

## **The Death of a Relationship and Its Critical Remains**

### **The Relationship:**

When analyzing Nietzsche's critical writings and often harsh polemics against Wagner one must understand the relationship that developed and disintegrated between the two, and the effects these interactions had on the two men, particularly on the younger philosopher who would soon find so many faults in his one time mentor. The young Nietzsche must have felt great anxiety during the first meetings with such an exalted figure, having never met a man of such worldly renown before. And as Wagner began to show interest in Nietzsche, and as, after a while, a significant relationship developed between the two men, growing stronger with seemingly no end, those early anxieties turned into a satisfaction that was as proportionately great as the trepidation he once felt. The feeling of fulfillment was immense for Nietzsche, giving him not only an outlet and focal point for his academic interests, but a friend and, by proxy, a place in the world. Wagner even provided, according to many scholars, a father figure that had long been sorely lacking in Nietzsche's life. And in retrospect it seems very appropriate to classify Wagner as a father figure for Nietzsche, given the way in which the relationship ended and at the way the end of this friendship affected Nietzsche in his development as a man and thinker.

Nietzsche's descriptions of Wagner and his art, while often reverent and grateful in nature, are also quite bitter and biting in their harshness. Nietzsche not only questions Wagner as a person, calling him decadent, but also marginalizes the value of Wagner's musical abilities. The man that he once idolized becomes to the maturing Nietzsche the embodiment of everything that is wrong with Europe and mankind. Wagner becomes the

symbol for the world weary and over-domesticated common people, as well as being a provider of lies and illusions that make the culturally diseased people of Europe able to withstand and continue in a world of suffering that they truly wish to escape. In fashioning an image of Wagner such as this Nietzsche has created someone who encompasses the totality of the things that Nietzsche wishes to revolt against. One telling example is that Nietzsche goes from praising Wagner for the composer's ability to replace the role of religion in people's lives, which indeed was a goal of Wagner, to criticizing him for the very same trait, finding now in his mentor the ancient errors of religion.

Yet, regardless of the criticisms leveled by Nietzsche, if one studies the philosophy of art and life offered in his writings one will be able to see that a favorable opinion of Wagner's art and ideas is necessitated by the perspective that is offered in the writings of the philosopher. Indeed, many of the psychological, cultural and philosophical insights that Nietzsche is known for are presaged in Wagner's operas. In fact, the essential idea in the pro-wagnerian work of Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, becomes the underlying principal in the philosopher's subsequent works. And, given this interpretation of Nietzsche's works as essentially stemming from an idea in his wagnerian past, the works of Wagner represent a distinctive artistic accomplishment. Not only must they be seen by a Nietzschean to have significant aesthetic value, but to have particular importance in the ideas that they express, which seem to be further developed subsequently by Nietzsche. But while a Nietzschean perspective of Wagner must reveal the great value of the art and the artist, the essential criticism that the philosopher levies at the composer, that he is the embodiment of the decline and world weariness of Europe

is a valid analysis, given Nietzsche's definition of decadence. Placing the appellation of decadent onto Wagner is largely due to the expression of Schopenhauerian ideas in the composer's operas. Those ideas advocated by Schopenhauer which are seen in Wagner's operas, especially the idea of renouncing the world in order to gain a certain kind of peace and tranquillity, are thought of by Nietzsche as a reaction of people unable to withstand the essential chaotic nature of the world. These people label their natural reaction against life as a free and proper decision toward a higher being or consciousness, while in truth their pursuit of peace only reflects, according to Nietzsche, the weakening and decline of a person or culture. Both Schopenhauer and, by extension, Wagner, are an expression and a reaction in line with such decadence. Thus, while Nietzsche's criticism of Wagner is somewhat self-contradictory, there is also merit in this criticism which highlights the rift that truly did exist between the two men and their world views. However the severity with which this criticism is levied shows more than an ideological difference between the two men, it shows the nature of their relationship and the deep influence that Wagner had on Nietzsche.

