



Nietzsche contra Wagner

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Date : Published March 30th 2003 by Siruela (first published 1887)

ISBN : 9788478446025

Author : Friedrich Nietzsche

Format : Paperback 61 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Music, Nonfiction, European Literature, German Literature, Psychology, Religion, Art, Literature, 19th Century

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Gijs says

Hoewel niet zo sterk geschreven als 'Der Fall Wagner' biedt 'Nietzsche contra Wagner' desondanks heel wat aanknopingspunten en verbindt deze tekst Nietzsches Wagnerkritiek ook sterker met zijn religiekritiek. Inhoudelijk misschien sterker dan 'Der Fall Wagner', maar met een stuk minder pit.

Shane says

"No, we are disgusted with this bad taste, this will to truth, this search after truth "at all costs," this madness of adolescence, "the love of truth;" we are now too experienced, too serious, too joyful, too scorched, too profound for that.... We no longer believe that truth remains truth when it is unveiled,—we have lived enough to understand this.... To-day it seems to us good form not to strip everything naked, not to be present at all things, not to desire to "know" all. "Tout comprendre c'est tout mépriser."... "Is it true," a little girl once asked her mother, "that the beloved Father is everywhere?—I think it quite improper,"—a hint to philosophers.... The shame with which Nature has concealed herself behind riddles and enigmas should be held in higher esteem. Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not revealing her reasons?... Perhaps her name, to use a Greek word is Baubo?—Oh these Greeks, they understood the art of living! For this it is needful to halt bravely at the surface, at the fold, at the skin, to worship appearance, and to believe in forms, tones, words, and the whole Olympus of appearance! These Greeks were superficial—from profundity.... And are we not returning to precisely the same thing, we dare devils of intellect who have scaled the highest and most dangerous pinnacles of present thought, in order to look around us from that height, in order to look down from that height? Are we not precisely in this respect—Greeks? Worshipers of form, of tones, of words? Precisely on that account—artists?"

Elien Angela says

Very sharp and highly entertaining.

Renxiang Liu says

This is a pamphlet collection of Nietzsche's passages on Richard Wagner. Nietzsche made the collection himself from his own books *Gay Science*, *Human, All-Too Human*, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Genealogy of Morals*.

These excerpts record how Nietzsche distanced himself from Wagner. Composed near the end of his career, it is also an expression of Nietzsche's most fundamental convictions. As Nietzsche claims in the Preface: when the passages are "read one after another, they will leave no doubt either about Richard Wagner or about myself: we are antipodes." (page 662 from The Portable Nietzsche)

As a first approximation, we can interpret Nietzsche's disagreement with Wagner with respect to Hegel's

distinction (in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art*) between classical and romantic art. While Nietzsche champions the art that is imbued with vitality and that is an active constituent of the world of meaning, Wagner's art is "sick", reflective, and overwhelmed by uneven expression. In this sense, Nietzsche's Wagner-critique can be situated within his reaction against the Romantic movement in general.

According to Nietzsche, the Romantic movement grows out of the soil of decadence and sickness. This is manifest, not through sufferings, but through the lack of it, through the urge to make life easier, to mild and mediocre. For Nietzsche, this is the taste of the unartistic mass, and its major problem is *boredom*. Because the mass is bored in enjoyment, it now craves for exaggeration, overabundance and excessiveness. Romanticism (and especially Wagner's music) meets this demand by appealing unregulated to the senses and by subjecting the music and the drama to the "pose". The result is that the aesthetic activity of the audience is disturbed, so that they can only "swim and float" in chaotic feelings.

To be sure, Nietzsche admits that Romanticism is a great movement. But it is a "swan song", that which emerges when a culture is at its decline. Though we can still admire Wagner, we have to be aware that his music is a witness, not a role model.

It is not quite clear why Nietzsche *has to* base his distaste for Wagner on these reasons. After all, it could be due to Wagner's anti-Semitism, his conversion to Christianity, or the fact that he appeals to the mass. The difference in style - the criterion Nietzsche seems to set in order to distinguish himself from Wagner - does not tell much: levity is sometimes cheerfulness, self-assurance and the ability to dance, sometimes mediocrity, hedonism and the inability to carry burden; ponderance is sometimes seriousness and more endurance, sometimes contrived sorrow and artificial pessimism. The decisive moment is rather the intensity of life: does the art come from a strong spirit or a weary one? But, when Nietzsche imposes this criterion on Wagner's works, he may be inventing some gap in it that is not understandable to Wagner himself. What if "Dionysian tragedy" and "Romantic pessimism" were in Wagner the same thing? (After all, these two categories were never *his own*.) And then who is Nietzsche to decide how much vitality is involved in the works?

Anyway, Nietzsche's message is clear. Art is art because of vitality, *tout court*. Strangely, this reverberates Hegel's controversial claim about the "end" of art: art can no longer enjoy supreme vitality in an age of reflection; it is no longer sacrosanct to a people, but instead has become superfluous "culture" or "expression".

What is no less interesting about the book is that it attests Nietzsche's transition of attitude toward Wagner, which implies a model of authenticity. By taking sides against himself, Nietzsche finds the way to himself, "that hidden and masterful something for which we long do not have a name, until finally it proves itself to be" (677). The authentic self, so to speak, remains nameless until disclosed, but whenever disclosed appears to have always already been lurking there.

Another point that worths attention is that, at the end, Nietzsche wants to balance the project of disclosure with the perseverance of hiddenness. "We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn"; "we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and 'know' everything." (682) When everything is brought present-at-hand (to borrow Heidegger's term), no secret remains and the truth must be plain and boring. The content of truth may remain, but the dynamicity is lost - but only the latter is what makes truth truth. Accordingly, Nietzsche advises us "to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance" (683). Knowing the secret, keeping it a secret, and presenting it as a secret: this is the most noble way of unconcealment. The appearance is divine; preserving

its magic and wonder is precisely the destiny of art.

Tyler V. says

In this short essay, Nietzsche attacks his old friend, the musician Richard Wagner. In order to do this, he simply compiled sections from his older works and revised them a bit to give them flow in this piece. Having already read all of those older works, this one was a bit of a bore for me. I also think Nietzsche's revisions to these sections actually made them harder to read and less enjoyable.

Overall, this was still a good read because, as a Nietzsche fanatic, I received another insight into the Wagner cult. This book is not without fresh ideas, either. In one section Nietzsche casually (typical for him) throws this out there: "Aesthetics are just applied physiology." I had to stop reading and chew on that one for days. An entire work could be written on just that one idea, yet Nietzsche just tossed it out there in one line.

As a writer and philosopher, he was so overflowing with ideas that he didn't even need to expound the one that blew my mind. Five words! I had to pause for them.

Alethleia says

"La tristeza de una implacable sospecha: la de estar ya condenado a desconfiar profundamente, a estar más profundamente "solo" que antes. Porque yo no tuve conmigo a nadie más que a Richard Wagner... Yo fui siempre condenado a tener a mi lado alemanes..."

Fred R says

One of the most embarrassing polemics I've ever read.

Greg says

The beginning reads very much as Nietzsche being elitist and essentially describing Wagner's music as for the masses. I did, however, thoroughly enjoy the last half or so where he elucidates his sense of alienation from Wagner's conversion to Christianity and how he in general views life after suffering a tremendous loss. His nausea, what he describes as "courageous pessimism", was definitely relatable. Nietzsche spent most of his life being the smartest guy in the room and you can see in this work his choice to remain cheerful despite his deep sense of alienation from everyone around him.
