rohner, *Deutsche Essays* (Munich, 1972), 3:215.

enthusiasm for all things Wagnerian, and yet it contains the outlines of his later critique of Wagner, which culminated in his rejection of the theater as a contemptible art form, fit only for the masses.

We can discount the possibility that Nietzsche was unacquainted with *Opera and Drama*, the official handbook of Wagner's aesthetic and historical philosophy. Even if his stylistic sensibilities prevented him from reading it to the end, he must have got as far as the statement, in the introduction, of the fundamental principle: "The error in opera as a genre was that a means of expression (the music) was made the end, while the end of expression (the drama) was made a means."<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche must therefore have known that he was challenging and contradicting Wagner when he wrote in the fragment "On Music and Words" that it is a "strange presumption" to place music "in the service of a series of images and concepts, to use it as a means to an end, for their intensification and clarification."<sup>4</sup> By the "series of [visual] images and [verbal] concepts" he meant the drama, as an entity compounded of mime and speech. Music is not a means to the dramatic end, he wrote, but, on the contrary, drama is an expression and a simile or metaphor (*Gleichnis*) of music. Schopenhauer had been "absolutely right when he characterized the drama and its relation to music as a schema, as an example versus a general concept."<sup>5</sup> The essence of things is heard in music; drama merely reproduces their appearance. Nietzsche's polemic is not, however, directed against musical drama itself, as realized by Wagner in the *Ring* and *Tristan*, but against the theory outlined in *Opera and Drama*, which Wagner modified and qualified in later writings, though he never withdrew it. "Music never can become a means," Nietzsche wrote,

however one may push, thumbscrew or torture it: as sound, as a drum roll, in its crudest and simplest stages, it still overcomes

3. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:231; cf. Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. K. Schlechta (Munich, 1966), 1:247.

4. Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 115, below.      5. Ibid., p. 107, below.

poetry and reduces it to its reflection. Opera as a genre in accordance with this concept [the concept of music as a means to a dramatic end] is thus less a perversion of music than it is an erroneous representation [*Vorstellung*] in aesthetics.<sup>6</sup>

According to *Opera and Drama* the function of musical expression is to "realize the poetic intention for the feelings": to present the creative artist's initial and underlying idea not merely to the intellect or understanding but directly to a region of perception where instinct and the emotions together recognize the truth in the evidence presented by the senses. It was only with such "realization" that drama becomes drama at all for Wagner.

If the poetic intention is still discernible as such it is because it has not been fully subsumed, that is, realized, in the composer's expression; on the other hand, if the composer's expression is still recognizable as such it is because it has not been completely permeated by the poetic intention; only when the expression has surrendered its individual, particular identity in the realization of that intention, do both intention and expression cease to exist, and the reality to which both aspired is achieved: that reality is the drama, in the performance of which we should no longer be conscious of either intention or expression, because we are overwhelmed by its content, as an expression of which we instinctively acknowledge the necessary human truth.<sup>7</sup>

Nietzsche is contemptuous of the "poetic intention," in which, according to Wagner, the musical drama originates. "But how should the image, the representation be capable of generating music? Not to speak of the notion that the concept or, as has been said, the 'poetical idea' should be capable of doing this!"<sup>8</sup> Poetic ideas are not the foundation of music; music is the foundation of poetic ideas. What appears to come first, the text, is in point of fact second—not only metaphysically but even genetically: "a musical excitement that comes from altogether different regions chooses" a text

6. Ibid., p. 116, below.

7. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 4:207.

8. Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 109, below.

to be "a metaphorical expression for itself."<sup>9</sup> And where music presents itself undiminished as that which it really is, metaphors or similes are superfluous and distracting.

Confronted with the supreme revelations of music, we even feel, willy-nilly, the *crudeness* of all imagery and of every emotion that might be adduced by way of an analogy. Thus Beethoven's last quartets put to shame everything visual and the whole realm of empirical reality.<sup>10</sup>

Nietzsche's verdict on hermeneutic "crudeness" calls involuntarily to mind Wagner's programmatic interpretation of Beethoven's C# minor Quartet op. 131 in his 1870 essay on the composer<sup>11</sup> (with which Nietzsche was undoubtedly familiar, since he explicitly quotes from it in "On Music and Words"<sup>12</sup>). The nineteenth century's exegetical zeal produced innumerable examples of musical works being treated as if they were chapters of autobiography; Wagner's program for op. 131 differs in being prefaced by the explanation that his interpretation of it as the "depiction of a day in the life of our saint" is intended only in an "analogical," not an "identifying," sense, and that readers will not recognize the merits of the interpretation so much while actually listening to the music—for in the immediate experience of it music is a "revelation from another world"—but when they are reflecting on the music after hearing it. Thus Wagner both offers the program and at the same time half withdraws it: which is characteristic of the way his later writings propagate not one but two aesthetic truths.

In the choral finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony orchestral music, for inherent musical reasons, makes a transition into vocal music: Wagner's historico-philosophical thesis that it was the "last symphony,"<sup>13</sup> and signified the end of absolute music (music that was absolute in sub-

9. *Ibid.*, p. 112, below.      10. *Ibid.*, p. 112, below.

11. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 9:96f.

12. Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 113, below.

13. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:97 (*Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*).

stance) provoked Nietzsche to riposte in a scornful tone which is astonishing in an utterance of 1871, the time of his friendship with Wagner.

What, then, are we to say of the incredible aesthetic superstition that Beethoven in the fourth movement of the "Ninth" gave a solemn testimony concerning the limits of absolute music and thus unlocked the portals to a new art in which music is said to be able to represent even images and concepts and has thus supposedly been made accessible for "conscious spirit"?<sup>14</sup>

It is possible that Nietzsche's polemic—the scorn he expresses for the "conscious spirit," which is led by an aesthetic error to think itself superior to the unconscious impulses of an earlier age—was directed not so much against Wagner as against Franz Brendel, who shared Wagner's views about the "end of the symphony,"<sup>15</sup> for it was Brendel who tried repeatedly, with the persistence of the dogmatist, the ideologist of a musical faction, to make a distinction between earlier "instinctive" composition and modern "conscious" composition.<sup>16</sup> (The thesis that, as Nietzsche puts it, music "is able to represent even images and concepts" served Brendel, though not Wagner, as the justification, aesthetically and historico-philosophically, of the program music of Berlioz and Liszt.) On the other hand it is a fact that Wagner too praised the finale of the Ninth Symphony as the sign and the paradigm of a transition to "conscious" composition: "With this melody [Freude, schöner Götterfunken] music's mystery is solved for us: now we know, we have won the ability to be artists who can create organically in full consciousness."<sup>17</sup> ("Creating organically with consciousness" meant being conscious of music's foundation in poetry as a condition of organic, as opposed to mechanical, composition.)

14. Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 113, below.

15. F. Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik in Italien, Deutschland und Frankreich*, 4th ed. (Leipzig, 1867), p. 593; cf. also pp. 355f.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 594, 597f., 634.

17. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:312 (*Oper und Drama*).

## 2

One of the central elements in Nietzsche's later critique of Wagner, his disparagement of the theater, is already pre-figured in "On Music and Words" without its polemic potential yet being apparent. Both in the essay on Beethoven, which was fresh in Nietzsche's mind when he was writing in 1871, and in *Opera and Drama* twenty years earlier, Wagner stressed the importance of the mimetic and scenic elements in musical drama.

We know that the lines written by a poet, even a Goethe or a Schiller, cannot determine music; only drama can do that, and by drama I mean not the dramatic poem or text but the drama we see taking place before our eyes, the visible reflection of the music, where the words and utterances belong solely to the action, and no longer to the poetic idea.<sup>18</sup>

Verbal utterance—*parola scenica* as Verdi called it—forms just one of the elements in a theatrical action, but it is the action as a whole which gives reality to the poetic idea by enabling it to reach the emotions and senses directly, instead of its merely being enunciated for the intellect to receive.

The sentence from Wagner's *Beethoven* quoted in the previous paragraph is equivocal in its description of the relationship between music and drama, for on the one hand drama is said to be able to "determine music," but on the other hand it is presented as the "visible reflection of the music": "das sichtbar gewordenes Gegenbild der Musik," a use of Schopenhauer's terminology which implicitly concedes that the music is the "*Urbild*," the "original" of the reflected image. Priority is split between music and drama—both determine and simultaneously both are determined; when Nietzsche puts the mimetic and scenic elements into second place, in the 1871 fragment, he is confronting an earlier product of Wagnerian aesthetic theory, the principal thesis of *Opera and Drama*, with a more recent

18. Ibid., 9:111f. (*Beethoven*).

theory, which Wagner formed under the influence of Schopenhauer. What is one half of the aesthetic truth proclaimed by Wagner, that the drama, the theatrical action, is a "reflection" of the music, a "deed of music that has become visible,"<sup>19</sup> is the whole truth for Nietzsche, and he expresses it with polemical directness.

Opera in this sense, of course, is at best good music and only music, while the imposture that goes on at the same time is, so to say, merely a fantastic disguise of the orchestra, and, above all, of its most important instruments, the singers, something on which people of insight turn their backs, laughing.<sup>20</sup>

The contempt for the theater, for stage spectacle, which Nietzsche expressed with ever increasing vehemence in his later critique of Wagner, is latent in Wagner's own aesthetic theory, insofar as it is based on Schopenhauer. Nietzsche put into words what he had himself experienced while watching *Tristan*, when he wrote:

... for at every point where the Dionysian power of the music strikes the listener like lightning, the eyes that behold the action and were absorbed in the individuals appearing before us become moist, and the listener *forgets* the drama and wakes up again for it only after the Dionysian spell is broken.<sup>21</sup>

This passage owes rather more to Wagner than the experience it describes: although it contradicts the earlier stratum of Wagner's aesthetic theory and thus implies a criticism of Wagner, it is very nearly a quotation of Wagner's own words from *Beethoven* ("gesture" [*Gebärde*] is Wagner's shorthand term for the mimetic and scenic aspects of the action as a whole):

Music expresses the innermost essence of gesture with such immediate comprehensibility that, once it has completely filled our beings, it diminishes even the power of our sight to concen-

19. Ibid., 9:306 (*Über die Benennung "Musikdrama"*).

20. Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 117, below.

21. Ibid., pp. 117f., below.

trate on the gesture, so that finally we understand it without even seeing it.<sup>22</sup>

"The drama we see taking place before our eyes"—the ultimate aesthetic authority in *Opera and Drama*—was still important to Wagner in 1870, but by then he was no longer in the planning stages of the *Ring*. By then he had written *Tristan*, and he admitted the subjection of the drama to the superior power of the music.

Thus the fragment "On Music and Words" contains the elements of a critique of Wagner which Nietzsche, by adroit, selective emphasis, was able to derive directly from Wagner's own aesthetic theory and the twofold truth it contained.

Wagner himself, in an outburst of disgust with the "business of costumes and make-up," once said in 1878 that he wished he could invent "invisible theater";<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche accused him, in *The Case of Wagner*, of having brought about the "decline of art" and the "demoralization" of the artist by the "total transformation of art into theatrical spectacle."<sup>24</sup> He depicted Wagner's "theatrical genius" as bringing a historical—or historico-philosophical—doom in its wake. In *Nietzsche contra Wagner* he wrote: "You can see that my nature is intrinsically anti-theatrical, in the very depths of my soul I feel that profound contempt for the theater, the mass art par excellence, that every artist feels today."<sup>25</sup> "We know the masses, we know the theater."<sup>26</sup> Though Nietzsche celebrated the first Bayreuth festival, in the fourth of the *Thoughts out of Season* ("Richard Wagner in Bayreuth") in 1876, as a repudiation of the modern theater exemplified by the Paris Opéra,<sup>27</sup> he later, after his "conversion," denounced the festivals as a manifestation and a symptom of the very ruin they had been intended to avert.

22. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 9:77; cf. also 9:104.

23. C. F. Glasenapp, *Das Leben Richard Wagners*, vol. 6 (Leipzig, 1911), pp. 137f.

24. Nietzsche, *Werke*, 2:916.

25. *Ibid.*, 2:1041.

26. *Ibid.*, 2:914.

27. *Ibid.*, 1:410.

With the scorn that is nourished by former admiration, Nietzsche emphasized Wagner's "histrionic" side, something he equated with "inauthenticity."<sup>28</sup> The category of inauthenticity was later taken to apply only to the psychology of individual artists and adopted in that form by a school of aestheticians, to the detriment of aesthetics. But in Nietzsche it is a central charge, which he levelled by no means solely at Wagner, but at the modern theater as a whole, and therefore it was not intended primarily as a psychological aspersion. If the argument is not simply to provoke the trite counter-argument that it is a waste of time to blame the theater for being theatrical instead of being an immediate expression of psychological reality, it has to be understood metaphysically. Closer analysis shows that once again Nietzsche was making polemical capital out of the dichotomy in Wagner's aesthetic theories.