### **Nietzsche Contra Nietzsche:**

In his books *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* and *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche at times speaks with one of his harshest tones about the virtues of Wagner. Then at another time he says with the greatest possible respect and deference that Wagner is the personification of every modern problem of mankind. Nietzsche's dark humor and critical eye are turned away from Wagner, however, in that philosopher's first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. The original title of this work is *The Birth of Tragedy Out of*

*the Spirit of Music*, a work written in 1872 while Nietzsche was still under the sway of Wagner and his ideas. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche outlines a view regarding the origins of Greek tragedy that is influenced by one of Wagner's theoretical papers on aesthetics, namely *Art and Revolution*. In the beginning of this paper by Wagner the terms Dionysian and Appolonian are mentioned, yet they are not fully developed. In the early work by Nietzsche however, these ideas are analyzed in order to discover the source from which the great Greek tragedians sprang. Nietzsche posits the view that tragedy came from the ancient Greek festivals dedicated to the god Dionysus. In these festivals the Greek citizens would become intoxicated and, letting their social inhibitions drop away, would sing, chant and dance in an animalistic manner like primitive people. These festivities were supposed to draw the group together into an experience and an expression of their usually suppressed primordial and chaotic natures, an expression of the vivacious and powerful living force within each individual which Dionysus represents (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 36-37). During these festivals the Greeks would sing together, letting the unity of their wild song express the principle, the god Dionysus, that lay behind them all. Each man faceless and without identity, the ritual created a transcendental sense of community which allowed the vivacious energies of the animal man to seep into and refresh the individuals and the society to which they belonged; and further to reconcile the artificial structures used to subjugate nature back into alignment with the natural order, harmony and force from which man and his conventions sprung.

But these festivals are but the Dionysian part of the origins of tragedy. Once these festivals allowed mankind to see his primordial nature, his own relative insignificance, and the tumultuous chaos at the root of his being the Greeks were forced to find a way to

withstand and understand this experience. The process of bringing order and understanding, of finding meaning in the primal sensation, this process is the true cause of tragedy. While the revelers sang in order to express their connection to Dionysus eventually their songs took on narrative structures, and they would then sing stories of Dionysus and of tales that represent the exuberance felt in the rhythm of their song (65). These songs provided images which gave an order to the deep rooted sensations being discovered by the Greeks, and in doing so they represented the secrets of Dionysus in Appolonian constructs. Now not only did the festival of Dionysus include a rhythmic and chanting crowd that had come under the sway of Dionysus, but also the group sang a story that would relay in words and themes the primordial unity and chaos found within the ritual. The same force that was responsible for the wild and savage songs of the Maenads would thus guide the orderly Appolonian style of arts.

At this point drama does not yet exist though. The tragedy begins when the story stops being sung and starts being acted. Eventually the narrative was not enough, the singers let themselves become the medium of art. Thus they let the guiding force behind the story and song guide them into acting out a play. Once the actor has appeared the singers thus become the chorus, they do not act, but merely transform the actor, a mere mortal, into a divine image through their song (65). They produce the environment that lets the man become the image of Dionysus, or some other narrative that illustrates the passion behind their song. The entity which is now the chorus is thus the essence of tragedy for Nietzsche, from the chorus the actor appeared, and by the chorus the actor is able to become that which he wishes to portray. And, since the chorus is an agent of song, and it is their song that produces the actors and drama, to Nietzsche tragedy was truly

born from the force, or spirit, that created the cultic Greek music. So tragedy, according to Nietzsche, arose when the Apollonian images were used to give order and objective content to the subjective sensations experienced during the Dionysian rituals. And, accordingly, Greek drama is seen as actors which are supported by the music of a chorus, with the chorus being seen as the essence of the art, the actors being only a mere representation of the content expressed by the rhythmic chanting of the chorus.

Such a view of the creation of tragedy was quite flattering to the art and aesthetic theories of Wagner. Wagner, after reading the philosopher Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, had been a proponent of an idea found in Schopenhauer's work. This was the idea that music was the highest art, and that all other arts were inferior to music's ability to accomplish artistic goals (*The World as Will and Representation* vol. 1, 265). The goal of art is, to Schopenhauer, to allow the person viewing the art to temporarily remove himself from the physical world inhabited by people, and to focus on an otherworldly force, the Will, which is said to be the creator and shaper of every corporeal object. Art is able to allow the viewer to focus directly on the Will via the style of the piece of art, and to stop focusing on the everyday objects which are manifestations of the Will. In this way the viewer of art comes into contact, through contemplation of a work, with the principle behind all existence. Yet music accomplishes this task to a greater degree than other mediums do. For Schopenhauer and Wagner music is not a manifestation of the universal principle in the same way as other arts, while they generalize the corporeal world into a style, and thus through this style express the creative force behind all things, music generalizes nothing. Music is, in a way, pure style; it is a direct manifestation of the universal Will, meanwhile other arts only express that

