

AESTHETIC PHENOMENA AS RELIGION

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A study of  
Tristan and Isolde  
in The Birth of Tragedy



By

JAMES ROBERTSON FIELD, B.A.

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AUTHOR:      James Robertson Field, B.A.    (University of  
  British Columbia)

SUPERVISOR:     Dr. G.P. Grant

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## ABSTRACT

"It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified." This sentence, repeated twice in The Birth of Tragedy, and standing as it does as the essential purpose and motivation of the book, seems to be an intentional turning about of the Lutheran doctrine of sole fide. Here art appropriates to itself what is essentially a religious function; art is the realm of human activity where experiences are ordered and intensified, and subsequently, where redemption is to be gained. In formulating his ideas on art and on Greek tragedy Nietzsche was influenced by Wagner. It was Wagner's music, above all else, that opened up to Nietzsche new problems for art and religion. The musical dissonance of Tristan opened up to Nietzsche the secret key to Greek tragedy. It was the recognition of the Dionysian origin of tragedy, of its origin out of the spirit of music, that enabled Nietzsche to discover the essence of tragedy free from the conventional aesthetics, which expected tragedy to answer the criterion of the plastic arts, that is, of beauty. The Birth of Tragedy announced to the world, as Nietzsche wrote to Wagner, that "practically nothing remains of traditional theories of 'Aesthetics'." In what follows an interpretation of the religious significance of this new aesthetics will be offered by way of a study of the role of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde in The Birth of Tragedy.

## P R E F A C E

The intent of this thesis is to interpret The Birth of Tragedy from the view-point of the Wagnerian art-work, with special emphasis on Nietzsche's interpretation of Tristan and Isolde. From this approach we seek to deal with the problem of the religious significance of art as it appears in The Birth of Tragedy. We do not, therefore, seek to understand what Nietzsche is saying about Greek tragedy, about Socratism or Platonism, as problems for the understanding of the Greek religious experience, but rather as problems for the understanding of the religious experience of nineteenth century romanticism, problems to which The Birth of Tragedy, especially the latter half, addresses itself. The meaning of Nietzsche's formula that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" will therefore be dealt with as an interpretation of the religious function of Wagnerian art. How does the influence of Wagner lead Nietzsche into a metaphysics of art and what does this metaphysics mean?

But why should this be a problem for religion at all? What makes the aesthetic doctrine of The Birth of Tragedy so important to the study of religion? I believe it is important and I hope I have succeeded in drawing out this importance in the body of the thesis and that I have presented

the thesis in such a way that the intention summarized above is implicit throughout. It may, however, be helpful to introduce our topic by explaining in a general way how The Birth of Tragedy faces us as a religious problem, at least for this author.

In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche attempts a total re-evaluation of art. In his own words he claimed that with The Birth of Tragedy "practically nothing remains of traditional theories of 'Aesthetics'." This re-evaluation was made necessary by a changing religious consciousness, a changing consciousness which Nietzsche became more acutely aware of, and which he hoped to bring to fuller realization in his later writings. Further more, it is our thesis that this re-evaluation was inspired by Nietzsche's appreciation of the Wagnerian art-work, especially of Tristan. What he heard in those bottomless discords had a profound effect on the young Nietzsche and set the atmosphere in which all his future thought was to develop, in which it would continue to grow even after his break with Wagner.

Our word "aesthetics" comes from the Greek word "aisthesis", which means sensation, or perception. As such aesthetics pertains to phenomena since phenomena are the objects of our sensation -- those things which "appear". Any sensation, therefore, is a potentially aesthetic sensation. But aesthetics is clearly much more than just sensations, for then the term "aesthetic sensation" would be mere redundancy and we would have no need for two words. Let us say, therefore,

that aesthetics is the meaningful ordering of our sensations. It makes our sensations of mere objects into sensations of "reality", providing, that is, that one accepts the idea that art (the aesthetic phenomenon) is able to reveal reality, in some sense, and is not merely an imitation of phenomena which themselves are only appearances and do not have any correspondence to reality which men can perceive. (This last qualification is necessary because one could conceive of art revealing reality by means of imitating phenomena if one ascribed some sort of reality to phenomena or if one believed there to be some correspondence between phenomena, that which art imitates, and reality, and if this correspondence were perceivable, that is, within the realm of aesthetics). Even the revelation of the meaninglessness of reality, as an aesthetic sensation, is a revelation of reality and is fundamentally a religious revelation (the division between religion and philosophy is superficial here, although the emphasis in The Birth of Tragedy is upon the former, due to the influence of Schopenhauer, who maintains that philosophy cannot reveal reality).

This proposition that art is able to reveal reality, and is not merely an imitation of phenomena, enables us to get some insight into what it was that Nietzsche heard in those "bottomless discords" (or infinite melody) and why what he heard had such a profound and lasting effect upon him. What Nietzsche heard was the announcement that reality had become an abyss of meaninglessness. Where formerly men

had found a reality that was hospitable, harmonious and eternal and which could be understood by reason, now this reality was seen to be, if not inhospitable, at least indifferent, relative and dissonant. It was irrational, being not just beyond reason, but even contrary to it. Reality had become an abyss, a vacuum. This vacuum was all around man -- whether he looked to the world of phenomena and nature (reality in the crude sense) or beyond phenomena to the universal (reality in the higher sense).

But somewhere, on middle ground, man was able to create a hospitable environment in which he could live. This middle ground was art. It is important to note that art is now something man creates. Man must create his own order and meaning out of nothing. This is because there is nothing left for the artist to imitate. Reality has become an abyss of meaninglessness and chaos (which is to say not only that phenomena have ceased to correspond to a higher reality, but that this higher reality has lost its inherent meaning and that we must provide the meaning ourselves). As a result of this, however, we find that the artist is creating an order and meaning which is forever being contradicted by his existence, by the element of meaninglessness in reality. Rather than building walls around his art in order to shut out this contradiction, in which case art would become rigid and sterile, Nietzsche advises that the artist accept the contradiction and even make it a part of his art. He



becomes, as such, what Nietzsche calls a Dionysian artist. He not only creates, he also destroys so that he may create ever new and fresh art-works. This dichotomy of creativity and destructiveness is embodied in the Apollinian and the Dionysian art-tendencies. Musical dissonance is the Dionysian. It is the principle of destruction and meaninglessness as the necessary counterpart of the creative aspect of the artist.\*

Certain difficulties present themselves to us in this system, at least as I have presented it. First, the artist as creator seems to be in the impossible predicament of being told to create out of nothing. Ex nihilo nihil fit. Furthermore, it often seems to us that the art-work, and in fact, our entire lives, are but a dream that has no dreamer-- that we are surrounded by images and illusions, but that these illusions cannot be said to be false because we have no standard of truth by which to measure them. The earth disappears from under our feet. In his Self-criticism, which Nietzsche included in the second edition of The Birth of Tragedy as a preface to it, he regrets his use of the language of Kant and Schopenhauer, whom he lumps together -- but is he really unaware that he is forced to use this language in order to avoid the absurdity of a creation out of nothing, a dream without a dreamer? It seems unlikely that a thinker of Nietzsche's caliber could have been oblivious to such a difficulty and therefore his system is a great deal more.

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\* Particularly relevant to this problem is § 58 in The Gay Science -- "Only as Creators".

involved than I have been able to present it here. An inescapable necessity dictates that the language of "universal will" and "thing-in-itself" be introduced in order to avoid the impression of absurdity. But does Nietzsche succeed in this task? According to Nietzsche himself -- no. He wrote in his Self-Criticism that The Birth of Tragedy was "marked by every defect of youth", "without the will to logical cleanliness, very convinced and therefore disdainful of proof, mistrustful even of the propriety of proof", "undecided whether it should communicate or conceal itself."

Faced by this very perceptive criticism by Nietzsche himself, how do we approach this veiled, almost impenetrable book? One way would be to expose all its impossibilities and absurdities. But for this task we should have to be as great a genius as Nietzsche, and as clever at pursuing and unravelling as he is at concealing and obscuring. And it is by no means certain that we would have accomplished very much by this if in the meantime we had not understood what motivated Nietzsche's apparent carelessness. It seems in fact that to expose an absurdity or a contradiction is a way out of coming to understand what the absurdity means -- and the latter is by far the greater and more important. For us, however, it is enough that we keep these absurdities in mind -- in the back of our minds -- and proceed simply to try and understand the work before us.

How, given all of this, do we begin? Because we are approaching The Birth of Tragedy through the Wagnerian art-

work, and through Tristan specifically, a substantial introduction may be necessary in order to locate the problem which concerns us in its general scope. Thus we begin with -- CHAPTER ONE -- A METAPHYSICS OF ART. This chapter is meant as an introduction. It is meant to establish the viability and value of dealing with The Birth of Tragedy by our method. In doing this we shall have to come to grips with the very general problems which face us before we throw ourselves in the specific. In other words, we must know generally where we are, what is the nature of the task before us, before we enter our thesis proper.

#### SUB-HEADINGS

1) The Problem It is not unnatural that, in order to accomplish the above, we should ask by what path Nietzsche approached his topic. Given, however, that we have already determined our problem, ie., the relation between the aesthetic doctrine of The Birth of Tragedy and the Wagnerian art-work, a certain amount of distortion is implied. There are certainly other ways of approaching The Birth of Tragedy. Wagner's art, though of primary importance for Nietzsche in approaching his problem, is not the only door by which he enters it. And yet, our choice of an approach is not, because of that, arbitrary. In this section we hope to show how closely the central purpose of The Birth of Tragedy is tied to Wagner.

2) Nietzsche and Wagner This section will examine the relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner in greater detail

and will examine the influence of Wagner over The Birth of Tragedy, particularly the influence of Wagner's musical dissonance.

3) The Wagnerian Art-work This section shall briefly outline the chief characteristics of Wagner's art in order to show how Wagner's art created a need for a new metaphysics of art and how this need found its way into The Birth of Tragedy.

4) Art, Science and Ethics Thus far we have dealt only with the specific problem of art. We must now, however, place art within the whole. How is art, according to Nietzsche, related to the other areas of human existence, such as morality and science?

5) A Modern Day Orpheus The problem of art and religion, the problem posed by the above triangular relationship, is drawn out by means of an analogy. The analogy is more, I hope, than a poetic affectation. It is meant to set an attitude of critical reflection. In the body of the thesis we must confine ourselves merely to understanding what Nietzsche is saying.

## CHAPTER TWO -- THE APOLLINIAN AND THE DIONYSIAN: THE AESTHETIC DOCTRINE OF THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY.

This chapter is meant to explicate as clearly as possible the system of the Apollinian and the Dionysian as it is presented to us in The Birth of Tragedy in Nietzsche's analysis of Greek tragedy and to compare this system to the art-theories of Wagner on the synthesis of the arts and the primacy of music.

1) Pessimism and Tragedy Musical dissonance was what provided Nietzsche with the insight into aesthetics that enabled him to formulate a new aesthetics. Parallel to this is the relation between pessimism and tragedy. It is necessary to separate Nietzsche's so-called pessimism from that of Schopenhauer in order to rectify any misunderstandings that may be encouraged by Nietzsche's use of the language of Schopenhauer.

2) The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music Given this "pessimistic" world-view, we must explicate the development of tragedy from Homer to Aeschylus, as Nietzsche portrays it, and explain the relationship between the Apollinian and Dionysian art-tendencies, with particular emphasis upon the consequences this system has for ethics.

