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### **Wagner and the Classical Tradition: Ideas and Action**

Among the innovators who have helped to shape the classical tradition, a few have done so by developing programmes of action from classical sources. Such a pattern is not the norm. Few great instigators of action are also significant figures in the classical tradition, and even when they are, the action and the tradition are very likely unrelated. Take Karl Marx. Marx is both a notable contributor to the classical tradition and the progenitor of a programme of action on an unprecedented scale, but the two are essentially separate. ‘Philosophers have only interpreted the world in their various ways: the point is to change it’: Marx’s celebrated proclamation<sup>1</sup> is paradigmatic and self-evidently independent of ancient paradigms – even if precedents might be found in Plato, above all. Very distinctive, then, is the case of Marx’s close contemporary, the composer Richard Wagner, celebrator of Germanic myth and (eventually) German nationhood, who plans to create a new culture, centred on a new music-theatre on the Greek model.

As with all significant figures in the classical tradition, Wagner’s relationship with antiquity needs to be appreciated in the context of his whole career. Symptomatically, his life (1813–83) is full of notable names, from the world of music, from the wider world outside, and in one significant case from the classical-scholarly world. His correspondents range from the French poet Baudelaire to the Russian anarchist Bakunin and the German Chancellor Bismarck. His fellow-composer Liszt becomes his father-in-law when he marries Liszt’s daughter, Cosima; for many years, King Ludwig II of Bavaria is his devoted patron; for a few years, the young Nietzsche – Professor of Classical Philology at Basel, but soon (thanks to his Wagnerian allegiance) *enfant terrible* among the classical-scholarly fraternity – is his enthusiastic follower and friend.

All this reflects a life of achievement. Wagner composed some of the most admired musical dramas in the operatic repertoire – writing words, as well as music, sometimes conducting, eventually directing: *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*, premiered in 1843), *Tannhäuser* (1845), *Lohengrin* (1850), *Tristan und Isolde* (*Tristan and Isolde*, 1859), *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (*The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, 1868), *Parsifal*

(1880) and the four-part *Ring* cycle: *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*, premiered in 1876). The *Ring* – *Das Rheingold* (*The Rhine-Gold*), *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* (*Twilight of the Gods*) – took nearly thirty years to plan, compose, revise, and perform. Intended to reinvent the culture that produced it, the *Ring*, in its Bayreuth setting, is perhaps the most ambitious work of art in Western history; the specially designed Bayreuth festival theatre, and the festival itself, with the first complete performance of the *Ring* its inaugural event, were ambitious ventures in their own right.

Wagner is one of the great musical innovators. He aimed to supersede traditional ‘number-opera’ and its sequences of recitative, aria, chorus, and ensemble. In its place, from *Lohengrin* onwards, he pioneered the integrated ‘music-drama’ (*not* his favoured term).<sup>2</sup> Integration was achieved by various means, but in the *Ring*, above all, partly by a principle of musical-thematic continuity in the shape of the celebrated ‘leitmotifs’ (again, *not* . . . )<sup>3</sup> – this, as one contributory element to the fusion of drama, music, and poetry in the ‘total work of art’: the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (yet again, *not* . . . ).<sup>4</sup> No less innovative is his bold harmonic usage, especially in *Tristan* (its ‘wandering tonality’ a precursor, even, of Schoenberg’s ‘atonal chromatic mode of composition’).<sup>5</sup>

Wagner’s influence has been huge, within the realm of music (‘I am not a Wagnerian,’ said Puccini, but ‘like every other modern musician, I have been influenced by Wagner’),<sup>6</sup> and also beyond. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal evoked responses across the modernist movements – from Mallarmé to Kandinsky to the Bauhaus (where architect-designer Gropius and theatre director Piscator envisaged a ‘total theatre’) – while the ideal still resonates in the world of digital technology (‘The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace’).<sup>7</sup> Bayreuth itself inspired the modern ‘music festival’, from Salzburg to Woodstock. The ‘Tristan chord’ is ‘by far the most analysed collection of four notes in Western music’.<sup>8</sup> An array of eminent figures from beyond the musical arena have investigated Wagner: Baudelaire and Nietzsche, George Bernard Shaw and Thomas Mann, Adorno, Badiou, and Žižek<sup>9</sup> – this, in response both to his art and to the Wagner ‘phenomenon’, including his appropriation by the Nazi regime and Wagner’s own nationalism and anti-Semitism that provoked it.<sup>10</sup>