version of the Will that the artist found in the objects of his experience and forged into his style. Because of this, music does not need to be contemplated in order for a viewer to be taken out of himself and allowed to experience the metaphysical Will, music allows all listeners to experience the Will directly. This is the reason that Wagner and Schopenhauer claim music as the ultimate art, and, furthermore, because it is a self-contained world, with value equal to the everyday world, more so than any other art form. While other mediums are dependent on the corporeal world as a reference point, music exists separately from all other sensations. Thus the other-worldly experience that art is to provide is accomplished to a greater degree in music, since other arts force the subject to remain concentrating to some extent on the physical world. The Will is then able to be more deeply and directly experienced in music, and through the relation with this art the world can be transcended, this being the goal of both Schopenhauer the philosopher and eventually Wagner the musician.

Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* is similar in many ways to that of Schopenhauer and Wagner. As Nietzsche describes the force that Dionysus represents, it seems to be similar to Schopenhauer's Will. For Schopenhauer the Will is a seething chaotic and mindless force that manifests itself as the corporeal world. Furthermore, the Will is the principal behind all individual entities, and thus all things in the earth are connected to it in their essence and origin. Dionysus is also seen to represent the force of animalistic vitality that exists in all organisms, and is seen to be a force that is as irrational and chaotic as the Will. Further, the experience of Dionysus, attained through the music of the Greek festivals just as the Will is experienced in art, is a sensation in which one is united with all other people and with nature as well, a sensation

in which one's individuality fades away. Thus, for Nietzsche, one gains an experience of Dionysus through music, and the experience one gains is of a primal and chaotic force that unifies one with the world and all the seeming individuals within this world.

Nietzsche can then be understood as drawing his conclusion that music is the essence of that great cultural accomplishment, tragedy, for a similar reason that Schopenhauer and Wagner declare that music is the supreme art. This reason is that these men each believe that music allows one to transcend individuality in order to experience the primal force causing and perpetuating all of existence.

Thus the early philosophical endeavor by Nietzsche is seen to be pro-Wagnerian, for Wagner had taken Schopenhauer's aesthetic and metaphysical talk of music being the surest means by which to experience the metaphysical Will behind all of existence to heart. He had rejected his past views and followed Schopenhauer from then on because of this view of that philosopher (Magee, *The Tristan Chord*, 176). Nietzsche merely echoes these views in his borrowing and elaboration of the one time Wagnerian terms Dionysian and Appolonian.

*The Birth of Tragedy* is not only sympathetic to Wagner's views of art and opera however, the philosopher's early work also presents a favorable view of Wagner's art and of the composer himself. As Bryan Magee says in his study of Wagner's operas, *The Tristan Chord*, "It would be difficult to imagine a more saturatedly Wagnerian work by anyone other than the composer himself." (297). As Magee points out, the work is dedicated to Wagner, the preface is a dialogue of gratitude to Wagner, and in fact "the entire book is addressed to Wagner" (297). Not only explicitly, but also implicitly the work is Wagnerian. As Nietzsche illustrates his vision of the origins of Greek tragedy he

creates an aesthetic view by which Wagner's operas would represent the greatest artistic and cultural achievement to date. For example, Wagner, a lover of Greek tragedies, had compared his proposed use of the operatic orchestra to the ancient tragedians use of the chorus. He believed, initially, that the proper role of the orchestra was to comment and lead and encourage the action of the stage (Magee, 91). In this view the music would aid the drama in accomplishing Wagner's artistic goal. However, with the discovery of Schopenhauer, Wagner somewhat reevaluated the role of the orchestra. Now the music does not accompany the action, but leads it. The action is merely the manifestation of the themes and passion within the music. Such is the case in *Tristan and Isolde*. In this opera the unending longing that Wagner believes is inherent in living entities is expressed by the music. The music is now aided by, as opposed to itself aiding, the plot. That the characters merely represent the themes of the orchestra is seen in the fact that the music continues its essential striving and hungering form despite the dying of characters. For example, as Tristan dies, and is thus released from his desires and passions, the music continues to express man's unending urges. Then Isolde enters, and as she pines to be again with her lover Tristan, she manifests the yearnings that the music contains. Throughout the opera, as the music continues without end to express Man's insatiable desires, characters continually appear in order to represent this longing once a previous representative has died. When the orchestra ceases, however, and the music has resolved and ended the insatiable longing expressed in it, the last character dies and no other appears, for the passion has disappeared that those actors were used to objectify.