3) Prometheus Unbound Adopting Nietzsche's analogy, we shall explain the relation between the Apollinian and the Dionysian through the myth of Prometheus. Of special importance in this section is the role of justice and sacrilege in tragedy.

4) The Lyricist as Artist This analogy is then translated into a concrete example -- that of the lyricist -- in order to prepare the way for dealing with Wagner.

5) Wagner and Gesamtkunstwerk With the foregoing explication of the aesthetic doctrine of The Birth of Tragedy we are now ready to compare Wagner's art-theories to it.

### CHAPTER THREE-- THE SPIRIT OF MUSIC AND THE MUSIC-PRACTISING SOCRATES.

The split between chapter one and two is not, as

might be expected, between section 1-15 of the book and 15-25. This would have provided, of course, an easy division between Nietzsche's discussion of Greek tragedy and Nietzsche's discussion of the re-birth of tragedy which he believed he saw in the Wagnerian art-work. We found, however, that Nietzsche's discussion of the death of tragedy in ancient Greece and his discussion of the re-birth of tragedy in the modern world formed, in fact, one topic and that it ought to be dealt with together -- separately from his discussion of the rise of tragedy.

1) The Death of Tragedy      The nature of the death of tragedy, which Nietzsche describes as a suicide, is briefly explained.

2 & 3) Euripides and Socrates      These sections deal with the responsibility of these men in the death of tragedy and isolates the factors which, according to Nietzsche, made them hostile to tragedy. This brings us to Nietzsche's great critique of Socratic rationalism.

4) The Music-Practising Socrates      Nietzsche uses both Socrates and Euripides to prove that science will lead to a re-birth of art in the true metaphysical sense of the word.

5) Modern Alexandrian Culture.      We now come to Nietzsche's most significant leap. He now applies the insights of his critique of Greek aesthetic problems to the modern world and makes an attack upon historicism, theoreticism, morality and optimism.-- the four faults of modern culture.

6) Opera and Optimism      The four faults of modern

culture can be seen to be embodied in Nietzsche's critique of Opera. And this clearly enables us, at last, to bring together the subject of Greek tragedy with Romantic art, and with Wagner specifically.

7) Beethoven the Clairvoyant and Endless Melody The primary source for this section is Wagner's essay, Beethoven, in which Wagner traces the development of his own art. The essay was written during the period of Wagner's friendship with Nietzsche and shortly before the publication of The Birth of Tragedy and so the parallel between Nietzsche's theories and Wagner's are at their nearest juxtaposition.

8) Wagner and Greek Tragedy. This section should make clear that our real topic is Wagner, and that Greek tragedy only concerns us incidentally.

#### CHAPTER FOUR TRISTAN AND THE EXTINCTION OF THE INTELLECT

This brings us finally to Tristan. Drawing upon all of the earlier chapters we can now apply them to an analysis of Tristan and what Tristan meant to Nietzsche. Tristan, therefore, becomes a model by which to understand what Nietzsche is saying. And this, in turn, leads to our final conclusions on what Nietzsche is saying on art and religion, and through them, what he is saying about the nature of reality.

1) Tristan and Isolde as Religious Drama Many critics have said that Tristan is not a tragedy because it is a religious drama. This section will attempt to suggest how Tristan can be both. Otherwise, talking about Tristan as tragedy would disqualify us from dealing with it as a religious topic.

2) The Themes of Tristan: Love and the Universal Will --

It is necessary, before we attempt to understand what Nietzsche is saying about Tristan, to attempt some understanding of it, and its themes, on our own. This is because the actual references to Tristan in The Birth of Tragedy are rather scanty. Nietzsche is writing, as he confesses in his Self-Criticism, to those who have already been initiated. He assumes we are already thoroughly familiar with Tristan. Therefore we must initiate ourselves.

3) Tristan and the Re-Birth of Tragedy in the Modern World

The place of Tristan in the modern world, its almost eschatological significance, is here explained; what was Nietzsche's interpretation of the predicament of philosophy in the modern world in the light of the so-called pessimism of Kant and Schopenhauer and what was the destiny of the Wagnerian art-work in filling the vacuum left by the death of philosophy.

4) Nietzsche's Interpretation of Tristan Nietzsche's analysis of the operation of the Apollinian and the Dionysian art-tendencies in Tristan.

5) Art, Religion and Reality. Here we must, in conclusion, offer some interpretation of what Nietzsche's aesthetic doctrine means for us religiously. The best way of approaching this is, I think, by asking the question, what is Nietzsche saying about reality? This, however, is an extremely complex question, and only very tentative answers, more in the form of questions and directions, can be made.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### A METAPHYSICS OF ART

A spectacle superb, but still, alas, a spectacle!  
Where seize I thee, Oh nature infinite?

Faust.

Cited by Wagner in Beethoven, p70

#### THE PROBLEM

In his Self-Criticism Nietzsche confesses that The Birth of Tragedy was written in the language of Kant and Schopenhauer and he regrets that "in those days I still lacked the courage (or immodesty?) to permit myself in every way an individual language of my own for such individual views and hazards -- and that instead I tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant's and Schopenhauer's spirit and taste!"<sup>1.</sup> Indeed, Nietzsche's view of Kant as a pessimist is certainly a questionable one; his interpretation of tragedy is so far from that of Schopenhauer that the use of Schopenhauer's language leads to confusion and misunderstanding. In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche is reaching out towards new "valuations" which, as he later came to realize, were completely antagonistic

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1. B.T. Attempt at Self-Criticism, § 6

to those of Kant and Schopenhauer.

The Birth of Tragedy appears to be tied only to the language of Kant and Schopenhauer, while in spirit it struggles to go beyond them, beyond their ethics particularly. Nevertheless, Kant and Schopenhauer are its starting point. Like a young man who is beginning to reach maturity but has not yet left home, one is not sure of where Nietzsche is going; one is only aware of a feeling that his spirit is yearning for new horizons. The radical division between noumena and phenomena made in The Birth of Tragedy, the pessimism of its world view and attitude to existence, the characterization of reality ("thing-in-itself") as veiled by maya, and the denial of the intellectual apprehension of reality -- all this points to some debt to Kant and Schopenhauer.<sup>2</sup> Yet all of this is merely his starting point. In the end we feel that we have come a long way from them, and that if we are still there in body, so to speak, we are no longer there in spirit.

Yet we might also say that the figure of Schopenhauer is similarly over-shadowed by another, one for whose sake Nietzsche in fact takes issue with Schopenhauer on a crucial point. This man is Richard Wagner, to whom The Birth of Tragedy is dedicated, and who was as enthusiastic a reader

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2. Nietzsche's understanding of Kant seems to be almost entirely through Schopenhauer and Schopenhauer's interpretation of Kant. Kant is mentioned only twice in The Birth of Tragedy, both times in connection to Schopenhauer -- "Kant and Schopenhauer". Thus, while Schopenhauer's influence is evident throughout, even as a quasi-antagonist, Kant is always shaded by a distinct Schopenhauerian hue.

of Schopenhauer as Nietzsche was. Wagner had adopted Schopenhauer's philosophy wholesale, with very little or no conscious modification, and applied it in his writings to his own world-view and art theories. Although Nietzsche knew of Schopenhauer and was captivated by him before he knew Wagner, and although Nietzsche was independent enough to have his own understanding of Schopenhauer, much of what he says in The Birth of Tragedy about Schopenhauer can be taken, indirectly if not always directly, as part of his commentary on the Wagnerian art-work.

Nietzsche had discovered Schopenhauer quite independently of Wagner and quite by accident, picking up a dusty copy of The World as Will and Representation at a second hand bookstore. He devoured the book enthusiastically, finding in Schopenhauer an "educator" and an example; a man who was bold and independent enough to strike out his own lonely path. The two men, Nietzsche and Wagner, therefore found upon becoming friends that they shared a mutual passion for the philosophy of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer was their common ground. In Schopenhauer both men saw new possibilities opened up for aesthetic theory. And Wagner, as an artist himself of considerable power and charisma, served to ferment the ideas opened up to Nietzsche by Schopenhauer.

For Nietzsche The Birth of Tragedy put an end to traditional aesthetics. Here aesthetics grows to monstrous proportions and crosses the boundaries of art into religion.

This is revealed in the sentence, repeated twice in The Birth of Tragedy -- "It is only as an aesthetic (asthetisches) phenomenon that existence (Dasein) and the world are eternally justified (gerechtfertigt)". This sentence, which speaks from the heart of The Birth of Tragedy and which stands as the essential purpose and motivation of the book, seems to be an intentional turning about of the Lutheran doctrine of sole fide. Here art appropriates to itself what is essentially a religious function, providing, that is, we understand experience as the essential religious problem for man. It is primarily the task of The Birth of Tragedy to offer a psychology of experience, that is, of the acts of perception and apperception, in which art is seen as the field of human activity where this is done, where experiences are ordered and intensified, and subsequently, where redemption is to be gained.

It is appropriate that much of the motivation and origin of the ideas expressed in The Birth of Tragedy is to be found in the person of Wagner, who was not a philosopher or thinker, but an artist -- a man who seemed the living embodiment of the artistic and creative spirit described in The Birth of Tragedy. Wagner felt intuitively that art was redemptive, but he did not have the ability to express, or for that matter to think in his own mind, what such an idea meant. Largely he latched onto the philosophy, or at least the verbiage, of Schopenhauer in order to back up his claims -- particularly his personal claim to have accomplished the

redemptive in art. In this light his operas ought to have spoken for themselves. But they did not and therefore Wagner had to wrestle clumsily with a theory of art that could justify his claims. Naturally, when Nietzsche, with his impressive command of philosophy and classical philology, and his unsurpassed talent at writing, undertook to take up the pen in Wagner's cause, the result could not have been other than a "questionable book", "an impossible book", but nevertheless a book that "satisfied 'the best minds of the times'."

Nietzsche owed a great deal to Wagner for the insight that enabled him to construct the system of The Birth of Tragedy. Quite simply -- The Birth of Tragedy, even that part on Greek drama, could not have been conceived without Wagner. Nietzsche's primary purpose in writing The Birth of Tragedy may have simply been to justify Wagner's claim to re-embody the principles of Greek drama, a claim which Wagner took very seriously and in which, clearly, Nietzsche believed. For this purpose great insight into The Birth of Tragedy is to be gained by showing the extent to which Nietzsche's theories paralleled Wagner's and formed a sort of running commentary on the Wagnerian art-work, especially on Tristan, the work most revered by Nietzsche, most in his mind during the writing of The Birth of Tragedy, and most heavily steeped in Schopenhauer and philosophy. But at this point we may do well to look more closely at Wagner's relation to Nietzsche, his influence on The Birth

of Tragedy, his art-theories and the special place of Tristan and Isolde.

#### NIETZSCHE AND WAGNER

Nietzsche had revered Wagner, as his sister tells us, and as he himself tells us in Ecce Homo, ever since he made the acquaintance of Von Bülow's piano score of Tristan and Isolde and struggled with the difficulties of playing it. His opportunity to meet the inaccessible Master came when Wagner happened to visit Leipzig, where Nietzsche was staying. When Nietzsche returned home on November 9, 1868, he found a note stuck on his door which read -- "If you wish to meet Richard Wagner, come to the Theatre Café at a quarter to four", signed by a friend.<sup>3</sup> The meeting of the two men was finally arranged and by the spring of 1869 Nietzsche was visiting Wagner's retreat at Tribschen as regularly as his busy schedule permitted. The meeting of the two men was one of the great "cultural events" of the nineteenth century; as it is so often with such great men it was more of a cultural event than it was a friendship such as the mundane world conceives of friendship. Indeed, it hardly seems proper that, in this thesis, which ought to confine itself to this "cultural event" and nothing else (more exactly with the religious aspects of the event), to waste even these few words on the relationship of Nietzsche and Wagner.