And Wagner is profoundly, but distinctively, implicated in the classical tradition. Like the German Hellenists of an earlier generation, Wagner looks to Greece, but with a difference.<sup>11</sup> He produces no *Hyperion*, like Hölderlin, no *Iphigenie*, like Goethe. Apart from a few trifles (including jottings, in 1849, for an ‘Achilleus’ drama),<sup>12</sup> the classical world plays no overt part in his creative work. His mature musical dramas are set in the world of medieval

legend (*Tristan*), or late-medieval historical fiction (*Meistersinger*), or pre-medieval Nordic myth (the *Ring*). Where the classical world figures explicitly is in his prose and his expository thoughts: in Cosima Wagner's diaries (which seek to transcribe his daily thoughts and words, from 1869 onwards);<sup>13</sup> in his autobiography, *Mein Leben (My Life)*, (1880); in his voluminous essays on music, theatre, aesthetics, cultural history, and politics, which strive to articulate the convictions behind his developing practice.

Like his art, the convictions change over time, sometimes drastically. Rarely are the changes confronted in Wagner's prose, however – ideas are simply adjusted or replaced, without comment – and this endless slippage makes the essays anything but a straightforward commentary on his mindset or his creative work. Worse, their idiom is often bizarre and their mode of argument elliptical. Their importance, nonetheless, is inescapable.

For our purposes, the single most important essay is *Die Kunst und die Revolution (Art and Revolution)*, written in the summer of 1849: this is the essay that spells out, most fully, the significance of Greece for Wagner's project.

The context of the essay is noteworthy. Wagner decided on a musical career after an unremarkable early life in Dresden and Leipzig. In 1843 the proverbial struggling composer became second conductor at the Dresden court opera. There he stayed until the wave of political uprisings that began in Paris, in 1848, spread to Dresden itself. His active involvement as a republican and, broadly, a socialist (with Bakunin, 'on the barricades') led to a warrant for his arrest in May 1849. He fled to Switzerland, where he stayed, on and off, first in Zurich, then near Lucerne, until 1872. Now married to Cosima (since 1870) and supported by Ludwig (since 1864), he moved to Bayreuth, in Bavaria, to put his festival project into action.

*Art and Revolution*, then, was composed and published in 1849, in the wake of Wagner's revolutionary activities. This and two other 'Zurich essays' that follow, 'Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft' ('The Artwork of the Future', published in 1850) and *Oper und Drama (Opera and Drama)*, (1852), all declare a commitment to ancient Greece. Wagner's 'Hellenism' first began with a schoolboy enthusiasm for Greek mythology;<sup>14</sup> then and later he made abortive attempts to learn the language;<sup>15</sup> in Dresden, in the 1840s, he read Greek literature extensively.<sup>16</sup> The work that impressed him, above all, was Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, in the translation by Johann Gustav Droysen, which he studied in 1847: 'My ideas about the meaning of drama, and particularly theatre, were crucially shaped ['entscheidend . . . gestaltet'] by the experience.'<sup>17</sup> The passion for Aeschylus, and the *Oresteia* in particular, never left him. In June 1880, he read the *Agamemnon* to Cosima, 'transfigured, inspired, all

one with his reading'; in his own reported words, the play achieved 'perfection' on every level, 'religious, philosophical, poetic, artistic'.<sup>18</sup> And among his last words of all: 'My admiration ['Bewunderung'] for [Aeschylus] never stops growing.'<sup>19</sup>