The way in which Nietzsche views the chorus of the Greeks, to which Wagner had compared both of his views of the operatic orchestra, encapsulates each Wagnerian

belief. In keeping with the early Wagnerian view, Nietzsche states in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the chorus was utilized to aid the plot of a drama. It commented and interacted with the hero, helping move along the action, and at the same time commenting and creating insights into the action unfolding, thereby better guiding the experience of the audience. The orchestra of early Wagnerian operas was meant to do this precisely. Yet, the chorus in Nietzsche's view, like the orchestra in Wagner's later operas, was also the most important element of a partly musical art. Not only from the chorus did tragedy originate, but the rhythmic chanting and singing of the chorus was the force that caused the audience to come under the spell of the drama. By this music the spectators came to feel the vivacious and destructive energy which the play merely was a representative of. Through the chorus the Greeks came to feel directly the themes that the actors manifested on stage, and thus the chorus is what caused the audience to believe and give themselves over to the plot. In other words, the chorus imbued the actors and plot with the divine importance the Greeks placed on their dramatic festivities. Similarly with Wagner's orchestration. It is the music that awakens the deep rooted and suppressed feeling of the audience, which enchants them into a state of stimulation and emotional excitement. With the music having done this the plot and characters then take on the significance that they possess for the audience, as those spectators transfer the awakened sensations within themselves onto the characters on stage. Thus Nietzsche's view of the tragic chorus – that the singing not only aids the plot it provides the plot with its' near divine significance – is Wagnerian in that it reflects both conceptions of orchestral music within the composer's art. Furthermore, since, through the use of music, the “inexpressible depths of the irrational” nature of humanity are illustrated and stirred by

Wagner, and since from here he provides plot and actors onto which the audience can project these deep rooted feelings, Wagner's art is then a significant accomplishment. For the ultimate form of drama, according to *The Birth of Tragedy*, is that which combines the probing and stimulating medium of music with more objective elements of plot and character. Wagner does this, and so by forming a view of the origins of tragedy that places music as the most important element, Nietzsche has created a history of art that is obliged to place Wagner and his operas as the penultimate achievement.

*The Birth of Tragedy* is thus seen to be a Wagnerian work. It not only flatters the operatic theories of Wagner, but his art and the composer as well. However, the main idea of this early philosophical work, while being pro-Wagner, is also the foundations upon which all of Nietzsche's subsequent philosophy will rest. The main idea of *The Birth of Tragedy* is the importance of combining the Dionystic and Appolonian forces in order to create a more perfect art and life. This idea, though not subsequently formed using the same terms, appears throughout the Nietzsche cannon. During the philosopher's lifelong analysis of the human sub-conscious, Nietzsche states that the sub-conscious mind is responsible for the majority of human behavior. Nietzsche describes the sub-conscious as a teeming hoard of suppressed desires and instincts, the animalistic mass of which he names as the Will to Power. This Will is in many ways a re-working of the force behind the revelers of Dionysus. The Will to Power, like the power that the cultic Greek god represented, is an animalistic and instinctual force which all living creatures are controlled by. Nietzsche's philosophy is in large part an attempt to come to an understanding of this aspect of human nature and to allow this more primitive force within ourselves to rise to the surface of our lives. Indeed, for Nietzsche the healthy man

was he who was closely connected to this force, who acted out the, at times, brutal directives of the Will. This healthy individual, at times called the superman, is not compelled by the feelings of guilt with which society tries to domesticate the animalistic nature of man, he does not suppress his desires in order to remain proper or sanctified. Instead, the superman, allowing himself to be controlled completely by his own Will, revels in the primordial force that naturally compels his actions, and feels joy at acting as his Will directs him, thinking not of the consequences or the rewards. Nietzsche, with this philosophy, thus wishes to accomplish precisely what, in his opinion, Greek tragedy once accomplished. Just as tragedy once caused the primitive force within all living creatures to rise within the Greeks, Nietzsche wished to help mankind tap into the Will to Power, and to allow this force to guide our lives and actions. And, as Dionysus once freed the Greeks of their social conventions, so, by raising from the sub-conscious mind the essential drive of all organisms, Nietzsche wished to transcend the repressive social order of his times. Nietzsche thus aspired, through his philosophy, to become a dramatist and artist, but on a great scale. His music would be his philosophy, raising Man's primitive nature from the subliminal level. His actors would be those who came to accept his ideas, as they acted under the spell of the Will to Power that his literature had awakened, moving to its' commands as the Greek actors moved to the rhythm of the music. Indeed, Nietzsche refers to this image he had of himself at the beginning of one of his books, with the statement, "Let the tragedy begin."(). And throughout his works he makes reference to Dionysus, comparing the god and his mythical followers with Nietzsche's own ideas and vision of a robust and healthy mankind. So Nietzsche, who formulated the importance of the fusion of Dionysus and Appolonian forces, in order, largely, to