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3. Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondance, edited by Elizabeth Foerster-Nietzsche. Boni & Liveright Inc. New York 1921. p5.

But necessity here seems to force itself upon us importunately.

Of these two great geniuses, to which do we attribute the thought and to which the spirit of The Birth of Tragedy? So often do we hear the voice of Wagner speaking in the work before us that we are inclined to believe Nietzsche totally under his spell and attribute Nietzsche's later break with Wagner to the natural urge of his own genius freeing itself from Wagner's hypnotic influence and staking out its own territory. But likewise we could expose the manifest influence of Nietzsche on Wagner's post-1870 writing. The purpose of this thesis is not, however, to study the influence of Wagner on The Birth of Tragedy, or vice versa. Rather, Wagner serves as a model for Nietzsche's theory, and at times as a foil. Ultimately Nietzsche himself is but an actor, one of the many Hamlets acting out an eternal drama. There is no drama without actors, nor, for that matter, actors without a drama. As long, therefore, as we are limited to approaching the drama through the actors we shall be called by necessity to deal with the question of influence and of relationships, that is, biographical and historical questions, even though in themselves these questions are of no value and can only be considered a waste of time.

Wagner's influence on the conception and particularly on the final form of The Birth of Tragedy was great. In his Preface to Richard Wagner Nietzsche says that as he



hatched his ideas on the birth of tragedy he "was communicating with you as if you were present, and hence could write down only what was in keeping with that presence". Wagner hovered over the genesis of The Birth of Tragedy like an anxious father, as well he might who rightly saw the work as the greatest and most profound monument ever erected to his cause. So much did he find the book to advocate Wagnerism that he declared Nietzsche to be "the only person who knows what I am driving at," adding in the same breath that "I foresee a time when I shall be obliged to defend your book against you, yourself."<sup>4.</sup> Undoubtedly he sensed that the spell he had cast over Nietzsche, as he had cast over so many other people, simply would not endure the test of so independent a spirit. Wagner greatly treasured the friendship of Nietzsche and every indication of a slackening of their relationship, or of Nietzsche's devotion and loyalty, caused him distress and fits of jealousy and sulkiness. This was the greatest and most valuable of his converts. His prestigious position as a professor of Philology at Basle, and this final monument of erudition and Wagnerism, The Birth of Tragedy, must have fairly turned the Master's head. How flattering it must have been for Wagner, till then scorned and shut out of the world of erudition, now to see himself reflected (and need we add, not at all accurately, but certainly flatteringly!) in so fine a mirror as Nietzsche's genius. He declares, with indebtedness, that "I must have

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4. Ibid, pl79

it [The Birth of Tragedy] in order to get in the proper mood for working after breakfast, as I am again hard at work on the last act [presumably of The Rhinegold] since reading your book."<sup>5.</sup>

Nietzsche himself felt certain qualms about becoming so absorbed into the cause of another. He had sufficient appreciation of his own genius to hear the inner reproach of self-betrayal. He intimated to his sister that certain of his own ideas had been suppressed out of deference to Wagner and wrote to his friend Röhde that "No one can form the faintest conception of the genesis of such a work, of the trouble and torment it is to keep one's self from being corrupted by other ideas [Nietzsche's italics] pressing in from all sides: of the courage required in conceiving and carrying out one's own ideas, and above all in this particular case, of the tremendous obligations I felt towards Wagner and which to be perfectly frank with you, caused me much inward contrition."<sup>6.</sup> But, as Elizabeth Nietzsche says, "consideration for his friend won the day". In 1871 Nietzsche set to work re-writing what was to have borne the title of Greek Cheerfulness, welding it into a work of Wagnerian propaganda and adding, unknown to Wagner himself, the last sections, which were to raise such an outrage among his more "hard-headed" colleagues.

The thoughts opened up to the world in The Birth of

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5. Ibid, p99

6. Ibid, pp85-86

Tragedy sent "mild shivers" up the spines of Nietzsche's fellow philologists, who were as much enraged as Wagner was delighted that a philologist should address himself not to his fellow philologists, but to a musician -- and one of a somewhat scandalous reputation at that. "Perhaps such readers will find it offensive," Nietzsche wrote in his Preface to Richard Wagner, "that an aesthetic problem should be taken so seriously -- assuming they are unable to consider art more than a pleasant side-line, a readily dispensable tinkling of bells that accompanies the 'seriousness of life'". Nietzsche persisted despite the scorn and opposition, convinced in his heart that he was one to whom "profound honours and experiences" had been vouchsafed and that he was one of the fighters for a new cultural movement. Nietzsche felt an enormous debt to Wagner because Wagner had opened to him a world which no philologist could have entered alone. For a long time Nietzsche had been searching for a philological topic in music, for which he had always had a special love. He found this topic opened up to him in Wagner's thought and work, "especially Tristan. And for crossing the artificial boundaries erected by the academic world of his time, Nietzsche incited the vague sense in his colleagues of having been betrayed. Nietzsche was to pay a price for his insight. Wagner felt certain jabs of conscience and felt that he was somehow responsible for Nietzsche's fall from favour in the academic world. He writes -- "I have not been able to find anything in my

'letters' to indictate that I have blazed a path for you (as you say) but, on the contrary, it seems to me as if I had done nothing but hang an additional burden about your neck."<sup>7.</sup>

Yet, for all of Wagner's humble protests, Wagner himself could not have been unaware that The Birth of Tragedy would have been inconceivable were it not for the very special insight of his music. Nietzsche, whose conservative dis-<sup>8.</sup>position inclined him by nature to traditional music, was only "weaned" from it with difficulty -- it took all of Wagner's magnetic personality to do so, and still Nietzsche displayed a somewhat "heretical" inclination towards Brahms. In fact, one near break between Nietzsche and Wagner occurred as early as 1874 when Nietzsche indiscreetly brought a copy of Brahms' Song of Triumph to Bayreuth and left it on Wagner's piano. Wagner reacted "like a bull to a red cloth" and flew into a rage, while Nietzsche, without a word, stared "with a look of astonished dignity."<sup>9.</sup> What Nietzsche hoped to discover by such a rash action we can only guess.

Tentative as was Nietzsche's devotion to Wagner's chromaticism and dissonance, it opened to him the secret key to Greek tragedy. It was the recognition of the Dionysian origin of tragedy, that is, of its origin out of the spirit of music, that enabled Nietzsche to discover the essence of

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7. Ibid. pl35.

8. See Love, Friedrich-- The Young Nietzsche and the Wagnerian Experience, New York, AMS Press, 1966

9. Gutman, Robert, Richard Wagner, The Man, His Mind, and His Music, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. New York, 1968. P354.

tragedy free from the conventional aesthetics, which expected tragedy to answer the criterion of the plastic arts, that is, of beauty. The trumpet sound of The Birth of Tragedy announced to the world, as Nietzsche wrote to Wagner, that "practically nothing remains of traditional theories of  
<sup>10.</sup>  
 'Aesthetics'."

#### THE WAGNERIAN ART-WORK

The "new aesthetics we have already described as crossing the boundries of art into religion. Now we have stated that Nietzsche's radical aesthetic doctrine owed very much to the insight of Wagner's music, especially of Tristan. It may therefore be beneficial at this point to examine the connection between art and religion and especially between music and religion in Wagner's art-work and theory. As important as this connection is, as much as one cannot be understood without the other, it is hoped that the following will demonstrate how it is possible to examine the question solely from the light of religion while leaving out purely musical questions.

Wagner himself declared that his critics did not so much question his abilities as they did his tendencies. Wagner, indeed, was the manifestation of some of the most extreme tendencies of his times, somewhat broadly and loosely

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10. Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondance, op. cit. pl48.

termed "romantic". It was never in Wagner's nature to be satisfied with a "mere" work of art. For Wagner expression was not an end in itself -- even though Wagner was a master of expressionistic technique. Always Wagner seemed to be striving to coax something out of art which had never been coaxed out of it before and he had an enormous sense of his own genius and destiny -- a feeling that he stood in the right place and at the right moment of evolutionary time to fulfill this sacred task.<sup>11.</sup>

Such a belief, however, could hardly have been considered self-evident. And so Wagner found it necessary to indulge in theoretical and speculative writing in which he drew upon political, philosophic, racist and religious formulations which were far from clear and which only necessitated more polemic and propaganda on his part. In these writings art is assigned tasks not conventionally considered to be within the realm of aesthetics, but which increased the power not only of the art-work, but also of the artist. For example, early in his career Wagner made the identification of art, and especially theatrical art, with the volk, and sought to involve art in revolution. These notions are expressed in his early writing Art and Revolution and were embodied in the early drafts of The Ring where the gods were meant as parodies of the old ruling class. Wagner's

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11. Nietzsche even uses the word KAIROS to describe Wagner's timeliness and a similar feeling of KAIROS prevades the Birth of Tragedy. But there is also a hint that Wagner is simply opportunistic. In Wagner at Bayreuth Nietzsche says that "there is a very intimate relation between greatness and the instinct which discerns the proper moment at which to act" -- praise which forebodes Nietzsche's disenchantment.

active participation in the revolution of 1848 in Dresden caused him to be forced into exile. In exile he became disillusioned and in a fit of pessimism he sought to harness art in a quest for the eternal longing, man's deepest need and being -- redemption through love and death (in short, the metaphysical system of Tristan). The idea of the volk did not disappear, but became mystical. In the private experience of Tristan the waves of the universal will, as in the music of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, as Wagner interpreted it, break down the barriers of the individual and so consecrate man to a higher community. In his later years, under the influence of unheard of artistic success and the careful direction of Cosima, this private experience was institutionalized. Art now became the helper, the guiding spirit, indeed, the saviour of institutional religions that had grown artificial.<sup>12.</sup> Wagner's last work, which he himself saw as topping and completing his career, Parsifal, was designated by him as a "Consecrational Festival Play" and performed the religious rites previously performed only by priests in churches. Wagner's inscription on the copy of Parsifal sent to Nietzsche contains a rare example in which Wagner appears to ridicule himself. He writes -- "for his dear friend, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Church Councillor."<sup>13.</sup> But Wagner's jest does not disguise his high seriousness. To such an extent has Wagner confused

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12. Wagner, Religion and Art. p213. Cf. Zukunftsmusik, p307ff

13. Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, H.5.

religion and art that he could even forget at times that he was an atheist!

It was out of these unusual, vague and unstable notions which approach the comic and burlesque<sup>14.</sup> that the "ideology" of Wagnerism emerged, an ideology nursed and promoted by Wagner himself. "Paradoxically," writes one critic, "although Wagnerism had begun with an idea about art, one did not need to be a musician to be a Wagnerian. The ideology could flourish divested of any essential artistic import."<sup>15.</sup>

In spite of the overwhelming role of conscious theorizing, however, Wagner still regarded himself as an artist who worked unconsciously and instinctively, in whom the world, in its "evolutionary march from unconsciousness to consciousness", "displays itself and comes to consciousness".<sup>16.</sup> He speaks of his prose writing, therefore, with repugnance, regarding criticism as unmanly and any form of literary poetry leaning on the didactic in which the "conscious tendence takes the place of the directly witnessed scene from life". (i.e. Plato)<sup>17.</sup> as inartistic. It was, he says, his perception that he was, as an artist, frustrated in his goals, falling short of the ideal, meeting

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14. Nietzsche attempted to come to terms with this side of Wagner's personality in Wagner at Bayreuth (sec. 3, pl15) Concerning Wagner's life as a nocturnal traveller, his unrest, his changing of associates and dwelling place, which seems analogous to his changing mind, Nietzsche writes that his life consisted mainly of comedy and burlesque, "this undignified element in it .. he who more than anyone else, perhaps, breathed freely only in sublime and more than sublime spheres."