In *Art and Revolution*, 'admiration' for Aeschylean Greece is unqualified. The opening paragraph insists that 'modern art is merely one link in the chain of Europe's overall artistic development; and this development begins with the Greeks.' In line with the title, meanwhile, the preface proposes to uncover 'the meaning of art as outcome ['Ergebnis'] of the life of the state'. The essay acclaims Aeschylean drama in its festival setting: 'the highest conceivable form of art'; the triumphant creation of the Greek 'people'; a 'religious festival', where the people 'streamed in their thousands' to hear their poet proclaim 'the great tale of necessity told through the mouths of [the people's] gods and heroes'. And yet the Athenian community went astray, and tragedy with it. What follows is centuries of decline: Roman 'imitation' and 'brutality' (here, as often, Wagner connects morality, political structure, artistic innovation, by phraseological gesture, rather than argument) – then 'the fresh Germanic nations', but soon 'Christian self-loathing', the 'so-called Renaissance', the 'hypocrisy' of French neoclassicism, and today's worship of commerce (the god of 'five per cent') and trivial 'entertainment': prosaic plays, inconsequential operas, 'civilized corruption and Christian dull-wittedness ['Stumpfsinn']'.

At its Aeschylean peak, the public art ('öffentliche Kunst') of Greece expressed the 'deepest and noblest' consciousness of the people; as such, it was 'conservative'. Greek theatre belonged to the people, ours to the moneyed classes. Today, what is 'deepest and noblest' is 'denunciation of our public art'. True art now lives in the private consciousness; as such, it must be revolutionary. And in frank contradiction of so many Romantic hopes, Wagner declares: 'No, we do not want to be Greeks again; for *we* know what the Greeks did not know and, not knowing, were doomed.'<sup>20</sup> In Greece, unified tragic art suffers a 'revolutionary' shift as early as the Periclean age, with Sophocles, before fragmenting into 'rhetoric, sculpture, painting, music, etc.', duly revived, as separate arts, in the Renaissance. In each separate art, 'great minds have created marvels' – Shakespeare and Beethoven are singled out – but 'the one true art has not been reborn . . . It cannot be reborn; it must be born anew.' Paradoxically, only 'the great revolution of mankind, whose beginnings once destroyed Greek tragedy, can regain this art.' Modern civilization values mankind instrumentally – it marginalizes 'man alive' ('der wirkliche lebendige Mensch')<sup>21</sup> – but revolution can create 'a nobler universalism'. Art will direct the revolution towards a new 'brotherhood of man', in which humanity is 'free and united', the separate arts meet once

more in tragic drama – and ‘this art will be conservative again’. A ‘free and independent’ public will sustain the theatre (‘most powerful of all artistic institutions’), to which, as in antiquity, they will have free admission. And Wagner concludes by invoking the brotherhood of man, the dignity (‘Würde’) of man, and Jesus and Apollo: ‘the two most sublime [‘erhabensten’] teachers of mankind’.

The switch from a rare moment of practical policy (‘free admission’) to this astonishing peroration (‘Jesus and Apollo’) is characteristic. The precise relationship between Wagner’s diverse hopes remains forever elusive. In lieu of practicalities, his stock-in-trade is sweeping denunciations of the negative and assertions of the positive, its consummate value, its own ultimate unity. The unified community and the unified work of art are themselves, ultimately, united – in Wagner’s mind. In his writing, such unities are established by a rhetoric of alignments and oppositions: the alignment of Apollo and Jesus (but *not* world-hating Christianity) is representative.

In this essay one can find most of the *idées fixes* that come to characterize Wagner’s subsequent outlook (though nationalism tends to displace ‘universalism’ and enthusiasm for political revolution soon fades). But at this mid-point in his creative career, with *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* behind him (the latter composed, though not yet performed), and Bayreuth and the masterpieces of *Tristan* and the *Ring* still to come, one has a sense of new directions. Praise of Attic tragedy and Beethoven, but scorn for opera, implies an aspiration, spelled out more fully in *Opera and Drama*, to translate the power and authority of the modern symphonic tradition into myth in dramatic form. In the years leading up to the Zurich essays, this new ‘mythic’ orientation is apparent, both from Wagner’s reading – not only Aeschylus, but also the Eddas and other Nordic saga-material – and from his drafts, which include (in 1848) a sketch of a drama on ‘The Nibelung Myth’ and a libretto for ‘Siegfrieds Tod’ (‘The Death of Siegfried’, a first version of *Götterdämmerung*). Work on the music of the *Ring* would not begin until 1853 (and on the music of *Tristan*, not until 1856).