illustrate the preeminence of Wagner as an artist, was subsequently guided by this idea throughout the rest of his philosophy. And, while the idea takes on variations from its *The Birth of Tragedy* beginnings, Nietzsche continued to think of the reformulated version of the Dionysian force, The Will to Power, as an extension of this original drama-interested work.

By viewing Nietzsche's philosophy in this manner one can then reevaluate the philosopher's criticisms of Wagner, and can begin to see the accomplishment that the composer's art must have truly been to Nietzsche. Nietzsche's aim in a large portion of his writings was to uncover the deep-rooted psychological essence of Man, his actions and his behavior. He wished for people to experience the sub-conscious urges, feelings and passions within themselves, and thereby to come to terms with their true humanity. Wagner's art also contains this purpose. Wagner's music pulls from the audience not just sentimental emotions, but also Man's primitive nature that lies behind his actions, and which he shares with all living creatures; it evokes that which the Tragedians once did, and which Nietzsche would one day try to discuss and analyze.

However, Wagner's art does not just cause the audience to experience and become conscious of a long suppressed nature in general. It is unlike the primitive cult festivals that enlivened the crowd through music and which merely made the listener feel in some vague way the primordial force of life that exists within himself. Rather Wagner, like Nietzsche would himself do, analyzes that force. Yet Wagner is able to accomplish this solely through his art. For, while most of Wagner's operas are able to cause a person to experience the feeling of a hidden inner nature, each one does this in a different way. The result is that each artwork offers a new insight into that force that Nietzsche labels

the Will to Power, and that the Greeks represented with Dionysus. For example, each *Ring* opera gives a new insight into that human nature which the cycle as a whole demonstrates. The *Ring* as a whole offers an analysis of the desire for power that is inherent to life and all living creatures. Beginning with *Das Rheingold*, the audience comes to feel the desire for power that exists within themselves as the music and action stimulates the suppressed longing for control over the world that drives all life. *Die Walkure* then conjures in the listener the confusion, angst, and isolation that living creatures feel as they unavoidably give in to the desire for power, a feeling long avoided but never escaped by Wagner's audience and by all of humanity. In *Siegfried* another aspect of human nature is demonstrated. Here those aspects of the Will that seem negative are manifested in *Siegfried*, and are stimulated in the audience by the music, but now with the effect that a new feeling is produced. Now the fear and angst of giving oneself over to power lust is not felt, but instead one feels the joy and exuberance that can occur when mindlessly obeying the Will. The robust feeling of hope and possibility that Man often feels when giving himself over to their inner nature is created by Wagner in the audience, and the negative fear from *Die Walkure* is transcended. Yet in *Götterdämmerung* the transcendent joy that constitutes experiencing the essential force of life is erased. While the angst aroused by the second *Ring* opera is not an in depth enough view of human nature for Wagner, neither is the feeling of hope found in *Siegfried*. The feeling of hope that exists within some of those who obey the desires for power which drives existence is a lie. In the final opera Wagner attempts to make the audience feel the ultimate futility of life and the essential force behind each man and existence in general. For Wagner the ultimate nature of mankind and life is thus presented as he illustrates the

futility and unworthwhile nature of that force which drives life. Thus the *Ring* first causes the audience to feel that desire for power that guides all life and human affairs which Nietzsche would call the Dionysian force. The angst and fear that one feels while being controlled by this terrible power is then conjured in the listener. From here the joy and hope one can experience when one comes more into harmony with this force is felt. Finally the Will is analyzed as irredeemable, and the joy one felt in the last opera is seen as false. Not only does Wagner cause the audience to experience the sub-conscious world that drives human behavior and directs the flow of life, and not only does he offer an analysis of this force, Wagner also causes a development of the audience's sensation of the Will. The result is that the audience not only consciously understands the human nature they have come to feel, but they also experience the increasingly complex views of the Will at an emotional level. To a philosopher such as Nietzsche, whose work was created in order to stimulate an experience and understanding of the hidden forces within humanity and life, art such as the *Ring* is thus a particular achievement. And the criticisms that Nietzsche directed towards Wagner's art are seen to contradict the origins and goals of the philosopher's ideas.