The fundamental thesis of *Opera and Drama*, that music must be a means at the service of drama—"the drama we see taking place before our eyes," that is, the stage action—was turned inside out by Nietzsche (as if he had forgotten his *Tristan* experience) and used to attack Wagner—the composer, not just the theorist—on the grounds that, in the creation of his musical dramas, Wagner denied music's metaphysical primacy and made mimetic and scenic elements his starting point, gave priority to his theatrical intuition. "Wagner starts with a hallucination, not of sounds but of gestures. Then he looks about him for a semiotic in sound with which to express them."<sup>29</sup> In order to prove his charge that Wagner was first and foremost a theatrical showman, who also happened to compose, Nietzsche takes up Wagner's own anticipatory description of his own work in *Opera and Drama* (the fallibility of which Nietzsche ought really to have learned from his own *Tristan* experience) and demolishes it by the use of critical categories based on Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music, that is, on an aes-

28. *Ibid.*, 2:919, 925.

29. *Ibid.*, 2:917.

thetic philosophy which owed its pre-eminence in the later nineteenth century entirely to its adoption by Wagner. Not that the genesis of Nietzsche's polemic makes any difference to its validity or lack thereof. (There is no contradiction between doubting whether any definite conclusions can be drawn at all over the genetic priority of music or staging in Wagner's creative processes, and simultaneously believing that psychological genesis and aesthetic validity need not coincide, that is, that the priority of the mimetic and scenic "hallucination" in the genesis of a work does not rule out the aesthetic and metaphysical primacy of the music.) It is of some importance, however, that Nietzsche reformulated Wagner's aesthetic theory in such a way as to turn the dialectical relationship between the two truths it contained (a relationship which will be analyzed closely below) into one of contradiction, in order to fuel an ambiguous polemic, in which revulsion was mingled with enthusiasm. (In 1876, in the panegyric *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, Nietzsche was still able to discuss elements that later were to disgust him—"theater," "effect," "mass art"—in a neutral tone, not exactly enthusiastic but without any perceptible intrinsic hostility:

When the dominating idea of his [Wagner's] life rose up in him, the idea that an incomparable effect, an effect greater than that of any other art, could be exercised by the theater, it stirred his being into the most violent ferment.<sup>30</sup>

He also referred to Wagner's "primal theatrical gift"<sup>31</sup> without any suggestion of a sneer, without any of that disparagement of histrionic talent which in any case was at odds with his admiration for Aeschylus.)

## 3

Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the "will" was modified by Nietzsche in the fragment "On Music and Words" by a process of subdividing concepts which at first sight may appear to be a grave infringement of the rule that concepts should

30. Ibid., 1:402.      31. Ibid., 1:398.

not be multiplied unnecessarily. The purpose of it becomes clear only when it is seen to be a means of making metaphysical provisions with which to solve aesthetic problems. Metaphysics is being used as an organon of aesthetics, instead of aesthetics being, as Schelling put it, an organon of metaphysics.

The "will," Schopenhauer's ultimate authority, is, according to Nietzsche, "nothing but the most general manifestation of something that is otherwise totally indecipherable for us"<sup>32</sup> a likeness, that is, not the original image—a "general manifestation," not the "thing in itself." On the other hand Nietzsche distinguishes between the "will"—the "basic ground of pleasure and displeasure"<sup>33</sup> which lies beneath all the stirrings of the soul and the processes of the conscious mind—and feeling, the mere emotions and instincts, which are "already permeated and saturated by conscious and unconscious representations";<sup>34</sup> which have, that is, moved further from the "indecipherable."

In Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music the "will," representing both the music's content and its origins, was equated with feeling, but Nietzsche subdivides this basic concept into no fewer than three categories: the "indecipherable," the "will," and the emotions. He defines the "indecipherable" as the "origin" of music, the "will" as its "subject," and the emotions as a mere "symbol": music is not the likeness and expression of an emotion, the emotion is a metaphor of the music.<sup>35</sup> Schopenhauer was not above adopting from popular aesthetics the proposition that music is an "imageless language of the heart,"<sup>36</sup> but Nietzsche was roused to combat the "corrupt emotional theory of aesthetics," as Hanslick called it.<sup>37</sup> "Feeling . . . is altogether the inartistic *par excellence* in the realm of creative art, and

32. Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 108, below.

33. Ibid., p. 110, below.      34. Ibid., p. 111, below.

35. Ibid., p. 111, below.

36. A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, §224 ("Zur Metaphysik des Schönen"), quoted by Nietzsche, Fragment, p. 106, below.

37. E. Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854; modern reprint, Darmstadt, 1965), p. v (preface).

only its total exclusion makes possible the full self-absorption of the artist and his disinterested contemplation."<sup>38</sup> From this it seems that Nietzsche has adopted the maxim that works of art are not created in the full flood of emotion but require contemplative distance. On the other hand he sees the origins of music lying in the "indecipherable," something that he understands to be a "power," "that in the form of the 'will' generates a visionary world: the origin of music lies beyond all individuation."<sup>39</sup> The relationship between the "indecipherable" and the artist's "disinterested contemplation"—or between the "Dionysian" and the "Apollinian," in the language of *The Birth of Tragedy*—remains undefined. But it is clear that Nietzsche, unlike Schopenhauer, disowned the emotional theory of aesthetics: emotions do not provide music with underlying premises or expressive content, but are merely a simile into which music can be translated. "All those who feel, when listening to music, that the music has an effect on their emotions" are concerning themselves with secondary matters. "The distant and remote power of music appeals to an intermediate realm in them, that gives them, so to say, a foretaste, a symbolical preconcept of the real music, the intermediate realm of the emotions."<sup>40</sup> The "real" music is "absolute" music,<sup>41</sup> which can have meaning without needing to be the "language of the heart."

The statement that the "will" is what forms the "subject" of music is very nearly a quotation from Schopenhauer, but the similarity of the formulations should not be allowed to disguise the differences in what they mean. For one thing, as has already been said, Nietzsche distinguishes the will, "this basic ground of pleasure and displeasure," from the emotions. Secondly the idea that this basic ground can be the subject of music, but the emotions, "already permeated and saturated by conscious and unconscious representa-

38. Nietzsche, *Fragment*, pp. 110, below.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 111, below.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 111, below.      41. *Ibid.*, pp. 107f., below.

tions," cannot, is not very far from the thesis of Hanslick the "formalist" that music can express only the "dynamic" aspect of the emotions, but not their specific subjective nature, contingent on the conception of a particular object.<sup>42</sup> Thirdly, if it is emphasized that the origin of music is in the indecipherable, the result will be to remove music completely from the realm of the emotions, and to diminish the importance of the concept of the will as music's subject, because, for Nietzsche, when the origin of a thing has been determined, the essence of its being has been defined.