Not quite all of Wagner’s positives were yet in place. In its diagnosis of human alienation and endorsement of secular (but spiritual) value, *Art and Revolution* is indebted to the post-Hegelian philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (whose *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future – Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, 1843 – also helped to shape Wagner’s slogans). A more momentous influence to come was the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which Wagner encountered ‘as a gift from heaven’ in 1854.<sup>22</sup> Yet Schopenhauer served to reinforce rather than redirect: ‘His central idea, the final negation of the will to live, . . . is the only means of redemption [‘einzig erlösend’] . . . [though] not new to me.’<sup>23</sup> Not new, indeed:

throughout Wagner's career, renunciation and redemption, often in a distinctively Wagnerian context of sacrificial love, are among his favourite themes, from *The Flying Dutchman* to *Tristan* to *Parsifal* (whose closing words, 'redemption for the redeemer' – 'Erlösung dem Erlöser' – sum up the continuity of his idiosyncratic neo-Christianity as well).<sup>24</sup>

In one respect, allegiance to Schopenhauer complicated the project. What was the status of music in relation to the other arts? For Wagner, 'absolute music' – 'music divorced from the art of poetry'<sup>25</sup> – had reached its highest form, but effectively a dead end, in the symphonies of Beethoven (in Wagner's mind, his great predecessor).<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere in the Zurich essays, especially *Opera and Drama*, he rewrites the hierarchy of the operatic arts: theatrical representation ('drama') comes first, music (expression of emotion) second, words ('poetry') third. Drama is 'the end', and music 'a means', whereas in opera 'a means of expression (music) has been made the end, and the end of expression (drama) a means.'<sup>27</sup>

A remarkable position, this, for the future composer of the *Ring* and, especially, *Tristan*, where magnificent music dominates from start to finish – and indeed for a devotee of Greek tragedy, where drama and the poetic word are dominant, and music a virtual appendage (not only is music confined to the lyric portions: in its monophonic simplicity, it will have borne no relation to the orchestral sophistications of the nineteenth century, or their 'expressive' power). But Schopenhauer's position was different again. In his philosophy, the everyday world is one of secondary illusion, from which drama, at its tragic best, offers an escape in the sense of a 'demonstration of the vanity of all human undertakings', whereas music has a superior significance altogether, penetrating metaphysical reality and revealing 'the innermost nature of the world': for Schopenhauer, 'at the highest creative level, words were redundant'.<sup>28</sup> Faced with these multiple contradictions, Wagner's successive prose writings make valiant attempts to square circles and reconcile irreconcilables.<sup>29</sup> His artistic development, mercifully, proceeded regardless.

In *Art and Revolution*, at all events, the essence of Wagner's project is on display: the unified community, coming together at a religious festival to experience unified musical tragedy and its mythic material (product of the community's 'insight into the nature of things and men')<sup>30</sup> – and then the Feuerbachian vision of the 'free' human individual, crystallized here in the phrase 'man alive' and elsewhere in appeals to the 'pure, essential human' ('das Reinmenschliche'), which, like the dramatic festival, is first cultivated by the Greeks.<sup>31</sup>

On one level, the entire project is one of innumerable instantiations of the Lacanian 'yearning for the whole'. In historical terms, it recalls the particular yearnings of the German Romantic generation, where the aspiration to recombine the arts is commonplace,<sup>32</sup> and

where Schiller, for one, contrasts the fragmentation of modern culture with the cultural unity of ancient Greece.<sup>33</sup> The difference is the emphasis Wagner gives to music – and the commitment he shows in attempting to translate these ideals into action.

It is easy to criticise Wagner's view of Greece. History has to be squashed, and actualities adjusted, to make the Athenian 'community' the effective creator of Greek myth. The Greek dramatic festivals have as much to do with the 'entertainment' that Wagner scorns as with the religion he commends. And (quite apart from the remarkable notion of a 'revolutionary' Sophocles) the idea that tragedy at its Aeschylean peak was 'conservative' (*because* communal) ignores its exploratory treatment of 'epic' heroism (obvious in the *Oresteia*), of dominant womanhood (in the Oresteian Clytemnestra), even of religion.