15. Kerman, Wagner: Thoughts in Season, Hudson Review, XIII, 1960, p330

16. Wagner, Zukunftsmusik, op. cit. p296.

17. Wagner, Destiny of Opera, pl38.



with hostility and ridicule, that led him to interrupt his unconscious artistic production and to indulge in theoretical writings<sup>18</sup>, which, he says, went against his nature and into which he was forced, not by the "needful coolness" of the theoretical man, but by a passionate impatience.<sup>19</sup> His major theoretical writing, Opera and Drama, was written during the years of his exile, during which time his artistic production sank to nil.

Tristan and Isolde is one of the works of Wagner which flowed out of an entirely uncritical state of mind,<sup>20</sup> a deep need arising out of a frustration in love<sup>21</sup> and a pessimism in life altogether, in which Wagner nevertheless experienced the great delight of spontaneous creation. Yet, when his critical mind returned Wagner found that he had created a work of art that had grown beyond his theories and he felt that he had to justify it, and especially that he had to justify the unprecedented dominance of music, a dominance that ran counter to his earlier theories. All his previous theories must have seemed inadequate now, all his previous art-works must have shrunk in comparison and the still incomplete Ring must have cried for revisions. And so Tristan seems to be responsible for perpetrating a body of new art theories quite different from the previous ones, art-theories which drew from wide sources and which were to find their greatest expression in The Birth of Tragedy.

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18. Wagner, Zukunftsmusik, p297.

19. Ibid, p321.

20. Ibid, p327-331.

## ART, SCIENCE AND ETHICS.

In the aesthetics of The Birth of Tragedy two things appear in the role of antagonists, i.e., two things are seen to be antagonistic and detrimental to art. These two things are science and ethics. This is not to say that a crude and simple line is drawn between art and science, or between art and ethics. In fact the three are so interrelated by Nietzsche to each other that none really stands apart from any other in a totally independent way. They are bound to each other by a sort of necessity, like three points on a triangle. This necessity is in contrast to the often arbitrary relations drawn between art and ethics, and between art and science by Wagner.<sup>22</sup> Yet, although Nietzsche preserves the interrelation between art, science and ethics in a much more meaningful way, he also increases the tension between them and so makes their relationship much more dynamic. In emphasizing this tension Nietzsche is, perhaps, bringing to the fore the central aesthetic problem of his time.

Ethics With his usual irony and sarcasm Nietzsche points out that Apollo, the deity of illusion and dreams, as his name (shining one) indicates, is also the ethical deity. In this way Nietzsche places morals in the same category as

21. Letter to Liszt, Dec. 16, 1854. Wagner on Music and Drama, eds. A. Goldman & E. Sprinchorn, E.P. Dutton & Co, New York, 1964.

22. This arbitrariness is particularly notable in Wagner's later writings. His art is often criticized for this-- Hanslick considered the plot of Tristan, with its magic potions, as too arbitrary. Nietzsche says in The Gay Science that Wagner "finds sounds for those secret and uncanny midnights of the soul in which cause and effect appear to be unhinged and any moment something can come into being 'out of nothing'."

art, as an aesthetic phenomenon and as an illusion. The primary illusion for which Apollo is responsible is the principle of individuation. It is from this illusion that the need arises to ~~delimit the~~ boundaries of the individual, to "measure in the Hellenic sense". And thus Apollo becomes the ethical deity. "Apollo, as ethical deity, extracts measure of his disciples."<sup>23.</sup> This is to say, he requires moral restraint and the delimiting of the boundaries between one individual and the other. This measure, this order, is, however, a mere illusion. It is destroyed by the tide of the Dionysian, which wells up from the depths of Being and which represents a chaotic, formless, undelimited reality lying underneath the surface of appearances and which always threatens to explode the appearances, as a volcano explodes the surface of the earth. This Dionysian impulse is not, however, an enemy of the Apollinian aesthetic phenomenon. Rather it is its necessary counterpart. Taken by itself the aesthetic phenomenon of morals and ethics is incomplete. Taken by itself, although it is an aesthetic phenomenon, it is hostile to true art because it refuses its counterpart -- it refuses artistic balance. Like a rebellious son it denies its parentage while at the same time it prematurely claims its inheritance, seeking inroads into art by such devices as poetic justice and the deus ex machina. It becomes a phenomena by itself as distinct from and in conflict with

the aesthetic phenomenon.

In his Self-Criticism Nietzsche reflects upon the unique value of The Birth of Tragedy in the conflict between ethics and aesthetics. "What," he asks, "seen in the perspective of life, is the significance of morality?"<sup>24.</sup> Nothing, according to Nietzsche. "Already," he says, "in the preface addressed to Richard Wagner, art and not morality, is presented as the truly metaphysical activity of man."<sup>25.</sup> In The Birth of Tragedy he believed he had gone beyond previous attempts to justify art against the objections of ethical philosophers, including those of Schopenhauer, which Nietzsche saw as compromising art with ethics. "Here," he says, "perhaps for the first time, a pessimism 'beyond good and evil' is suggested. Here that 'perversity of mind' gains speech and formulation against which Schopenhauer never wearied of hurling his most irate curses and thunderbolts; a philosophy that dares to move, to demote, morality into the realm of appearance -- and not merely among 'appearances' or phenomenon (in the sense assigned these words by Idealistic philosophers) but among 'deception', as semblance, delusion, error, interpretation, contrivance, art."<sup>26.</sup> Ethics, for Nietzsche, are merely a neurosis of art; a sort of schizophrenia whereby one face of art establishes a separate identity and begins to harass art as a whole.

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| 24. | B.T.         | <u>Attempt at Self-Criticism,</u> | 85 |
| 25. | <u>Ibid.</u> |                                   | 86 |
| 26. | <u>Ibid.</u> |                                   | 85 |

Science. This ethical aspect of the Apollinian gives birth to yet another enemy of art-- science. Along with the ethical demands of moral restraint and delimiting occurs the demand -- "know thyself".<sup>27.</sup> Self-knowledge is necessary before moral demands can be made of men. Therefore, along with the invasion of ethics into art comes the invasion of science. Only what is known can be aesthetically beautiful, according to science. And soon this science shows itself to be cold and mechanical. Knowing is chained to the demands of dialectical language. It is purely intellectual. "The Apollinian tendency," Nietzsche says, "has withdrawn into the cocoon of logical schematism."<sup>28.</sup>

Nietzsche's concern here is shared by many other romantic artists. The Romantic Movement, of which The Birth of Tragedy is an expression, is often described as a reaction to the rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment. "Science" is used in The Birth of Tragedy in the broad sense of "rationalism"; Socrates is understood as the chief representative of such a science -- the prototype of the theoretical man. Nietzsche portrays Socrates as a "despotic logician"<sup>29.</sup> who believed that only what was knowable by logic had any value. He follows Schopenhauer, a philosopher with great appeal to the Romantic Movement, in insisting that theoretical investigation has

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27. B.T. § 4 p46.

28. B.T. § 14 p91.

29. B.T. § 14 p92.

its limitations and that what is beyond these limits has value also -- perhaps the only value.

Contrasting the artist and the theoretical man, Nietzsche says that "whenever the truth is uncovered, the artist will always cling with rapt gaze to what still remains covering even after such uncovering; but the theoretical man enjoys and finds satisfaction in the discarded covering and finds the highest object of his pleasure in the process of an ever happy uncovering that succeeds through his own efforts."<sup>30.</sup> Nietzsche cites the example of Lessing, "the most honest theoretical man" who "dared to announce that he cared more for the search after truth than for truth itself--" and thus revealed the fundamental secret of science, to the astonishment, and indeed the anger, of the scientific community."<sup>31.</sup> Put in other words, the theoretical man seeks "to fathom the depths and to separate true knowledge from appearance and error",<sup>32.</sup> while the artist rejoices in this appearance, in this creation and destruction.

While emphasizing the tension between science and art Nietzsche also establishes between them a blood relationship, not just through ethics, as we have seen, but directly. He says that science must inevitably end by becoming art. Science, in fact, although it destroyed

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30. B.T. § 15 p94. What is curious here is that Nietzsche ignores what would seem most obvious, i.e. that our attention ought to be directed to what is uncovered and revealed, the truth. Nietzsche is undoubtedly fully aware of the way in which he is turning around the scientific presumption that science is concerned with "truth".

the old art, particularly the old tragedy, also leads to its re-birth in a revitalized and new form. In this way Nietzsche is offering us an aesthetic interpretation of what the limitations and end of science mean to us existentially. The aesthetic philosophy that Nietzsche developed in his later, more mature books, such as The Gay Science, his entire moral (or anti-moral) philosophy, although outgrowing and revising much of The Birth of Tragedy, is nevertheless based on its fundamental insight, which is merely refined and developed by the older Nietzsche.

Of course, one could raise the objection that setting up such a tension between art and science poses certain dangers. Science, we may say, goes one way towards a soul-less mechanical system, and art veers sharply towards romanticism and sensationalism. The two phenomena can scarcely be understood separately. The movement of the one may seem erratic and aimless unless one keeps in mind the movements of the other. A fearful symmetry can be seen to be working-- the more one veers in one direction, the more the other veers in the other direction in order to keep the precarious teeter-totter from tipping. The illusion of balance between the two encourages our recklessness. And this seems to be the extent of Nietzsche's much hoped for re-birth of art out of the phoenix-like scientific spirit-- a last "jubilant dance" of the artist before he drops completely over the horizon.

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31. B.T. § 15 p95.

32. B.T. § 15 p97.

## A MODERN DAY ORPHEUS

In Wagner at Bayreuth Nietzsche claims that Wagner's big discovery was that art and life were one. In this light his efforts to make art redemptive compare to those of a mythical artist of antiquity-- Orpheus. In The Gay Science Nietzsche calls Wagner "the Orpheus of all secret misery" who "has incorporated in art some things that had previously seemed inexpressible and even unworthy of art".<sup>33.</sup> Orpheus, the mythical poet-singer of ancient Greece, has seemed to many to represent the power of art over life, its powers of redemption. This life-giving power of music Nietzsche affirms in The Gay Science, saying -- "Oh, if you are still stones and animals, then better look for your Orpheus."<sup>34.</sup>

Orpheus enchanted the wild animals of Thrace, and even the forces of nature seemed moved by the power of his lyre. His music seemed to mirror the world itself and reflect, even control, its changing forms. He thus found himself in the possession of great power. Not, however, until fate plucked Euridice from him on the eve of his wedding did Orpheus, consumed in grief, raging against the gods, truly realize that his art must now move into action. This crisis of his life becomes, therefore, the crisis of his art. He decides to venture into the underworld to bring back to life what death had taken from him, using, like Dante and Vergil,

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33. Nietzsche, The Gay Science, § 87, p143.