### **Nietzsche contra Wagner:**

Though it is true that Wagner heavily influenced Nietzsche's philosophy, and though an objectively applied Nietzschean analysis of Wagner's art would be forced to look favorably on the composer's operas, still some of the criticisms levied by Nietzsche contain truth. Such is the case with what Nietzsche believes to be the most central flaw in Wagner and his art. This is Wagner's supposed decadence. A decadent is, according to

Nietzsche, one in whom the vital energies have begun to wane, one who no longer is able to enjoy the essential animalistic nature of existence, and who is thus unfit to live. Such a person, who is no longer able to affirm and justify life based on its own merits, will subsequently choose one of two paths. Most people choose to give meaning to their lives by positing an entity or concept which exists apart from the corporeal world. Christians do this with their belief that God is the essence of life, and Kant does this as well with his idea of a noumenal world in which the true essence of all phenomenal things exists. Others, who are unable to believe in the ability of any metaphysical construct to justify existence and who also lack the strength to affirm life in itself, such people must necessarily conclude that life is inherently meaningless and worthless. This group therefore rejects life. Schopenhauer is a representative of this group, for while he posits an otherworldly force underlying life, this force is only a reflection of the inherent chaotic suffering underlying existence; Schopenhauer's Will is not used to justify life, rather it serves to explain the (to him) unlivable conditions inherent in this existence that is to be rejected. To Nietzsche both the person who seeks to find an external justification of life and the person who wishes to escape life and its tumultuous nature are equally decadent. Each lack the ability to become excited and find life worthwhile based solely on the eternal conflict that they, as living creatures, are a part of.

This is Nietzsche's definition of decadence, and in *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche explains why he considers Wagner as such. The thrust of his argument is that Wagner is a disciple of Schopenhauer, and is thus decadent. Wagner and his work are indeed Schopenhauerian. A large number of Wagner's operas contain a desire for peace and for a release from a life filled with suffering which can be found in that philosophy

that the composer was so influenced by. This is the case even in early works such as *The Flying Dutchman*, where the eternally sailing Dutchman wishes only for a release from his existence. He takes no joy from his adventurous journeys, as Nietzsche believes a healthy individual would (*The Gay Science*), but instead his entire life has become a search for an escape from life. Like Schopenhauer's philosophy, it is only the eventual release from this brutal life, which life has beaten and destroyed the once ambitious Dutchman, that justifies the sailor's continued existence. Another example is the *Ring* cycle, which is a massive illustration of the metaphysical Will. These operas end when Brunnhilde renounces the world created by Wagner in the image of Schopenhauer's Will, and renounces the Will that exists within Brunnhilde herself. *Tristan and Isolde* also illustrates a Schopenhauerian view that life is filled with insatiable desire, and that the only way to truly reach a sense of spiritual satisfaction is to renounce one's desire and the objects of desire that constitute the world. The effect of Wagner's art is meant to relay into the innermost feelings of the audience such a view of life and the world. The music of *Tristan and Isolde* is meant to raise feelings of longing and desire within the audience, and with the conclusion of the music such feelings are meant to be let go. This allows the audience to desire throughout the opera the spiritual satisfaction and peace prescribed by Schopenhauer, and, as the music ends, to receive a sense of what that peace may feel like. Wagner is thus guilty of Nietzsche's indictment that the composer is spreading Schopenhauer to the masses by means of his operas, for Wagner's art both represents to, and creates within the audience a Schopenhauerian view of existence.