Easy, too, to identify discrepancies between the Greek paradigm and Wagner's project, as eventually realized in the *Ring*. Like the *Oresteia*, the *Ring* is a connected cycle, but a very different sort of cycle. Its characters and plot – adapted freely from the abstruse material of the sagas – define a conflict, on a cosmic scale, between power and love. The conflict is initiated by the theft of the Rhine-gold, and its fashioning into a ring in which earthly power resides, and resolved by the love-struck Brünnhilde's sacrifice of the ring, and herself, which precipitates the destruction of the gods: love overpowers power itself. Such an allegory, foreign to Greek tragedy, is only one of many un-Greek features of Wagner's *Ring*.<sup>34</sup> Not only is its music unrelatable to any Aeschylean 'equivalent' (albeit, in an audacious pun, Wagner identified the musical commentary provided by his *orchestra* with the role of the tragic chorus in the Greek *orkhestra*).<sup>35</sup> The *Ring*'s 'concocted mythology' (unrelated to a living religion) is far removed from the traditional mytho-religious materials that formed the 'inner landscape' of Athenian audiences,<sup>36</sup> while the whole momentum of the cycle is devoted to 'exploring the world of inner feeling in a way which is quite alien to the spirit of Aeschylus'.<sup>37</sup>

For good measure, Wagner's best efforts to make Bayreuth 'a festival of German art' and a 'real religious necessity',<sup>38</sup> and his festival theatre an indoor equivalent of a Greek theatrical space, largely went astray. The theatre, based on designs by Gottfried Semper, had novel features: an ingenious amphitheatrical auditorium, without social stratification, and a darkened auditorium and concealed orchestra pit. The overall effect (in Thomas Mann's words) was 'a kind of theatrical Lourdes, a grotto of miracles for a weary twilight age that yearns for some kind of faith', while the whole Bayreuth phenomenon embodied 'not the spirit of the nation, but simply one artist's supreme ambition'.<sup>39</sup> (Mann might have added that, where Athenian festivals had competing playwrights, Bayreuth was all Wagner.)

Privately, Wagner was dissatisfied, too, especially with his audiences: moneyed, paying customers, ‘all in fancy dress and make-up’, a world away from his original vision of a ‘free’ community: ‘Now I’ve created the invisible orchestra, I’d like to invent the invisible theatre’.<sup>40</sup>

There is, certainly, direct influence on Wagner’s creative work (especially the *Ring*) from Greek tragedy (especially the *Oresteia*).<sup>41</sup> The *Ring* and the *Oresteia* have in common the cyclical form; a huge tale of striving and vengeance; a god-driven cosmology; and a trajectory from the divine to the human (*Eumenides* closes with a human processional acclaiming reconciliation among the gods, the *Ring* with human survivors contemplating the gods’ collective ‘twilight’). Then there are ‘Aeschylean’ moments, like Sieglinde’s nightmare (both vision and reality) in *Walküre*, Act II, recalling the lyric dialogue between Cassandra and chorus in the *Agamemnon*.<sup>42</sup>

But the Aeschylean traces in Wagner’s work pale into insignificance beside the triumphant modernity of the music, the ‘inner feeling’, and the inner values that are everywhere evident. Wagner is ‘the modern artist *par excellence*,’ said Nietzsche in 1888: ‘the Cagliostro of modernity.’ And ‘confronted with the labyrinth of the modern soul, where could [one] find a more qualified guide?’<sup>43</sup> In the years leading up to the first performances at Bayreuth, Wagner’s intimates might see him as a new Aeschylus,<sup>44</sup> but he knows he is not – and *no*, he does not even *want* to be . . . He wants to create, not Aeschylean tragedy, but ‘near-tragedy’ – ‘the compromise of an age which did not believe in the finality of evil’.<sup>45</sup> He wants to explore, not the societal loyalties of Greek heroes, but the emotional compulsions of the modern ‘subjective’ individual,<sup>46</sup> whose passions define the nineteenth-century novel, as they define *Tristan* and the *Ring*.<sup>47</sup> And that ‘Aeschylean’ end of *Götterdämmerung* – Brünnhilde’s ‘redeeming’ self-sacrifice and the love that drives her to join her Siegfried in death (‘die Liebe nur sein!’ – among her last words – ‘only love!’)<sup>48</sup> – all this is modern in a very special way. This love that destroys gods, and lets human beings inherit the earth, is Christianity translated into Wagnerian-redemptive worldly love: God was among us, so loved the world, *died* for us, that we might live. Insofar as Wagner’s resolution satisfies on the mythic-dramatic level, it does so by tacit appeal to this nexus – reshaped, in irresistibly modern form, for an age of the death of God, or gods. But meanwhile (in case the dramatic resolution is insufficient), the *Ring* is resolved, musically, by – no less irresistibly modern – an overwhelming recapitulation of musical themes from the whole cycle.