34. Ibid. § 286, p230.



for example, the power of his poetic license; but using this power, unlike Dante and Vergil, in order to rob Hell. In Hell itself Orpheus expresses in the strongest possible terms the force of human longing against the ruthless indifference of nature. He lulls Cherebus to sleep, moves Charon to pity and, singing a hymn to life to the Furies, soon has the Infernal Chorus itself singing --

No undertaking of man is tried in vain,  
Nor can nature arm against him further ....  
35.

Orpheus's success, however, depends not on his ability to merely move Hell by his grief, but also on his power to regulate his own emotions and passions by the medium of Apollinian control -- and being the son of Apollo himself he ought to be prepared to do this. Indeed, he may seem to achieve this, an almost otherworldliness, by means of his self-control and aesthetic sensibility. We can see him in the Elysian field when, as in a dream, Eurydice is returned to him. But can we truly imagine the poet, whose passions brought him willingly to the very depths of Hell, dwelling in serene wonder now the object of all his longings and desires has been returned to him? As one critic wrote of Monteverdi's opera-- "as a man he cannot shape his emotions to Pluto's shrewd decree; face to face with the situation, he looks back, and fails. Life and art are not

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35. From *L'Orfeo*, an opera by Monteverdi. Cited in Joseph Kerman's *Opera as Drama*, Vintage Books, New York, 1956, p36.

necessarily one."<sup>36.</sup>

How are life and art to be held together? Artists seems to set a very bad example and constitute an argument against the possibility of such a union, rather than an argument for it. Art, as the Buddha said, seems to be the widest path leading away from salvation -- and we may add, from life itself. Speaking of artistic natures in general, Nietzsche says that whoever is completely and wholly an artist (Homer, Goethe) is forever separated from the "real", the actual -- we can see how he wearies of this eternal "unreality" and falsity of his inmost existence and wishes for once actually to be. And, he adds, for this typical velleity of the artist, Wagner was to pay dearly.<sup>37.</sup>

Wherever idolatry is "triumphed over," art has found its way into the religious life of man, in the face of recurring outbursts of iconoclasm, only through the back door. A persistent suspicion has haunted men that art is a spiritual danger, leading men into illusion and darkness, to become ensnared by appearances. Art has been tolerated only if it is tamed, that is, if it is put to educational use, into the service of ethics and morality. Nietzsche's system of Apollinian and Dionysian is an attempt to discover ways in which art may be shown to have a religious function completely outside of, though not, as we have seen, unrelated to, the realm of ethics and, what is tied to it, the realm of science. For this reason, of course,

36. Ibid. p28.

37. Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, III • 4 .

Socrates is one of the central antagonists of The Birth of Tragedy, along with Plato. Nietzsche must overcome the reservations about art which Socrates and Plato expound if he is to convincingly present art as being redemptive.

What Nietzsche takes to be the Platonic reservation about art, that it deals only with illusions and appearances and is therefore two steps removed from reality, is central to Nietzsche's system. Nietzsche's response to this is complex. He accepts it as a valid (but not all inclusive) criticism and applies it to his own criticism of Apollinian art-- and ironically traces Socratism's origins to that Apollinian. Nietzsche does not, in fact, endeavour to show that art can reveal reality, although his use of such Kantian terminology as "thing-in-itself", and such Schopenhauerian language as "universal will", when applied to the Dionysian art tendencies, would seem to suggest this. The Dionysian brings us face to face with the abyss. Thus it destroys the Apollinian illusions. It can only be described as revealing "reality" in a very negative sense. Nevertheless, owing to the fact that this negative revelation is spoken of by Nietzsche with such positive enthusiasm, we can speak in some sense as if Nietzsche had, while accepting Plato's reservations about art, at the same time reversed them. It is on the basis of his Dionysian insight that Nietzsche launches what is for him a very imperative attack upon the Socratic position.

"Let us imagine," he says, "the one great Cyclops

eye of Socrates fixed on tragedy, an eye in which the fair frenzy of artistic enthusiasm had never glowed. To this eye was denied the pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses."<sup>38.</sup> In Wagner this lack is overcome. In him the Dionysian spirit re-awakens. And Wagner, unlike Orpheus, is not fooled by appearances or shadows<sup>39.</sup> having experienced, perhaps, the abyss underneath them. Therefore, according to Nietzsche, Wagner's music did not stoop to "realism", that is, was not beguiled into "representationalism", into becoming the mirror of phenomenon, and thereby the image of an illusion.<sup>39.</sup> And, unlike Orpheus, both Tristan and Isolde are models of a resolute segregation of their love from their phenomenal selves, even if this segregation brought them face to face with the abyss. Neither of them, unlike Orpheus, looks back. Like Faust, Wagner rejoices in serene wonder at the power of his art, but is not satiated by it, knowing it to be illusion. He cries in despair-- "A spectacle superb! But still, alas! a spectacle. Where seize I thee, O Nature infinite?"<sup>40.</sup>

Wagner believed this cry answered in the most positive way by music, affixing his seal, as Nietzsche said, to Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music. It seemed clear that the universal, "nature infinite", could never be grasped

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38. B.T. § 14 p89.

39. Whether Nietzsche was right or wrong in this is a musicians' question. In any case, Nietzsche himself came to feel that he was wrong and came to see in Wagner's music a paltry replica of phenomena.

40. Wagner, Beethoven, p70.

so long as individuals remained locked in their individuality. And so it was clear that the art form must go beyond individuation. Music itself had to be freed. One might say that the lyre of Orpheus, with its emphasis on symmetry and proportion (Apollinian restraint) had to give way to the pipe of Dionysus, with its more free and unorganized movement. "The psalmodizing artist of Apollo, with his phantom harp-sound ... paled before an art that, in its intoxication, spoke the truth."<sup>41</sup> That is the creed of Die Meistersinger. Art must be freed from laws of form and plunge itself into a head-on, direct confrontation with nature, intuitively experienced.<sup>42</sup> By claiming, through music, a realm of art that spoke directly from the "universal will" and did not merely imitate phenomenon and in so doing prepare for itself the fate of Orpheus, Wagner thus had no use either for theories and critics, or for ethics. This, at least, is what Nietzsche believed. He marveled that the artist who had plumbed the depths of pessimism in Tristan still had the strength of spirit to recover and become healthy in Die Meistersinger. Perhaps Nietzsche failed to realize that for Wagner universal will carried a far too positive meaning to be truly Dionysian. It is these misunderstandings and complexities that often make The Birth of Tragedy impenetrable.

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41. B.T. § 4 p46.

42. Die Meistersinger is, as Nietzsche pointed out, optimistic, while Tristan is pessimistic. The role of the "Dionysian" is, therefore, quite different in the one than in the other. In the latter case it leads to death, in the former to victory.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE APOLLINIAN AND THE DIONYSIAN: THE AESTHETIC DOCTRINE OF THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY

Mephistopheles:

"Little one, let your light shine with sound."

Homunculus:

"Thus shall it flash and ring."

Faust, Part II Bayard Taylor  
trans.

"Do I hear the light?

The light goes out."

Tristan, Act III, Scene 2.

## PESSIMISM AND TRAGEDY

Entrance into the mystery rites of tragedy, Nietzsche impresses upon us, is gained only by those human beings who possess a certain mental attitude, a strength and vision that brings them face to face with the vanity and horror of existence. To them the wisdom of Silenus has spoken, the wisdom that "what is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is -- to die soon,"<sup>1</sup> This quotation, cited from Sophocles' Oedipus Colonus, is also

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1. B.T. § 3, p42.

cited by Schopenhauer<sup>2.</sup> as proof of his pessimistic world-view. We may assume that Nietzsche had Schopenhauer in mind when he made the quote, accept that while Schopenhauer endores the wisdom of Silenus, Nietzsche, as we shall see, reverses it.

In Schopenhauer's view man is condemned, through the principium individuationis, to be torn from the universal and flung into an ephemeral world of shadows, there to be ruthlessly driven by his insatiable will. Rarely in this situation is he able to perceive things beyond their appearance. The veil of maya, the mere phenomenon, obscures his vision. In this world the devil is master; Mephistopheles, the master of illusion and deception, the trickster and charmer, is always ready to lure us into the land of shades in all manner of illusive quests. Schopenhauer cites Luther's Commentary on Galatians to this effect-- "In our bodies and circumstances, however, we are all subject to the devil and are strangers in this world, of which he is prince and lord. Hence everything<sup>3.</sup> is under his rule, the bread we eat, the beverage we drink, the clothes we use, even the air and everything by which we live in the flesh." "The myth of the Fall of man," Schopenhauer says, "... is the only thing in the Old Testament to which I can concede a metaphysical, although only allegorical, truth; indeed it is this alone that reconciles me to the Old Testament."<sup>4.</sup>

2. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, Vol. II, Chapter 46, "On the Vanity and Suffering of Life". p587

3. Ibid. p580

4. Presumably because of its pessimism.

Thus our existence resembles nothing but the consequence of a false step and a guilty desire."<sup>5.</sup> The fall of man, as well as that of the devil, "consisted in the fact that the one, like the other, had ascribed to himself I and me, mine and to me."<sup>6.</sup> In other words, the principium individuationis was the cause of the fall of man and his separation from God. Living within the law of this principle each man becomes a wolf to the other and the world a Dante-esque Inferno where "one man must be the devil of another"; it is a "battle ground of tormented and agonized beings who continue to exist only by each devouring the other."<sup>7.</sup>

It is necessary to deal with this subject, not in order to say anything authoritative concerning the pessimism of Schopenhauer, but in order to penetrate the mood with which The Birth of Tragedy begins to reveal itself, which from the very outset characterizes existence as appearance by comparing it to a dream. Nietzsche says, with Schopenhauer in mind, that "philosophical men even have a presentiment that the reality in which we live and have our being is also mere appearance, and that another, quite different reality lies beneath it. Schopenhauer actually indicates as the criterion of philosophical ability the occasional ability to view men and things as mere phantoms or dream images. Thus the aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of dreams as the philosopher does to

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5. Ibid. p580.

6. Ibid. p613.

7. Ibid. p581.



the reality of existence; he is a close and willing observer, for these images afford him an interpretation of life, and by reflecting on these processes he trains himself for life."<sup>8.</sup>

In Schopenhauer's pessimism we see intimations of Nietzsche's Dionysian category. In Nietzsche's view this pessimistic world-view gives rise to the metaphysical need in man to realize the unity of the universal which is lost in the principium individuationis. But how is this to be done? Nietzsche goes along with much of Schopenhauer's pessimism, insofar as it opened to him, as he believed, the possibility of a truly metaphysical task for art. But he found Schopenhauer's Christian and ethical conclusions difficult. Nietzsche seems to have belatedly grasped the confusion that had arisen over his use of Schopenhauerian terminology and language to explain, for example, the meaning of the Dionysian, or of his concept of tragedy. In his Self-Criticism, Nietzsche presents us with Schopenhauer's conception of the tragic, quoting from The World as Will and Representation -- "That which bestows on everything tragic its peculiar elevating force is the discovery that the world, that life, can never give satisfaction and hence is not worthy of our affection: this constitutes the tragic spirit -- it leads to resignation." Nietzsche cries out -- "how differently Dionysus spoke to me! How far removed I was from all this resignationism!"<sup>9.</sup> It seems, therefore,

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8. B.T. § 1. p34.