The musical aesthetic Nietzsche outlined in the fragment "On Words and Music" seems therefore, not to put too fine a point on it, to be a covert argument on behalf of "absolute" music, a translation of a doctrine which may seem empirical and limited when expounded by Hanslick into the language of Schopenhauerian metaphysics, which originally accepted the emotional theory of aesthetics.

#### 4

The aesthetic of "absolute" music was expressed by Hanslick with conspicuous sobriety and with due regard to the persuasive effects of an appeal to common sense. In this guise it was carried along on the anti-Hegelian current of the age, but it was nothing other than the reformulation of a thesis that had been expounded in enthusiastic language half a century earlier by romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel and E. T. A. Hoffmann, so that the metaphysical turn given it by Nietzsche amounted to a restitution. In the "Athenäum" fragments of 1798 Schlegel, on the one hand, attributed to "pure instrumental music" a "certain tendency" towards philosophy, or philosophical meditation, and, on the other hand, dismissed the saying that music was the "language of sensibility" as the "banal point of view of so-called naturalness."<sup>43</sup> These were ideas that Nietzsche

42. Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, p. 14.

43. F. Schlegel, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I*, Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, vol. 2 (Munich, 1967), p. 254.

later developed in the fragment "On Music and Words": the interpretation of "absolute" music (the term as such was unknown to Schlegel and Hoffmann) as an organon of metaphysics, or as a "premonition of the spirit realm," and the repudiation of the emotional theory of aesthetics, which belonged not so much to romanticism as to the Enlightenment and later to the Biedermeier outlook.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's development as an aesthetician depended first and foremost on his relationship with Wagner (he was hardly conscious of the connection between his modification of Schopenhauer's musical metaphysics and the romantic theory of "pure instrumental music"). And—although it may at first sound like a deliberately provocative paradox—it is perfectly reasonable to claim that, at the same time as Wagner pronounced the doctrine that music is, or ought to be, a means to a dramatic end, he also espoused other, contradictory aesthetic principles which reveal that he, hardly less than the "formalists" who were his opponents in the day-to-day cut and thrust of musical debate, took for granted the truth of the idea of an "absolute" music which was characteristic of the nineteenth century as a whole. *Opera and Drama*, officially his principal theoretical work, propagates an "exoteric" aesthetic, but there is another, "esoteric," Wagnerian theory of aesthetics, the components of which are to be found scattered throughout the later writings. It was a theory for initiates which Nietzsche took as his starting point but then carried to an extreme where it was converted into a critique of Wagner and finally into outright polemic against him.

Wagner once talked about "absolute" music—an expression that appears to have been invented by him—in a negative sense. In *The Artwork of the Future*<sup>44</sup> he uses the term to refer to a "pure instrumental music" which has been "released" (or "absolved" [*abgelöst*], hence "absolute") from its original motivation in dance and thereafter "desires" to be "redeemed" (*erlöst*) by a poem (as in the finale of the Ninth

44. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:85, 93, 96, 101.

Symphony) or by a drama from the unhappy isolation where it languishes without an aesthetic *raison d'être*. In *Opera and Drama*, however, he also designates such operatic music as is not determined by and founded in drama, but attempts instead to create drama or the appearance of drama out of itself, as "absolute" music,<sup>45</sup> because it has no foundation or reason for existence. Thus Spontini is an "absolute musician,"<sup>46</sup> Rossini's melody is "absolute melody."<sup>47</sup>

As Wagner understood it, "absolute" music was deficient (in spite of his enthusiasm for Beethoven's symphonies: the Hegelian concept of "subjectively" admiring what you nevertheless "objectively" rejected from the historicophilosophical standpoint was a commonplace by 1850). The release of melody from "the conditioning poetic substratum"<sup>48</sup> may mark an advance in terms of compositional technique, but aesthetically melody is reduced, diminished. "Unconditionality" is seen as a deficiency, a logical absurdity, not as a metaphysical distinction (as in the romantic theory of "pure instrumental music"). And since the concept of "absolute" music is negative in its formulation—being determined by its loss of association with language and dance, with the extra-musical "formal motives"<sup>49</sup> which lend music a "need to exist"—it can (like all negative concepts) embrace the most extreme variety of phenomena, from Beethoven's symphonic instrumental melodic writing to Rossini's operatic melodic writing. "Absolute" music is everything that Wagner wanted to separate from musical drama, as the idea of it shaped itself in his mind around 1850.

If, in *Opera and Drama*, where he proceeded from the thesis that music was a means to the dramatic end and nothing more, Wagner's conviction of the absurdity of "absolute" music admitted no qualifications or doubts, once he began to read Schopenhauer in 1854 his certainty started to waver. The question whether music, of itself, without a

45. *Ibid.*, 3:233.      46. *Ibid.*, 3:241.

47. *Ibid.*, 3:251, 255.      48. *Ibid.*, 3:276 (*Oper und Drama*).

49. *Ibid.*, 5:191 (*Über Franz Liszts symphonische Dichtungen*).



foundation in language or dance (mimetic and scenic representation in drama was included in Wagner's expanded definition of dance), could create coherent meaning became a vexing problem for him. For the doctrine he had formulated with such uncompromising severity in *Opera and Drama* was hardly to be reconciled with Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music, which exerted such a strong attraction over him—hardly surprisingly at the time of the genesis of *Tristan*.

(The practice of applying the term "absolute" music only to instrumental music without program or verbal text hinders a formulation of the problem in its historical context, conditioned by the assumptions of nineteenth-century aesthetics. Wagner's primary concern in his campaign against "absolute" music was the question of the function and significance of music in musical drama and vocal music as a whole: whether music was the "founding" and "motivating" element or whether it was "founded" in and "motivated" by other elements. Acknowledgment of the aesthetic right of "pure instrumental music" to exist was then merely a consequence of being persuaded that music could be meaningful of itself—without an extra-musical "formal motive." Since Wagner altered his aesthetic interpretation of musical drama, he was able in the end to accept Bruckner and even, at the end of his life, to toy with the idea of writing symphonies himself. The idea of "absolute" music means that, possessing meaning and coherence in its own right, music can be the founding element aesthetically—but not genetically—when it is vocal music, as well as stand on its own feet when it is purely instrumental.)

In Wagner's 1870 essay on Beethoven his acknowledgment of Schopenhauer, which is the form in which he expresses the change in his attitude towards his own work (Wagner never absorbed anything from outside unless he had an inner need and use for it), comes close to quotation.