Where, then, does all this leave Wagner and the Greeks? What, ultimately, is their contribution to his project? Details apart, the Greeks form no part of Wagner’s edifice. They

are, rather, part – but a crucial part – of the scaffolding. Some interpreters have invested the Greeks with a more direct significance, whereby, for instance, ‘Wagner’s Hellenism and his anti-Semitism are integrally connected’,<sup>49</sup> with the Greeks paradigmatic for a nationalist project, the Jews as the cosmopolitan Other. Such a schema is not persuasive: not because there is any doubt about the anti-Semitism, but because Wagner himself never articulates this opposition,<sup>50</sup> and complicates any thought of it by an alignment between the Jews and the nationalist-minded *French*,<sup>51</sup> which assumes the special significance of French opera. In France, opera had acquired the status of a national art-form as early as the founding of the Académie Royale de Musique in 1669.<sup>52</sup> In dismissing traditional opera and nominating Beethoven as his predecessor, Wagner is affirming the superiority of the symphonic Germans over the operatic French (and, not least, over the dominant figure in mid-nineteenth-century French opera, the German-Jewish composer, Meyerbeer).

‘No, we do not want to be Greeks again’. It is no coincidence that Wagner’s Greek allegiances hardly surface within his vast influence,<sup>53</sup> or indeed within the perspective of his chief critics. Here, Nietzsche is a revealing case. In 1872, at the height of his Wagnerian commitment, Nietzsche acclaims Wagner as the modern successor to Aeschylus (and Sophocles), heralding the birth of a new ‘tragic age’.<sup>54</sup> In 1876, by way of a last hurrah and though now deeply ambivalent, Nietzsche affirms the ‘affinity’ between Wagner and Aeschylus himself.<sup>55</sup> Yet once he has finally renounced Wagner, later that decade, his copious critiques of his former idol freely condemn Wagner’s nationalism and anti-Semitism, mischievously identify Wagner as spiritually French (‘Very modern . . . Very Parisian. Very *decadent*’),<sup>56</sup> but say hardly a word against (or even about) the Greek connection. And it is no coincidence, either, that *Tristan*, Wagner’s most achieved and most quintessentially Wagnerian work (‘he says he has produced nothing new since’),<sup>57</sup> with all its consummate inner feeling and ‘uninterrupted music’ (‘ununterbrochene Musik’),<sup>58</sup> has nothing Greek about it at all.

Wagner is a composer who puts great emphasis on performance, and a music-dramatist for whom only his own theatre will do. He is a man of action, certainly, and he thinks of action when he thinks of art. Art should ‘give light at a time rich in deeds’ (‘sie . . . leuchten soll während einer tatenreichen Zeit’).<sup>59</sup> His musical-theatrical goal, he wrote in 1872, was ‘deeds of music made manifest’ (‘ersichtlich gewordene Taten der Musik’).<sup>60</sup> Deeds *of* music, or deeds lit up *by* music: like so much else, this relationship is never determined. What *is* determined is that the deeds belong to the here-and-now, not to the past, Greek or other.

Wagner represents a striking case of a devotee of the ancient world who uses antiquity to assist a programme of action, without feeling any obligation to *imitate* antiquity. Demonstrations of the way he models this or that aspect of the *Ring* on the *Oresteia* are, in the final analysis, off the point. In fundamentals, Wagner is remote from the spirit of the classicizers who practise and endorse such imitation.

However, like most of antiquity's imitators, great or small, Wagner believes that we can (even must) learn from antiquity. Like, but significantly unlike. He converts the ancient authorities into a stage in a process of construction that (like scaffolding . . .) is to be out of sight, even out of mind, in the event. The imitators, necessarily, accept the validity of the classical example, across cultures, and share a faith in the universality of behaviour. That kind of transculturalism is asserted by Wagner in one sense (the 'pure human' that informed the Greek world must inform ours now), but not in another: *no*, we cannot and do not even want to *try* and be Greeks again. Among the significant makers of the classical tradition – and the wider, modern world – Wagner offers, himself, a provoking example.