9. B.T. Attempt at Self-Criticism, § 6 p24.

that Nietzsche's formula that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" is not only an intentional reversal of Luther's sole fide, but also an unconscious, or as yet unopen, opposition to Schopenhauer's doctrine of denial of the will-to-live, which, when applied to art is, as Schopenhauer would see it, to lead to resignation, to point out the vanity of existence in order to make us deny it, it is clear that it does not justify existence, but denies it and leads us away from life itself. Nietzsche opposed this use of art, but at the same time he made use of Schopenhauer's pessimism in order to reach his understanding of the Dionysian origin of tragedy, its origin out of the spirit of music.

#### THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY OUT OF THE SPIRIT OF MUSIC

Nietzsche's understanding of aesthetic phenomena, and more specifically of tragedy, revolves around his distinction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian, "the separate art worlds of dreams and intoxication". The beautiful illusions of the dream world, in which, Nietzsche says, citing Lucretius, the "glorious divine figures first appeared to the souls of man", i.e. to the Greek poets, is the origin of the Apollinian art-impulse. The master of this world is Apollo, thus the art-impulse is "Apollinian". Apollo seems to cast a hazy dream image over the whole world of reality so that, for those whose wakening self-

consciousness is just beginning to perceive the vanity and horror of existence," awakened by the pessimistic world-view expressed in the wisdom of Selinus above, the shock is buffered by the self-encouragement that is, as Nietzsche says, not without success -- "It is a dream, I will dream on!"<sup>10.</sup> The Apollinian art-impulse, therefore, speaks of a profound need of the Greeks, who like the dreamer above, were just awakening to self-consciousness. It is the need to overcome the "overwhelming dismay in the face of the titanic powers of nature". Thus, "out of the original Titanic divine order of terror, the Olympian divine order of joy gradually evolved through the Apollinian impulse toward beauty."<sup>11.</sup> In this way, he says, the Greeks were seduced to life. In this way the wisdom of Silenus is reversed, that is -- "to die<sup>soon</sup> is the worse of all for them (men), the next worst -- to die at all."<sup>12.</sup>

Here above all, according to Nietzsche, we have the emergence of a culture such as is celebrated in Greek mythology and the poetry of Homer. The gods of Olympus are merely the mythical images reflected in the mirror of this culture by its greatest poet. The first task and highest effect of this "Apollinian culture" (Kultur) is to "overthrow an empire of Titans and slay monsters." It "must have triumphed over an abysmal and terrifying view

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10. B.T. § 1 p35.

11. B.T. § 3 p43.

12. Ibid.

of the world and the keenest susceptibility to suffering through recourse to the most forceful and pleasurable illusions."<sup>13.</sup> This is the stage of Greek culture which Goethe and Schiller held up to the world-- "Greek cheerfulness", the picture of the playful, happy, beautiful Greeks. "At this Apollinian stage of development, the 'will' longs so vehemently for this existence, the Homeric man feels himself so completely at one with it, that lamentation itself becomes a song of praise."<sup>14.</sup> Schiller applied the term "naive" to describe this art, meaning not "simplemindedness", but harmony with nature. "Homeric naivety", says Nietzsche; "can only be understood as the complete victory of Apollinian illusion".<sup>15.</sup> And it is at bottom something false, "an artificial paradise", and Nietzsche refuses to believe in it. How can one live in "harmony" with nature? "O you noble Stoics, what fraudulent words!" Nietzsche was to cry much later in Beyond Good and Evil, "Think of a being such as nature is, prodigal beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without aims or intentions, without mercy or justice, at once fruitful and barren and uncertain; think of indifference itself as a power-- how could you live according to such indifference?"<sup>16.</sup> Yet finding some sort of harmony and justice seems to be the task of art.

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13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. B.T. § 3 p44

16. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, § 9

Nietzsche seems to equate "nature" with phenomena. If man relies upon this in order to justify his existence then he would be placing his hope in a deception. "Here," he writes, "Apollo overcomes the suffering of the individual by the radiant glorification of the eternity of the phenomenon: here beauty triumphs over the suffering inherent in life; pain is obliterated by lies from the features of nature."<sup>17</sup> Plato's objection to art, Nietzsche says,-- "that it is the imitation of a phantom and thus belongs to a sphere even lower than the empirical world"-- may be justified in this context,<sup>18</sup> since the Apollinian artist has forgotten what is for Nietzsche the true function of art, that is, to justify existence. Instead it takes joy in mere appearance, and this, for Nietzsche, is no justification. Apollo, (as the etymology of the name suggests), is the "shining one",<sup>19</sup> the deity of light and also the ruler over the beautiful illusions of the inner world of fantasy. Like dreams, which may either lend us valuable insight or become mere idle day-dreaming or worse, Apollo may benefit or mislead us. And so "we must also include in our image of Apollo that delicate boundary which the dream image must not overstep lest it have pathological

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17. B.T. § 16 p104

18. B.T. § 14 p90. This "context", of course, is Nietzsche's, and is a means by which Nietzsche may "dam up" Plato's more general criticism of art and confine it to what Nietzsche would himself criticize, art that lacks the Dionysian.

19. In German the word Scheinen, to shine, is related to the adjective, Schein, which means, seeming, illusion, appearance, and is also related to Der Schein,-- light, fire and erscheinen,-- to appear.

effect (in which case mere appearance would deceive us as if it were crude reality)".<sup>20.</sup>

This is the origin of the "measured restraint" of the Apollinian-- it is none other than the principium individuationis, which, as we have seen, leads not to unity, but to separation, egoism, etc. It leads to the loss of universality. Nietzsche cites the words of Schopenhauer to describe this effect of Apollo. Schopenhauer describes the man wrapped in the veil of maya-- "Just as in a stormy sea that, unbounded in all directions, raises and drops mountainous waves, howling, a sailor sits in a boat and trusts in his frail bark: so in the midst of a world of torments the individual human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the principium individuationis."<sup>21.</sup> And so, Apollinian art, rather than breaking the spell of individuation, fortifies it, protecting the individual and saving him from making the plunge into the primordial unity of things.

"This apotheosis of individuation," says Nietzsche, "knows but one law-- the individual, ie. the delimiting of the boundries of the individual."<sup>22.</sup> Such a delimiting is called for in order that individuation does not create a Dante-esque Hell on Earth where every man become his neighbour's devil. "Apollo, as ethical deity, exacts measure of his disciples," Nietzsche says, "... and so, side by side

20. B.T. § 1 p35.

21. B.T. § 1 p36.

22. B.T. § 4 p46.

with the aesthetic necessity for beauty, there occur the demands 'know thyself' and 'nothing in excess'; consequently overweening pride and excess are regarded as the truly hostile demons of the non-Apollinian sphere, hence as characteristics of the pre-Apollinian age-- that of the Titans."<sup>23</sup> Here Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer, who felt that art could be made to serve an ethical purpose by destroying the principle of individuation, egoism, and transcending it in "will-less contemplation". For Nietzsche it is individuation which is moralistic, which is in fact responsible for giving birth to morals, and in leading us beyond individuation art does not lead us into resignation and ethics, but beyond them.

Nietzsche goes beyond the conventional conception of the Greeks, the one still prevalent in his day, the conception maintained by what Nietzsche calls the "pale egigones" of Winckelmann and Goethe, who maintained the "aesthetic necessity for beauty". Nietzsche drank at the water of the sublime and the beautiful Apollinian, but, sweet as it was, he left it unsatisfied, finding it incomplete in itself. And this is because, as Nietzsche says, using the terminology of Schopenhauer, the Apollinian is occasionally dumbfounded "by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principle of sufficient reason, in some of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception" and we are seized by a tremendous terror. A new God, Dionysus, is

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23 . Ibid.

struggling to establish his authority. "Let us imagine," Nietzsche writes, "how into this world built on mere appearance and moderation and artificially dammed up, there penetrated, in tones ever more bewitching and alluring, the ecstatic sound of the Dionysian festival; how in these strains all of nature's excess in pleasure, grief and knowledge became audible, even in piercing shrieks; and let us ask ourselves what the psalmodizing artist of Apollo, with his phantom harp-sound could mean in the face of this demonic folk-song!"<sup>24.</sup> "The individual, with all his restraint and proportion, succumbed to the self-oblivion of the Dionysian states, forgetting the precepts of Apollo. Excess revealed itself as truth." Returning to Schopenhauer's analogy, we might say that the man in the boat suddenly realizes the frailty of his craft and the fury of the storm and is seized with terror. "If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed, of nature, at this collapse of the principium individuationis, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian."<sup>25.</sup> This occurs, either under the influence of some "narcotic draught" (as, we may presume, a love-death potion), "with the potent coming of spring", or with the folk-festivals and dances of the Middle Ages, for example, the dances of St. John and St. Vitus, in which "we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks".

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24. Ibid.

25. B.T. § 1 p36



In this way the naive splendour of the Homeric world was overwhelmed by an influx of the Dionysian, in which the destruction of the principium individuationis became itself an aesthetic phenomenon. The two artistic impulses thus found themselves at loggerheads-- an open war seemed to rage. Here the Dionysian seemed to win a victory and the Apollinian was smashed and destroyed. Elsewhere "the first onslaught was successfully withstood, the authority and majesty of the Delphic god exhibited itself as more rigid and menacing than ever." For Nietzsche "the Doric state and Doric art are explicable only as a permanent military encampment of the Apollinian. Only incessant resistance to the titanic-barbaric nature of the Dionysian could account for the long survival of an art so encompassed with bulwarks, a training so warlike and rigorous, and a political structure so cruel and relentless."<sup>26.</sup>

Nietzsche divides the history of Hellenic art into four periods -- one, the age of Bronze, the age of the Titans and of a "rigorous folk-philosophy", the second, the Apollinian, which is in turn overwhelmed by a resurgence of the Titanic in the form of the Dionysian impulse, which was in turn suppressed in the fourth period by the retrenchment of the Apollinian in the Doric state. How is this conflict between the two opposing art-impulses to be resolved? Which of the two art impulses will gain the victory? It might be thought that, on the basis of all that has been said

upon the nature of the Apollinian, with its principium individuationis, its egoism and its ethical air, Nietzsche would now introduce the Dionysian as an alternative to the Apollinian, as something that overcomes and replaces it. The popular notion, which Nietzsche himself perpetrated, that Nietzsche was a disciple of Dionysus contributes to this expectation. In fact, Nietzsche, unlike the uncautious Hippolytus in Euripides' play, wishes to offend none of the gods. Therefore, in Nietzsche's system, the Dionysian never overcomes and replaces the Apollinian except at its own expense, or as a last resort and as a sort of revenge -- a form of madness by which Dionysus punishes those who fail to honour him and who, like Pentheus, oppose him. There is a great gulf separating those who are merely mad, merely intoxicated, and those who are the true devotees of Dionysus. In order to escape the lopsidedness of the former, the Dionysian needs the Apollinian -- needs the Apollinian in cooperation with it. And so the fifth period of Greek art, that of Attic tragedy and the dramatic dithyramb, which is the subject of Nietzsche's book, "presents itself as the common goal of both these tendencies whose mysterious union, after many long and precursory struggles, found glorious consummation in this child".<sup>27.</sup>

The principium individuationis, although something to be overcome, is in fact an indispensable aid to the appearance of the Dionysian as an aesthetic phenomenon. According to

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27. Ibid.