Music does not represent the ideas contained in the phenomena of the world; it is itself an idea, a comprehensive idea, of the

world. Of itself music includes drama entirely within itself, since drama in turn expresses the only idea of the world which is commensurate with music. . . . Just as drama does not depict human characters but enables them to present themselves directly, so a piece of music, in its motives, gives us the character of all the phenomena of the world according to their innermost essence. The movement, formation and alteration of these motives, by analogy, are not only related solely to the drama: but the drama, representing the idea, can in truth be understood with perfect clarity only through the medium of those musical motives and in the way they move, form, and alter.<sup>50</sup>

Music, which is an idea, is the origin of drama, which represents an idea. In 1872, in his essay *On the Term "Music Drama,"* Wagner spoke of his dramas as "deeds of music which have become visible."<sup>51</sup> Music is the "essence" (*Wesen*), to which drama stands in the relationship of "material appearance" (*sinnliches Scheinen*), in Hegelian terminology.

There are no more references to "absolute" music; Wagner has dropped the term altogether—probably to avoid using it with a positive, instead of negative, emphasis and so making the disjunction in his aesthetic theory more obvious than it was already. But there is no denying that the concept designated by the term is implicitly present as one of the central categories in Wagner's later writings on aesthetics. The turning point—and apparently his last use of the term—is marked by the open letter *On Franz Liszt's Symphonic Poems* (1857), in which the change in Wagner's ideas, though unacknowledged, reveals itself in the ambiguity of his formulations. At first Wagner appears to be still loyal to the thesis he expounded in *Opera and Drama*, that music needs an extra-musical "formal motive" (a non-musical reason for existing at all) if it is to make sense and express anything.

Nothing is less absolute than music (*nota bene*: where its appearance in life is concerned), and those who champion the cause of an absolute music

50. *Ibid.*, 9:105f.

51. *Ibid.*, 9:306.

—the expression Wagner had invented in his reforming essays of the early 1850s had in the meantime been adopted by Hanslick, in 1854, and used in an apologetic sense<sup>52</sup>—

evidently do not know what they mean; to confound them it would be enough to ask them to show us a piece of music without the form which it took from physical movement or words (according to the causal nexus).<sup>53</sup>

But the parentheses betray Wagner's philosophical embarrassment. It is uncertain whether by "causal nexus" he means only the historical provenance of "pure instrumental music" out of dance music (as such fulfilling a function) and vocal music (which it imitated) or whether he also means the dependence of a dramatic score on the prescribed text and scenario; it is of no great importance to decide, since both meanings are open to the objection that the genesis of a musical form cannot be automatically equated with its aesthetic validity. The banal fact that text and scenario precede music (the few exceptions, such as in the case of *Tristan*, do not affect the general rule) does not prevent the text and the stage action from appearing as a translation and simile of the music (as Nietzsche put it) when the work is completed. The first parenthesis—"({*nota bene*: where [music's] appearance in life is concerned})"—obviously refers to the distinction between genesis and significance, between empirical, biographical facts and metaphysical, aesthetic truth. Metaphysically, the music is the "origin" of the drama; empirically, in compositional practice, it is "conditioned" by the drama.

On this we are agreed and admit that divine music in this human world had to be given a conjunctive, indeed—as we have seen—a conditioning element to make its appearance possible.<sup>54</sup>

52. Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, p. 20.

53. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5:191.

54. *Ibid.*, 5:192 (*Über Franz Liszts symphonische Dichtungen*).

"Conditionality" is forced upon a composer who needs to meet some form of opposition in order to be creative, and "unconditionality" on a listener who recognizes aesthetic contemplation, as described by Schopenhauer, as a vehicle of metaphysical insight.

## 5

The idea of an "absolute," "unconditional" music, needing no extra-musical "formal motive" to be meaningful, is one of the central aesthetic tenets of a century in which art music (not the vast majority of the music that was written, which remained in the shadows) rose to aesthetic "autonomy," that is, no longer had a manifest function to fulfill, but was intended to be listened to for its own sake. Of course "autonomous" music often had an "ideological" or prestige function imposed upon it, but that does not alter the fact that there is a palpable distinction in principle between "functional" and "autonomous" music.

The word "absolute" is an equivocal one, signifying the absolving of music from the obligation to fulfill extra-musical functions and subject itself to texts and programs, as well as suggesting an affinity to the metaphysical category of the "absolute," but this is by no means a terminological weakness which ought to be eliminated by stricter definition. Rather it is an exact verbal equivalent of the aesthetic idea the term seeks to express: the idea that music is given metaphysical significance by the very fact that as an "autonomous" art it forms "a separate world of its own";<sup>55</sup> the "essence" that lies beyond the "appearance" reveals itself, according to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, to the listener who forgets self (escapes from "individuation") and immerses himself in music, in the immanent dynamic and logic of the sound. It is "absolute" music, music which is independent of a text or of the need to illustrate one, which

55. L. Tieck, "Die Töne," in W. H. Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe* (Heidelberg, 1967), p. 245.

reveals or intimates the "spirit realm," E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Djinnistan": music, that is, which either exists in its own right without text, scenario, or program, or possesses an aesthetic superiority beside which the text that is associated with it fades to a mere simile of the sounding "revelation from another world."<sup>56</sup>

The claim that the metaphysics of "absolute" music—not the emotional theory of aesthetics inherited from the eighteenth century, and not Wagner's "exoteric" theory of extra-musical "formal motives"—is the true musical aesthetic of the nineteenth century, the age of musical "autonomy," from Friedrich Schlegel, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and Schopenhauer to Hanslick, Wagner, and Nietzsche, emerges from the construction of an "ideal type" in the Weberian sense,<sup>57</sup> not a simple summary of what is to be found in the sources. Strictly speaking, it is only Schlegel, Hoffmann, and later Nietzsche who expound a theory of "absolute" music that ventures without qualification on the metaphysical, or (to invert the formulation) a metaphysics of which "absolute" music is an organon—music, that is, which is not founded on emotions, but of which the emotions can be regarded as similes, as secondary reflections. Schopenhauer melded the metaphysics of music with the emotional theory of aesthetics (though in an abstract form), Hanslick was opposed to metaphysics (though not as independent of Hegel as he claimed to be), and Wagner modified the metaphysics of music (of "absolute" music, though he did not call it by that name) with an empirical theory of "conditional" music.

The construction of "ideal types" is not only legitimate but inevitable if the writing of history—the history of music no less than that of politics—is not to stifle beneath the rubble of facts. There is moreover the circumstance that Nietzsche drew critical conclusions from the aesthetic theories of Schopenhauer, Hanslick, and Wagner which pin-

56. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 9:96 (*Beethoven*).

57. M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 3d ed. (Tübingen, 1968), pp. 190ff.

point the spot where the originally separate or even contradictory theories converge to create a metaphysics of "absolute" music. The historical significance of the fragment "On Music and Words" is that Nietzsche, in an unconscious referral back to romanticism, formulated a comprehensive concept of "absolute" music which reveals the latent unity of musical aesthetics in the nineteenth century.