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<sup>1</sup> *Theses on Feuerbach* (composed in 1845), 11.

<sup>2</sup> See his essay ‘Über die Benennung “Musikdrama”’ (‘On the Name “Music-Drama”’, 1872). The term originates in the 1830s: Dahlhaus (1971) 9. Up to and including *Lohengrin*, Wagner’s ‘operas’ are so called; then (e.g.) *Tristan* is an ‘Action’ (‘Handlung’) and the *Ring* a ‘Festival Play for the Stage’ (‘Bühnenfestspiel’).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. in *Opera and Drama* (1852), 3. 5–6, Wagner speaks of ‘musical motifs’ and ‘principal themes’. ‘Leitmotif’ was popularized by Hans von Wolzogen: Grey (2008a) 87.

<sup>4</sup> The term was invented by Karl Trahndorff, *Ästhetik* (1827): Dieckmann (1988). Wagner uses it in *Art and Revolution* (1849) and ‘The Art-Work of the Future’ (1849–50), but avoids it thereafter.

<sup>5</sup> Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre* (1911): Grey (2006) 65.

<sup>6</sup> Interview in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 1912.

<sup>7</sup> The title of Smith (2007). Influence of the *Gesamtkunst* ideal: Bablet (1995), Finger and Follett (2011), Fornoff (2004), Wöll (1984).

<sup>8</sup> Deathridge (2008) 114.

<sup>9</sup> Baudelaire, ‘Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris’ (1861); Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’ (1876), *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* and *Der Fall Wagner* (both 1888); Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite* (1898); Mann, *Wagner und unsere Zeit* (essays collected in 1963); Adorno, esp. *Versuch über Wagner* (written in 1937/8, published in 1952); Badiou and Žižek in Badiou (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Provoked also (debatably) by ‘totalitarian’ implications of the ‘total’ work of art: Michaud (2003). Wagner’s anti-Semitism (endlessly discussed): Grey (2008b).

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<sup>11</sup> Wagner and the Greeks: overviews in Lloyd-Jones (1982) 126–42, Schadewaldt (1970). See also: Ewans (1982); Foster (2010) (but see n. 41 below); Lee (2003); Silk and Stern (1981); Wilberg (1996). Cf. variously: Deathridge (2008) 102–9, Goldhill (2008), Roller (1992), Ruehl (2003). On German Hellenism, see, summarily, Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2013) 23–8.

<sup>12</sup> He also arranged and translated Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1771–3) for performance in 1847.

<sup>13</sup> *Die Tagebücher*, first published in full in 1976/7.

<sup>14</sup> See Wagner's open letter to Nietzsche, 12 June 1872, and *Mein Leben*: Altmann (1923), 1. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Ewans (1982) 15–16.

<sup>16</sup> Also some classical scholarship: Foster (2010) 1–6, 269–94.

<sup>17</sup> Droysen, *Des Aischylos Werke* (1832/41). *Mein Leben*: Altmann (1923), 1. 469.

<sup>18</sup> Cosima Wagner, *Tagebücher*, 23–24 June 1880.

<sup>19</sup> A final entry added to Cosima's *Tagebücher* by his stepdaughter Daniela, after his death on 12 February 1883.

<sup>20</sup> Contrast e.g. Goethe's 'Let everyone be Greeks their own way' ('Antik und Modern', 1818: Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2013) 27.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. D. H. Lawrence: 'the only thing that is anything . . . man alive, and live woman' ('Why the Novel Matters', published posthumously in *Phoenix*, 1936).

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Liszt, ?16 December 1854.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. his letter to Hans von Wolzogen, 17 January 1880.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Ferdinand von Biedenfeld, 17 January 1849.

<sup>26</sup> Partly on account of the use of words in the Choral Symphony. Wagner and Beethoven: Kropfinger (1974).

<sup>27</sup> *Opera and Drama*, 3, and introduction to 1.