Furthermore, in seeing how Wagner is Schopenhauerian, one also can understand Nietzsche's criticism that Wagner is decadent. Nietzsche presents this belief in *The Case*

of Wagner by comparing the dramatic love of Wagner to that of Bizet (1838-1909). Here the love seen in operas such as *Carmen* is described as “natural”, in that it is presented as “innocent, cynical, cruel.” Here Nietzsche’s embracing of the violent and chaotic elements of life, which elements Schopenhauer rejects, can be seen. Nietzsche writes that he is invigorated and “made fertile” by Bizet’s operas, for these operas awaken within him the animalistic force that Dionysus aroused in the Maenads. On the other hand the love of Wagner’s operas is criticized as being used as a tool to escape life. The redeeming women with whom Wagner’s heroes fall in love are not natural and do not participate in any physical or worldly expressions of their relationships. They seem to exist beyond the world, and to offer an aid to those who wish to transcend and escape a life that has become intolerable.

It is this desire for transcendence and peace that one finds motivating and becoming the essence of Wagner’s operas which Nietzsche found objectionable and for which he labeled the composer a decadent. To Nietzsche the recoiling from the world should be compared to the recoiling that a worm performs when stepped on (*Twilight of the Idols*, 471). Just as the worm shrinks away from a stimulus that has injured it, and for which it lacks the strength to confront, so the person who rejects the world is merely trying to avoid coming into contact with something it is not able to survive or withstand. While a man filled with strength and vital energies is able to take joy in the conflicts of life, seeing in them that powerful vital force that directs himself and connect him to the entire world, the man of diminished energies cannot help but reject a natural world order that he is a reject within. Nietzsche labels Schopenhauer and Wagner as this sort of man. For, while all three men share a similar view of existence, that it is inherently filled with

strife and suffering, and that behind all events and entities there is an underlying force which is responsible for this chaotic life, these men disagree on how to react to such an existence. Nietzsche embraces it, believing that it is justified simply on its own merits, that a healthy person experiencing life cannot help but feel exhilarated by the power. Wagner rejects this exhilarating power, desiring instead a rest and peace from the disorder that accompanies such excitement. Herein lies the philosophical rift that actually existed between Wagner and Nietzsche, and it is this difference that causes Nietzsche to criticize Wagner as a decadent man.

Nietzsche's true philosophical differences with Wagner therefore somewhat clarifies the seeming contradiction found as the philosopher, who remained forever intellectually indebted to the composer, criticizes harshly the man he once praised. Yet, Nietzsche also makes statements, found in both his published and private writings, that express his gratitude and continued admiration for Wagner and his art even after the rift between the two arose. While he may publicly compare *Carmen* favorably with Wagner's operas, in private letters Nietzsche recants such a view, revealing his still ardent passion for Wagner and his work (Magee, 327). Indeed, Nietzsche's seemingly contradictory opinions of Wagner are largely due to his respect for the insight into the nature of existence offered by the composer's music, which is simultaneously experienced with his revulsion at Wagner's rejection of such a nature. However, much of the polemics against Wagner are a result of the type of relationship that Nietzsche shared with this man, and a result of the effect that the end of this friendship had on Nietzsche.

Many, such as Magee, see the importance of the relationship in the way it ended, believing that the scandalous end of the friendship is responsible both for the break and

for Nietzsche's ardor against Wagner. But this view does not properly take into account what Wagner meant to Nietzsche. Wagner was a father figure to the philosopher; the younger man having not known his true father well projected many paternal feeling onto Wagner. Not having a father, the young Nietzsche would not have developed psychologically as most children do. In Freudian terms he would not have properly completed the Oedipal stage. There was no father in the household to fear as a rival, no male to immolate and to eventually revolt against in order to become a true man. Wagner provided all this. Nietzsche was brought into the household almost as a son. Here he took on the beliefs of Wagner in order to overcome his trepidation that he once felt before a world-renowned man. Here he even came to fall in love with Wagner's wife. That Nietzsche thus revolted so completely against Wagner, creating a philosophy that is the antithesis to his one time mentor is thus not surprising. Nietzsche's break with Wagner was merely the philosopher's belated maturation process. Wagner allowed Nietzsche to become an adult in a way he may otherwise have not been able to become, and in doing so he permanently influenced the ideas and character of Nietzsche, despite the natural filial hostility on Nietzsche's part.

**James Ham**

### Works Cited

- Magee, Bryan. *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2000.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. New York: Random House inc., 1966.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. New York: Random House inc., 1967.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. New York: Random House inc., 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1976.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur, *The World as Will and Representation vol. I*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969.
- Wagner, Richard. *The Ring of the Nibelung*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1976.