7[125]

What kind of genius is produced time and again by the stimulus of Socratism?

We have already realised how Greek art and ethics, which were based on the instincts and had attained no knowledge of themselves, foundered on the theoretical genius: whereby the Greek state, which had existed only on the basis of that ethics and for the purpose of that art, naturally also received its death sentence. As to the new artistic objective indicated by the initially anti-artistic operation of the theoretical genius and the enormous periods of time covered by the production of this new art, I have had an idea which I will articulate in spite of its resemblance to a metaphysical whim and even at the risk of being treated as a dangerous

<sup>27</sup> The novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* by the Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) was an immediate success when it was published, and enjoyed a revival of popularity in Europe at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries (see Jean Canavaggio, *Don Quichotte du livre au mythe: Quatre siècles d'errance*, Paris: Fayard, 2005). Nietzsche was repelled by the sadism of the work, noting that Cervantes chooses to satirise not the Inquisition, but its victims (KSA vol. 8, 23[140], 1876–7), and called *Don Quixote* ‘one of the most harmful books’ (KSA vol. 8, 8[7], 1875).

<sup>28</sup> Goethe, *Faust Part I*, trans. David Luke (Oxford University Press, 1987), ll. 1254–5.

heretic. But before I do so I must note that *time* impresses me as little as it does the geologist, my contemporary, and that therefore I undauntedly take the liberty of disposing of millennia, as something totally unreal, for the creation of *one* great work of art.

The theoretical genius pushes for the unleashing of artistic-mystical drives in two ways: on the one hand through its sheer existence, which demands the existence of its immortal twin, like one colour the other, in accordance with a certain allopathy of nature; on the other hand through the abrupt transformation of science into art every time its limits are reached. We must imagine the beginning of the latter process as follows: at some point of the perceptible world theoretical man becomes aware of the existence of an illusion, of the general existence of a naïve deception of the senses and the intellect, from which he frees himself through the careful use of causality and by means of the logical mechanism. At the same time he discovers that the usual mythical representation of that course of events, in comparison with his insight, contains an error and that therefore the people’s world view, which is revered as something credible, contains demonstrable errors. That is the beginning of Greek science, which, already in its very first stages, basically while still a mere embryo of science, turns into art and, from the narrow standpoint it has just gained, concocts a new world picture by means of a fanciful analogy, the world as water or air or fire.<sup>29</sup> Here a simple chemical experiment has been turned into the origin of being through an enlargement by a concave mirror; and for the sake of these cosmogonies the diversity and infinity of that which exists must now be explained through a host of physical phantasms, or, if these do not suffice, even through the old folk gods. Thus the scientific world picture initially departs only slowly from popular representations and, after a brief sidestep, returns to them

<sup>29</sup> Much of the Pre-Socratic philosophy we can recover was devoted to cosmological speculation. Thus, the figure usually recognised as the earliest ‘philosopher’ was Thales, who probably lived in the town of Miletus in Asia Minor during the first half of the sixth century BC. He was thought to have claimed that the basic substance from which everything was made was ‘water’. Anaximenes (also of Miletus; mid-sixth century) is said to have declared that the basic substance was ‘air’, and Heraclitus (of Ephesus in Asia Minor; late sixth – early fifth centuries) ‘fire’. Presumably in all these cases the ‘water’, ‘air’ etc. of which these philosophers spoke referred to some underlying metaphysical principle, not the liquid or gas we use to fill our baths or to breathe. Given the fragmentary nature of our knowledge of their views, however, we cannot be at all sure how the various Pre-Socratics conceived of the relation between their respective basic principles and the normal phenomena after which the principles were named, or indeed whether they did have a very clear conception of that relation. See Nietzsche’s *Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* in KSA vol. 1, pp. 801–72.

again and again as soon as the narrowly circumscribed actual knowledge is to be expanded into a fundamental knowledge of the world. What force is it that causes those inordinate exaggerations and abuses of analogical inference, and that on the other hand drives theoretical man so seductively from the secure ground he has just conquered to the hodge-podge of imagination? Why this leap into the bottomless pit? Here we must remember that the intellect is merely an organ of the will, so that all its operations, with a necessary craving, push for existence, and that its goal can be only various forms of existence but never the question of being or not-being. For the intellect there is no nothingness as a goal, and therefore no absolute knowledge, because absolute knowledge, compared to being, would be a not-being. Accordingly, to support life – to seduce to life – is the intention underlying all knowledge, the illogical element, which, as the father of all knowledge, also determines the limits of knowledge. Thus that mythical world picture, decorated with phantasms, may appear merely as the exaggeration of a small isolated piece of knowledge: in truth, however, it is the driving cause<sup>30</sup> of this knowledge, even though this process cannot be grasped by consciousness, which is always forced to judge empirically, in accordance with purely empirical principles, and which in fact can only present cause<sup>31</sup> and effect in reverse. Therefore that which always goes beyond the limits of science and as it were – – –

## 7[126]

Modern art was born during the back-and-forth surge of this struggle. As a sign of these struggles it generally has a 'sentimental' character and it achieves its highest goal when it is able to create the 'idyll'. I am unable to apply Schiller's glorious terminology<sup>32</sup> to the entirety of what is the widest field of all art, because I find a considerable number of periods and works of art that I cannot subsume under those terms, even though I think I am right in interpreting 'naïve' as 'purely Apollonian', as 'the illusion of illusion', in contrast to 'sentimental', as something 'born out of the struggle between tragic knowledge and mysticism'. As certainly as the 'naïve' has been recognised to be the eternal mark of a supreme artistic genre, just as certainly the term 'sentimental' does not suffice to sum up

<sup>30</sup> *der treibende Grund.*

<sup>31</sup> *Grund.*

<sup>32</sup> See his 'On naïve and sentimental poetry'.

the characteristics of all non-naïve art. If we try to do this, how confounded are we, for example, by Greek tragedy and Shakespeare! Not to mention music! In my understanding, the complete opposite of the 'naïve' and 'Apollonian' is the 'Dionysian', i.e. any art that is not 'the illusion of illusion', but 'the illusion of being', a reflection of the eternal primal One, in other words, our whole empirical world, which, from the point of view of the primal One, is a Dionysian work of art, or, from our own point of view, music. From the highest seat of judgement, I am obliged to deny recognition to the 'sentimental' even as a pure work of art, because, rather than arising from the supreme and enduring reconciliation of the naïve and the Dionysian, it swings restlessly to and fro between them and achieves their union only spasmodically, without acquiring permanent possession and holding an uncertain position between the different arts, between poetry and prose, philosophy and art, concept and intuition, desire and capability. It is the work of art born out of that as yet undecided struggle which it is on the point of deciding. It does not actually reach that goal, but by moving and elevating us, as does e.g. Schiller's drama, it points us into new directions. Thus it is 'John the Precursor', coming to 'baptise all nations'.