Nietzsche, "the only truly real Dionysus appears (erscheint) in a variety of forms, in the mask of the fighting hero, and entangled, as it were, in the net of the individual will. The god who appears talks and acts so as to resemble (ähnelt) an erring, striving, suffering individual. That he appears [Nietzsche's italics] at all with such epic precision and clarity is the work of the dream-interpreter, Apollo." <sup>28.</sup>

The Apollinian is, Nietzsche emphasizes, speaking of the Homeric gods and the second stage of development, the "only satisfactory theodicy". "The gods justify the life of man: they themselves live it." <sup>29.</sup> Some sort of mediation seems to be necessary between the particular and the universal. Dionysus would, in himself, be as incomprehensible to us as would the dream of deepest sleep; as the universal always will be basically unknowable and incomprehensible as perceived by the individual human being. It therefore is never so perceived without doing considerable violence to its universality. Therefore, Dionysus appears to us suffering the properly Dionysian suffering -- dismemberment, i.e., individuation, so that "we are therefore to regard the state of individuation as the original and primal cause of all suffering, as something objectionable in itself". <sup>30.</sup> We are led, through this mystery doctrine of tragedy, this Apollinian-Dionysian art phenomenon, to "the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of

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28. B.T. § 10 p73

29. B.T. § 3 p43.

30. B.T. § 10 p73

individuation as the primal cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness".<sup>31.</sup> Art is the means of mediation between the realm of the particular, of phenomena, and the universal. Nietzsche asserts the power of art not by the criteria of pure will-less objective contemplation, such as, for example, Schopenhauer uses as one of his criteria,<sup>32.</sup> but by the Romantic formula that not mere men and individuals are artists, but that nature herself is the artist, so that the "typical velleity" of the artist described earlier may in fact be a symptom of closeness to "nature" and "reality" (the inverted commas are of utmost importance here). "Nature" would seem here to overcome her indifference, though not her ruthlessness. Men, in this process, are the mere clay of the world-creating spirit of "nature".<sup>33.</sup> In art, therefore, the boundries that ordinarily separate men from men, and men from nature, are destroyed in order to manifest a higher community. "In these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity."<sup>34.</sup> We might say, therefore, that "nature", as an artist, embodies the Apollinian-Dionysian partnership and that art

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31. B.T. § 10 p74

32. This in fact appears as a sort of left-over of Nietzsche's use of Schopenhauer's language (i.e., B.T. p48) but is not really compatible with the spirit of The Birth of Tragedy.

33. B.T. § 2 p38

34. B.T. § 1 p37.

merely mirrors nature and brings it within the realm of our experience. "Nature" makes her universality manifest in the particular; for only through the principium individuationis may she take the form of "reality" in Time and Space. And she herself, therefore, becomes caught in and shares the contradiction which dwells in all self-conscious beings,-- a fundamental contradiction within the nature of things, for she must now assert her universality by the ruthless destruction of that very thing by which she first appeared.

The stage is now set for the aesthetic phenomenon of the tragic.

#### THE PROMETHEUS MYTH

In the alliance of the Apollinian and Dionysian, Nietzsche sees the conquest of the Olympian world-view by a much profounder world-view. Nietzsche presents us with a compact analogy of this conflict and the eventual conquest of the Olympian world-view by the new forces of tragedy, using the myth of Prometheus, who appears to us as a mask for Dionysus.<sup>35.</sup> The Olympian world-view had symbolized, for Nietzsche, the order of culture, of individuation, ethics and morals, but also of the tyranny of the Olympian gods who had overcome the Titan world order of nature only by ruthlessness. Nietzsche uses the example of the Doric state, saying that in the Doric state Might becomes Right, because

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35. An engraving of Prometheus unbound decorates the title page of the first edition of The Birth of Tragedy. Nietzsche refers to this engraving in his Preface to Richard Wagner.

only Might is able, in this state, to overcome the abyss which possesses the man living within the principle of individuation, within culture and society, whenever he looks deeply into himself, or when he looks outside himself at his fellow men or at the Titanic forces of nature. The principle of individuation is always experienced as conflict, because an individual is an individual only by virtue of his ability to negate, in some sense, other individuals. Some kind of tyranny is necessary in order to keep this conflict from getting out of hand. Men are willing, therefore, to suffer a tyranny and forego the justice and ethical equilibrium of Apollo in favour of a strictly legal regimentation which defines exactly the boundaries between themselves and others, rather than to face the abyss. In Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, this tyranny is aptly represented by Zeus and the Olympian gods, for it is these gods of the old culture which the new art of tragedy must overcome. These are the gods whom Dionysus himself must overcome if he is to establish a place for himself in the pantheon. Pity, which alone is able to render the tragic before us by building a bond of sympathy between us and the tragic hero, is totally denied by the tyranny of Zeus. "Are you pitying again?" asks Might, who observes Hephaestus' pity for Prometheus as something dangerous, as a case of divided loyalty, since, as Might expresses it, "there is nothing without discomfort except the overlordship of the gods". But Hephaestus does take discomfort at the fate of

Prometheus and so enters tragedy.

The fate of Prometheus is a way of expressing what happens when the Apollinian art-tendency gets out of hand and becomes tyrannical. The tyranny of the Olympian gods is, however, fated to come to an end-- Zeus will be forced to enter into an alliance with Prometheus. Justice will be satisfied. This justice is tragic justice. Such a strange, seemingly unaesthetic cry for justice, "the centre and main axiom of the Aeschylean view of the world which envisages Moira enthroned above the gods and men as eternal justice",<sup>36.</sup> would seem to us an uncongenial idea to a system which, as Nietzsche's system has, excluded ethics from the realm of aesthetics. Justice creeps into Nietzsche's system because it is necessary to maintain the balance between the Apollinian and the Dionysian<sup>37.</sup> and because, in an aesthetic system based upon the relationship between the divine and the human realms, only justice is able to overcome the terrible inequality between the two. Thus, the Titanic, which in the Olympian world-view appeared as the divine order of terror to be overcome by the Olympian gods (who represent the epic poetry of the Apollinian stage of development), in the myth of Prometheus appears as the benevolent god who suffers for human-kind-- gives man a sense of justice and so saves him from the tyranny of fear. Prometheus "caused mortals to cease foreseeing doom" by placing "in them

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36. B.T.. 89 p70

37. B.T. 825 p143. Justice is here understood as artistic balance and harmony.

blind hopes"-- "besides this I gave them fire."<sup>38.</sup> Prometheus tells us that "men at first had eyes, but saw to no purpose; they had ears, but did not hear. Like the shapes of dreams they dragged through their long lives and handled all things in bewilderment and confusion."

But, strangely and paradoxically, this cry for justice is also a cry of sacrilege. The unity of justice and sacrilege is what makes tragedy-- and what makes justice tragic. Prometheus gives men all the things which, in the Semetic myth of the fall, Satan (at least in the Christian interpretation of the myth) gives to men-- i.e. knowledge, knowledge of "what things come verily true from dreams" and the meaning of omens and the "flaming signs of the sky that were before dim", as well as fire, which Nietzsche characterizes as the "true palladium of every ascending culture".<sup>39.</sup> The Prometheus myth has, therefore the "same characteristic significance for the Aryan character which the myth of the fall has for the Semetic character".<sup>40.</sup>-- namely, humanity's sacrilege and usurpation of the divine powers of creation. By adopting the Aryan myth and rejecting the Semetic myth, Nietzsche places a wide gulf between himself and Schopenhauer, whose interpretation of the myth of the fall of man has already been outlined. The two myths are therefore both similar and opposite. Nietzsche characterizes them by saying that they are "related to each other

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38. Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound

39. B.T. § 9 p71

40. B.T. § 9 p70.



like brother and sister". The sins of the Semetic myth: curiosity, mendacious deception, susceptibility to seduction, are all "feminine" sins, which lead to ethics, resignation and ecclesiastical tyranny. Nietzsche contrasts these to the "masculine" sins, the "active" sins of the Titanically striving artist, who, like Faust, overleaps the distance and draws the fairest form into existence;<sup>41.</sup> and so overleaps the boundry imposed by the Apollinian between the divine and the human.

Prometheus, in one sense, represents the spirit of the creative artist, the sacrilegious tendency of the artist which is represented by Nietzsche in the audacious words of Goethe's Prometheus --

Here I sit, forming men  
in my own image,  
a race to be like me,  
to suffer, to weep,  
to delight and to rejoice,  
and to defy you,  
as I do.

42.

Nietzsche, continuing with the analogy between Prometheus and the "creative" artist, says that "Man, rising to the Titanic stature, gains culture by his own efforts and forces the gods to enter into an alliance with him because in his very own wisdom he holds their existence and their limitations in his hands."<sup>43.</sup> This sacrilege is none other than

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41. Quoted by Nietzsche on p113 and also ridiculed by him in his Self-Criticism. The Romanticism of this art-impulse, which Nietzsche later came to realize, was rejected by him.

42. B.T. § 9 p69 43. Ibid.

the attempt to overcome the principle of individuation, artistically embodied in the Apollinian art tendency and politically embodied in the Doric state. In doing so, however, Nietzsche says, man becomes caught in a contradiction at the heart of the world. "In the heroic effort of the individual to attain universality, in the attempt to transcend the curse of individuation and to become the one world-being, he suffers in his own person the primordial contradiction that is concealed in things, which means that he commits sacrilege and suffers."<sup>44.</sup> The difference between the Semetic and the Aryan myths, according to Nietzsche, is that ~~the~~ Aryan myth is not inclined to interpret away the misfortune in the nature of things, the misfortune which Nietzsche characterized as a "contradiction at the heart of the world" which reveals itself to us in the Prometheus myth "as a clash of different worlds, e.g. of a divine and human one, in which each, taken as an individual, has right on its side, but nevertheless has to suffer for its individuation, being merely a single one beside another."<sup>45.</sup> Thus, the central and innermost kernel of the Prometheus myth is the necessity of sacrilege and its unity with justice -- which means, for Nietzsche, the destruction now and again, of "all those little circles in which the onesidedly Apollinian 'will' had sought to confine the Hellenic spirit."<sup>46.</sup>

Prometheus, however, is but a mask, a mask of Apollinian appearance for Dionysus-- and a very strange mask indeed

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44. B.T. § 9 p71.

45. Ibid.

46. B.T. § 9 p72.

for those who conceive of Dionysus only as the god of destruction, without his Apollinian counterpart. The gifts that Prometheus brings, as we may have guessed, are none other than the gifts of the dream-interpreter, Apollo. Indeed, in Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche compares Dionysian suffering with the pain of childbirth.<sup>47.</sup> Thus, as a god, Prometheus' sacrilege is the opposite of man's, for he becomes like the world creator Brahma, who, as Wagner liked to say, must suffer for having brought the universal into particularity.<sup>48.</sup>

But Prometheus finds that even "eternal suffering is a slight price" to pay for the manifesting of the eternal in the particular. As such he fulfills his role within the theodicy by suffering the earlier mentioned proper Dionysian suffering-- dismemberment, birth being experienced here as a form of dismemberment, the suffering that all universality undergoes in manifesting itself as the particular and giving birth to it. And conversely, by undergoing this suffering, Prometheus, like his Titan brother, Atlas, carries the separate little, wave-mountains that are humanity. upon his broad back, carrying them higher and higher, farther and farther.<sup>49.</sup>

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47. Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, p110.

48. Wagner on Music and Drama, op. cit. p277. Wagner wrote in the scenario of 1848 for The Ring that when the gods endowed man with divine attributes and with free will and conscience to work the annulling of their crime, the eternal risked their own destruction. (Gutman, p156). This compares to the risk Prometheus took and for which he is punished. Compare Prometheus and Brunnhilde, Wotan and Zeus. It is not unlikely that Nietzsche's Prometheus is shaded by The Ring.