<sup>28</sup> Silk and Stern (1981) 327, 55; Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819/44), 2. 3. 37 and 1. 3. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Silk and Stern (1981) 53–7, 137–40, 239–42.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Die Wibelungen’ (‘The Wibelungs’, 1849).

<sup>31</sup> *Opera and Drama*, 2. 6 (‘das, was das Wesen der menschlichen Gattung, als solcher, ausmacht’); ‘Artwork of the Future’, 3. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Schefer (2011). This aspiration in fact precedes the Romantics: see e.g. John Brown’s *Dissertation on the . . . Separations . . . of Poetry and Music* (1763).

<sup>33</sup> See esp. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795).

<sup>34</sup> Like many modern artists, Wagner uses myth as ‘cover’: Silk, Gildenhard, and Barrow (2013) 301, 422.

<sup>35</sup> See Silk (1999) 213–17. Of *Götterdämmerung*, Act III, Wagner said, ‘I have composed a Greek chorus . . . to be sung by the orchestra’: Cosima, *Tagebücher*, 29 September 1871.

<sup>36</sup> Steiner (1961) 322–3; cf. Ewans (1982) 56–62.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>38</sup> Letters to Ludwig, 1 October 1874, and Hans von Bülow, 15 February 1852.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Leiden und Grösse Richard Wagners’ (1933); ‘Versuch über das Theater’ (1908).

<sup>40</sup> Cosima, *Tagebücher*, 23 September 1878.

<sup>41</sup> Scrutinized (and, we would argue, overstated) by Ewans (1982). Misrepresented by Foster (2010): cf. Ewans (2010). The ‘Aeschylean’ *Prometheus* also influenced the *Ring* – Ewans (1982) 256–60 – and is itself invoked in *Art and Revolution*.

<sup>42</sup> Ewans (1982) 141–5. Wagner thought the Cassandra scene ‘the most perfect thing human art has ever achieved’: Cosima, *Tagebücher*, 18 November 1874.

<sup>43</sup> *Der Fall Wagner*, 5, and preface. By now, Nietzsche was no friend of Bayreuth (cf. p. 9 above), but (or and) fully equipped to offer an informed view.

<sup>44</sup> Cosima, letter to Nietzsche, 26 August 1869; Nietzsche, letter to Erwin Rohde, 3 September 1869; Cosima, *Tagebücher*, 4 October 1869; Nietzsche, ‘Richard Wagner in Bayreuth’ (the fourth of Nietzsche’s *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, 1876), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Steiner (1961) 133.

<sup>46</sup> A Hegelian contrast: see Hegel’s *Ästhetik*, 3. 3. 3. c. c. 3. b–c (*sic*); cf. Silk and Stern (1981) 322–5.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, 9.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Wagner, letter to August Röckel, 25/26 January 1854.

<sup>49</sup> Goldhill (2008) 461–2.

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<sup>50</sup> Despite eventually seeing the Jews as ‘the enemy of the pure human’ (‘reine Menschheit’: letter to Ludwig, 22 November 1881), alongside his view of the Greeks (p. 6 above). His anti-Semitism is first fully overt in ‘Das Judentum in der Musik’ (‘Jewishness in Music’), published under a pseudonym in 1850.

<sup>51</sup> The French and the Jews are common targets in (esp.) Wagner’s essay, ‘Was ist deutsch?’ (‘What is German?’, 1865/78).

<sup>52</sup> Fulcher (1987).

<sup>53</sup> Bayreuth provoked a few classicizing imitations, notably the ‘Fêtes d’Orange’ (1894), held in the Roman amphitheatre at Orange and featuring Saint-Saëns’s ‘Hymne à Pallas-Athéné’.

<sup>54</sup> *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 19: Silk and Stern (1981).

<sup>55</sup> See n. 44 above.

<sup>56</sup> *Der Fall Wagner*, 9. ‘Decadence’: Silk (2004).

<sup>57</sup> Cosima, *Tagebücher*, 26 March 1879 – twenty years after *Tristan* was composed. In 1860, Wagner had already decided that, after *Tristan*, there were ‘no new essential truths’ for him to ‘uncover’: letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 2 May 1860.

<sup>58</sup> Wagner’s own description: Cosima, *Tagebücher*, 4 October 1881.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 21 December 1870.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Über die Benennung “Musikdrama”’.

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