## 7[127]

After these premises, imagine what an unnatural, indeed impossible, enterprise it must be to compose music for a poem, i.e. to try to illustrate a poem through music, perhaps even with the explicit intention of symbolising the conceptual representations of the poem through the music and thus helping music to acquire a conceptual language: an enterprise that appears to me like that of a son trying to beget his father. Music can project images<sup>33</sup> out of itself: but these are always mere reflections,<sup>34</sup> as it were, specimens of its essential content; the image, the representation – let alone the concept or the poetic idea, as has been claimed – will never be able to produce music out of itself. On the other hand, it is not such a ridiculous phenomenon as it has seemed to recent aesth[eticians] for a Beethoven symphony to elicit time and again a language of images from the individual listeners, however fantastically motley, indeed contradictory,

<sup>33</sup> *Bilder.*

<sup>34</sup> *Abbilder.*

a compilation of the different worlds of images produced by a piece of music may appear. Practising their poor wit on such compilations and failing to recognise that the phenomenon is worth explaining is quite typical of those gentlemen. Indeed, even if the composer has spoken about a composition in images, if, for example, he describes a symphony as 'pastoral' and a movement as a 'scene by the brook' or as a 'merry gathering of country folk',<sup>35</sup> these are nothing but allegorical representations born out of the music, which can teach us nothing whatsoever about the Dionysian content of the music and which in fact have no exclusive value in relation to other images. As for pressing the music into the service of a number of images and concepts, using it as a means to an end, that is, to intensify and to clarify them – this strange presumption found in the concept of 'opera' reminds me of a ridiculous man who tries to lift himself into the air by his own arms: what both that fool and opera in that sense try to do are pure impossibilities. That concept of opera demands from music not an improper use, but – as I have said – an impossibility! Music *can* never become a means to an end, however much one may squeeze, wrench and torture it: even in its rawest and simplest stages, as mere sound, as a drum roll, it overcomes poetry and reduces it to a reflection of itself. Therefore opera as a genre in that sense is not so much a confusion of music as a mistaken representation of aesthetics. Incidentally, in thus justifying the nature of opera for aesthetics, I am of course far from wishing to justify bad operatic music or bad operatic poems. In contrast to the best poem, the worst music can still signify the Dionysian foundation of the world; and the worst poem, given the best music, can be a mirror, an image and a reflection of this foundation: as certainly as the individual tone, in contrast to the image, is already Dionysian, and the individual image, together with the concept and the word, in contrast to music, is already Apollonian. Even bad music together with bad poetry can teach us about the nature of music and poetry. The *recitative* is the most obvious expression of the unnatural. If, for example, Schopenhauer perceived both the music and the poetry of Bellini's *Norma* as the fulfilment of tragedy,<sup>36</sup> he was fully entitled to do so by his Dionysian–Apollonian elation and oblivion of self, because he perceived both the music and the poetry in their most universal and, so to speak, philosophical value, as music and

<sup>35</sup> Beethoven gave his sixth symphony (F major, Opus 67) the descriptive title 'Pastoral' and also gave descriptive titles to each movement.

<sup>36</sup> WWR vol. II § 37.

poetry in an absolute sense; even though this judgement revealed an insufficiently educated taste which failed to make historical comparisons. To us, who deliberately avoid any question about the historical value of an artistic phenomenon and who try to consider only the phenomenon itself in its unchanging, as it were, eternal significance and therefore in its *supreme type* – to us the genre of opera is as justified as the folk song, in so far as we find in both the union of the Dionysian and the Apollonian and may therefore assume that the origin of the opera – that is, the supreme type of opera – was analogous to that of the folk song. It is only in so far as the opera known in history had a completely different origin from that of the folk song that we reject this 'opera', which bears the same relation to the genre of opera defended by us as the marionette does to the living human being. Although the music can never become a means in the service of the text and in any case overcomes the text, it certainly becomes bad music if the composer breaks every Dionysian force rising in him by an anxious glance at the words and gestures of his marionettes. If the librettist has offered him nothing more than the usual schematic characters with their Egyptian regularity, then the freer, the more absolute, the more Dionysian the music becomes, and the more it despises all the so-called dramatic requirements, the greater will be the value of the opera. At its best opera in this sense is indeed good music and only music, while the tricks performed at the same time are, as it were, merely a fantastic disguise of the orchestra – particularly of its prime instruments, the singers – from which the discerning turn away laughing. If the mass relishes the *latter* while merely *tolerating* the music, it is in the same position as those who hold the gold frame of a good painting in higher esteem than the painting itself: who would consider such naïve confusions worthy of a serious, not to say solemn, response? But what may opera mean as 'dramatic' music as far removed as possible from pure, exclusively Dionysian music making its impact as music in its own right? Let us imagine a colourful, passionate drama that carries the spectator away and that can rely on its sheer action for its success: what will 'dramatic' music be able to add to this, if it does not in fact take something away from it? But firstly it *will* take a great deal away from it: for at any moment at which the Dionysian force of the music hits the listener, the eye that sees the action and has been engrossed in the individuals appearing in front of it is veiled: now the listener *forgets* the drama and reawakes to it only when the Dionysian magic has let go of him. Actually, in so far as the

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music makes the listener forget the drama it is not 'dramatic' music: but what kind of music is that which is not *allowed* to exert a Dionysian power over the listener? And how is that music possible? It is possible as a *purely conventional symbolism* from which convention has drained all natural strength: as a music reduced to a mere mnemonic sign with the desired effect of reminding the spectator of something that he must not miss if he is to understand the drama he is watching: just as a trumpet signal is an invitation for the horse to trot. Finally, before the beginning of the drama and in the intervals between scenes, alongside boring passages of doubtful dramatic effectiveness, and even at the climactic moments, a different, no longer purely conventional music of recollection, but a *music of excitement* would be permissible as a stimulant for blunt or exhausted nerves. I can distinguish only these two elements in so-called dramatic music: a conventional rhetoric of a music of recollection and a *music of excitement* which has a primarily physical effect; and so it swings back and forth between the din of drums and signal horns like the mood of a warrior going into battle. But now the sensibility which has been trained through comparison and which delights in pure music demands a *masquerade* for those two abusive tendencies of music: 'reminder' and 'excitement' is demanded, but through good music, which should be enjoyable and even valuable in itself. What despair for the dramatic musician, who must mask the big drum by good music, which, however, must only have an exciting, not 'purely musical', effect! And now along comes the audience of philistines, wagging its thousand heads, and enjoys this 'dramatic music' – which is always ashamed of itself – lock, stock and barrel, without an inkling of its shame and embarrassment. Rather, this audience feels a pleasant tickle all over its hide: after all, homage is being paid to it in every possible way, to the dull-eyed diversion-seeking hedonists who need excitement, to the conceited connoisseurs who have become as accustomed to good drama and good music as to good food, without actually caring for them very much, to the forgetful and absent-minded egoists who must be led back to the work of art by force and by signal horns because their heads are constantly exercised by selfish plans devoted to profit or enjoyment. Wretched dramatic musicians! 'Take a look at our patrons! Half of them have no taste and half no heart.' 'Poor fools, why pester your Muses to toil for this'<sup>37</sup> And that the muses are

<sup>37</sup> Goethe, *Faust Part I*, ll. 123–8.

pestered, indeed tormented and maltreated by them – they do not deny it, these sincerely unhappy people!

We had assumed a passionate drama which carries the listener away and which is certain to make an impact even without music. I am afraid that what is 'poetry' and *not* 'action' proper in this drama will bear the same relation to true poetry as dramatic music does to music pure and simple: it will be a poetry of recollection or a poetry of excitement. The poetry will serve as a means to recall, in a conventional manner, feelings and passions whose expression was found by real poets and became famous, or indeed the norm, together with them. Then it will be expected to lend the 'action', be it a crime and horror story or a manic piece of quick-change wizardry, a hand at dangerous moments and to spread a disguising veil over the crudeness of the action itself. Ashamed that the poetry is only a masquerade which cannot bear the light of day, such 'dramatic' scribbles demand 'dramatic' music: while the dramatic musician for his part, with his talent for the drum and signal horn and with his fear of genuine, self-confident and self-sufficient music, meets the scribbler of such dramas three quarters of the way. And now they see and embrace each other, these Apollonian and Dionysian caricatures, this *par nobile fratrum!*<sup>38</sup>

After this appraisal of the opera culminating in 'dramatic' music, as we know it from history, let us turn to that ideal of opera which came into being in an analogous way to the lyrical folk song and which, in the form of Greek tragedy, represents the purest and highest union of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, while in 'dramatic' music the same elements, painfully distorted and dependent, walk together like a pair of cripples who feel more secure because each of them on his own would fall over. The gradual artistic *development of the folk song into tragedy*, as a new artistic movement, begins with the Dionysian–Apollonian Archilochus,<sup>39</sup> the first musician we can recognise as such. But this process, which takes place visibly in a series of *artists*, is paralleled by another process which occurs without the intervention of an artist in the omnipotence of nature and in a much shorter period of time. Let us assume, in

<sup>38</sup> a noble pair of brothers. Quotation from Horace, *Sermones* 2.3.243. The quotation continues: '*nequitia et nugis, pravorum et amore gemellum*': 'like twins in their ineptitude and silliness, and their love of what is depraved'.

<sup>39</sup> The earliest Greek lyric poet (mid-seventh century BC) of whose work any significant fragments have survived. See BT §§ 5–6.



analogy to similar phenomena, that the Dionysian rapture of the mass, born in those ecstatic spring festivals, expresses itself in the individual; and that from these beginnings the orgiastic frenzy then spreads faster and faster to ever larger circles. Now let us imagine such a mass, merging more and more into *one* immense individual, obsessed by a common dream vision: Dionysus appears, all see him, all prostrate themselves before him. This phenomenon too, the *same vision* becoming visible to *several*, indeed a whole mass of people, will have been seen first of all by one individual, from whom the vision spreads to all the others, the more, as I say, that the mass merges into one individual. This is the process that is analogous to the slow development, over a century, of the folk song into tragedy. For this is where I recognise the fundamental concept of Greek tragedy, whereby a Dionysian *chorus*, through Apollonian influence, has its own condition revealed to itself through a *vision*: just as in the lyrical folk song the individual, simultaneously aroused in both Apollonian and Dionysian fashion, suffers a similar vision. The increasing arousal, spreading from the individual to the chorus, and the greater and more enduring visibility and effectiveness of the vision resulting from this, seem to me to be the primal process of tragedy: therefore the ‘drama’, i.e. the action, can be explained by regarding the transmission of the arousal from the individual to the whole chorus as the ‘action’ of the vision, as *a manifestation of the life of the vision as character*. That is why in the beginnings of tragedy only the chorus, situated in the orchestra, was real, while the world of the stage, the characters and events on it, became visible only as living images, as figments of the Apollonian imagination of the chorus. That process of the *gradual manifestation of the vision* progressing from the individual to the chorus in turn appears as the *struggle and victory of Dionysus* and assumes a sensory quality before the eyes of the chorus. Now we see the profound necessity of the traditional fact that in the earliest time the suffering and victory of Dionysus were the sole content of tragedy; indeed we now realise that any other tragic hero must be understood only as a representative of Dionysus or, so to speak, a mask of Dionysus.

7[128]

What we call ‘tragic’ is precisely the Apollonian clarification of the Dionysian: if the tangle of emotions created simultaneously by the

Dionysian intoxication is broken down into a series of images, that series of images expresses the ‘tragic’, as is to be explained immediately.

The most common form of *tragic* destiny is the victorious defeat or the victory achieved in defeat. Each time the individual is defeated: and yet we perceive his destruction as a victory. For the tragic hero it is necessary to be destroyed by that which is intended to make him victorious. In this disturbing contrast we surmise something of the highest esteem for individuation, as already suggested: individuation needs the primal One in order to achieve its ultimate goal of joy, so that passing away appears equally dignified and worthy of reverence as coming into being, and what has come into being must solve the task set it as an individual by passing away.

7[130]

Apollonian and Dionysian.

Lyric.

Tragedy. Tragic.

Dithyramb.

The death of tragedy. Socrates: ‘What was at issue was finding the tragic idea.’

Shakespeare: ‘The poet of tragic knowledge.’

Wagner.

7[131]

Euripides on the path of science seeks the tragic idea, in order to attain the effect of dithyramb through words.

Shakespeare, the poet of fulfilment, he brings Sophocles to perfection, he is the *Socrates who makes music*.<sup>40</sup>

7[134]

*Shakespeare*: the fulfilment of Sophocles. The Dionysian has been completely absorbed into images. The omission of the chorus was completely

<sup>40</sup> See Plato, *Phaedo* 60c8–61c1. See also BT §§ 15, 17.