49. B.T. B.9 p72.

Only in undergoing dismemberment is the Dionysian able to be the bond between the universal and the particular, and Prometheus, by fulfilling this in his suffering, forms such a bond. He is a Dionysian mask; "in the aforementioned profound demand for justice Aeschylus reveals to the thoughtful his paternal descent from Apollo, the god of individuation and of just boundries". From this we conclude that there is a dual nature in Aeschylus' Prometheus. This nature, which is at the same time Dionysian and Apollinian, might be expressed in the conceptual formula-- "'All that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both'". Nietzsche quotes Goethe's Faust-- "That is your world! A world indeed!--"<sup>50.</sup> In other words, they are justified as aesthetic phenomena.

#### THE LYRICIST AS ARTIST

The power which frees Prometheus from the bounds imposed on him by the Olympian tyrant, Zeus, is the "Heracleian power of music", in which the Dionysian, overwhelming the Apollinian principium individuationis, is able to liberate the world-creating spirit from the penalty of particularity. In music is discovered the Dionysian art, alone capable of approaching the universal without becoming entangled in phenomena. Nietzsche, following the example of Wagner, substantiates this claim by citing Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music, quoting at length a passage from chapter 52 of The World as Will and Representation. In this passage

50. Ibid.

Schopenhauer says that "we may regard the phenomenal world, or nature, and music as two different expressions of the same thing", i.e., the will. He says that music, "if regarded as an expression of the world, is in the highest degree a universal language," comparable, for example, to "geometrical figures and numbers, which are the universal forms of all possible objects of experience and applicable to them all a priori, and yet are not abstract but perceptible and thoroughly determinate. All possible efforts, excitements, and manifestations of will, all that goes on in the heart of man and that reason includes in the wide, negative concept of feeling, may be expressed by the infinite number of possible melodies, but always in the universal, in the mere form, without the material, always according to the thing-in-itself, not the phenomenon, the inmost soul, as it were, of the phenomenon without the body.... Music is distinguished from all the other arts by the fact that it is not a copy of the phenomenon, or more accurately, of the adequate objectivity of the will, but an immediate copy of the will itself, and therefore complements everything physical in the world and every phenomenon by representing what is metaphysical, the thing-in-itself. We might just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will ..."<sup>51.</sup>

Nietzsche by and large accepted Schopenhauer's metaphysics of music; it offered a brilliant and powerful argument against what Nietzsche took to be the Platonic

objection to art, especially if, in the context of this metaphysics, music was united with the plastic arts in the way that Wagner united music and poetry in drama. To achieve such a union in art would, in a sense, bring into reality the union of the universal and the particular, the divine and the human -- and so achieve the highest goal of mankind and not just of art. But Nietzsche was alive (as Wagner was not) to the difficulties and contradictions inherent in applying Schopenhauer's theories of art to the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk or to his own synthesis of Apollinian and Dionysian art tendencies. Schopenhauer rejects the possibility of a union of the arts. Nietzsche therefore accuses Schopenhauer of portraying lyric art, that art which is the union of poetry (Apollinian) and music (Dionysian), as an incompletely attained art, a "semi-art". Nietzsche again cites The World as Will and Representation. In this passage Schopenhauer portrays the lyric artist as a mixture of subjective and objective states of mind. He believed on the one hand that "It is the subject of the will, i.e., his own volition, which fills the consciousness of the singer" while on the other hand, "by the sight of surrounding nature, the singer becomes conscious of himself as the subject of pure will-less knowing, whose unbroken blissful peace now appears, in contrast to the stress of desire." It is the very contrast between these subjective and objective states which "principally constitutes the lyrical state" and is "really what the song as a whole expresses." "In it pure

knowing comes to us as it were to deliver us from willing and its strain; we follow, but only for moments; willing, the remembrance of our own personal ends, tears us anew from peaceful contemplation; yet ever again the next beautiful environment in which pure will-less knowledge presents itself to us lures us away from willing."<sup>52.</sup>

Nietzsche accused Schopenhauer of clinging to the Kantian distinction between subject and object; Nietzsche wishes us to move beyond such arbitrary categories. Such a distinction, he believes, is not longer relevant in artistic activity as Nietzsche has revealed it in his system of Apollinian and Dionysian art impulses (which do not, as one may be tempted to think at first sight, represent objective and subjective states of mind). The subjective artist, Nietzsche says, is known to us only as the poor artist, for "throughout the entire range of art we demand first of all the conquest of the subjective, redemption from the 'ego', and the silencing of the individual will and desires"<sup>53.</sup> He regrets that, regarding the frequent placing of the faces of Homer and Archilochus side by side on gems, sculptures, etc, "modern aesthetics, by way of interpretation, could only add that here the first 'objective' artist confronts the first 'subjective' artist". If Archilochus is a subjective artist, and therefore a poor artist, how, asks Nietzsche, are we to explain "the reverence which was shown him -- the poet -- in very remarkable utterances by the

Delphic oracle itself, the centre of 'objective' art?" This calls attention to the need on the part of aestheticians to come to an understanding of how the lyricist is possible as an artist. And such an understanding, because the lyricist embodies the union of music and poetry, will put our understanding of the Apollinian and the Dionysian, which in the Prometheus myth we attempted to explain by analogy, into a concrete world.

The lyricist is possible as an artist-- "he who, according to the experience of all ages, is continually saying 'I' and running through the entire chromatic scale of his passions and desires" because he begins not with "I", not with words, but with a musical mood. "With me," Schiller said, "the perception has at first no clear and definite object; this is formed later. A certain musical mood comes first, and the poetical idea only follows later."<sup>54</sup> The lyricist starts as a strictly Dionysian artist. He has identified himself with the primal unity, with its pain and contradiction, and expressed it, recast it adequately, in music. (There is nothing either subjective or objective in this process). Only then does the Apollinian intervene, the lyricist's "I". The Dionysian musical enchantment of the sleeper seems to emit image sparks, lyrical poems, which in their highest development are called tragedies and dramatic

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54. B.T. § 5 p49. Wagner describes a similar process of creation. The music of Tristan began to impress itself upon him even before he wrote the words. The above reference to the "chromatic scale" also suggests that Wagner is the subject of much of Nietzsche's discussion of the lyricist. Wagner was aggressive in his use of the chromatic scale, rather than the more restrained Diatonic scale.



dithyrambs." <sup>55.</sup> This union of Dionysian and Apollinian, incorrectly contrasted as objective and subjective, is achieved in the folk-song. The folk-song, says Nietzsche, is the musical mirror of the world, the original melody seeking for itself a parallel dream phenomenon and expressing it in poetry. <sup>56.</sup> This interpretation of the lyric artist owes very much to Wagner. It enabled Nietzsche to formulate a theory of art which, he believed, would enable art to transcend mere imitation and actually seize reality beyond appearance.

#### WAGNER AND GESAMTKUNSTWERK

We leave to others the prodigious task of commenting on the validity and truth of Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek tragedy. We shall return to the Greeks to discuss other more general aspects of Nietzsche's theories on them. But having now some idea of how Nietzsche combines the Apollinian and the Dionysian and what this unity signifies, it is time to turn to our real task -- what, through this, Nietzsche is saying about the Wagnerian art-work.

It is almost too easy to make comparisons between Wagner's synthesis of poetry and music in drama and Nietzsche's synthesis of Apollinian and Dionysian in tragedy. Nietzsche makes clear that, in his mind, Wagner represented not merely the Dionysian, but also the Apollinian art-impulse, citing the words of Hans Sachs in Die Meistersinger--

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55. B.T. § 5 p50.

56. B.T. § 6 pp52-53

The poet's task is this, my friend,  
 to read his dream and comprehend.  
 The truest human fancy seems  
 To be revealed to us in dreams:  
 all poems and versification  
 are but true dreams' interpretation.

57.

It often comes as a surprise to us that Wagner, primarily remembered and honoured as a musician, did not regard himself solely as such, and indeed that at times he sought to dispense with it altogether. For a while in the late forties he toyed with the idea of writing a spoken drama on Frederick Barbarossa, and later he made extensive preliminary sketches for a spoken drama called Jesus of Nazareth for which he would write no more than a few musical interludes. He left behind these projects, however, lured not so much by the love of music itself, but by the Siren call of the Romantic heritage, which still cried for a synthesis of the arts-- Gesamtkunstwerk. Opera, the art-form of the bourgeois nineteenth century, was Wagner's natural enemy, being more a hodge-podge of the arts than it was a synthesis. He condemns it as an "art-caprice", having no "natural" origins, that is, not having originated from the "folk". Opera did not originate from the medieval folk-plays, wherein Wagner found traces of a natural cooperation of the art of tone and that of drama; it originated in the rich courts of Italy.

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In these Operas Wagner found that the arias were nothing but the original folk-tunes stripped of their naivety and truth, rendered before the world of rank and quality by the

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57. B.T. § 1 p34.

58. Wagner, Opera and Drama, p18

"art-singer".<sup>59.</sup> The performer thereby brought about the preferment of the musician over the poet. Such an unnatural tyranny was, according to Wagner, severely detrimental to the drama.<sup>60.</sup> It meant that music, the means of expression, had become the end, while the end of expression, the drama,<sup>61.</sup> had become the means.

In Opera and Drama Wagner worked out his involved theories of Gesamtkunstwerk. According to this work all the separate arts, music alone, poetry alone, etc., were sterile. The history of these arts is the history of their separate development wherein they try to make up for their incompleteness and deficiencies. Wagner believed that he could solve this problem by means of a synthesis of the arts, in which the deficiencies of one art is made up for by the other. This fusion would give a more total aesthetic effect whereby the bourgeois ideal of entertainment art is replaced by a higher form of art.

The need for synthesis came from the belief that each art in itself had its particular limitation. Wagner's return to the musical-drama, after toying with the idea of abandoning it for purely spoken drama, was the result of his awareness of the limitations of the spoken word, and thus, of the purely spoken drama. Speech, he says, finds its limitations at those great moments where individual feeling has

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59. Ibid. p21.

60. Ibid. p25

61. Ibid. p17

reached a point where the particular and the arbitrary give way to the general and the involuntary, "where the individual escapes out of the egoism of his limited personal feeling into the universal realm of great all-encompassing emotion."<sup>62</sup> To counter this limitation Wagner, so to speak, dug into his grab-bag of the arts to find the art which could make up for this deficiency of speech. These were the tone of voice, the gesture of the body, and the expression of the face. Music, then, the art of tone, is merely one of the three helpers. The orchestra, Wagner said, is the "harmonic means for supporting the individual with a foundation of universal emotion from which the personalized feeling of the actor can differentiate itself."<sup>63</sup> Music, therefore, is subordinate to the words-- contrary to the relation Wagner saw in Grande opera. Nietzsche sums up this early attitude of Wagner's by saying that he had "made music a 'woman' who requires a goal, a man, in order to prosper-- namely, drama!"<sup>64</sup> Music is constantly running to the aid of the poet, lending him support and adding effect, a universal flavouring, to his words.

Wagner's word-tone synthesis, despite his later theories, remains perhaps his greatest achievement in his theoretical writing. Following Herder's linguistic theories he notes that vowel sounds were the most primitive expression of human emotions-- the basis of musical tone expressing the most universal emotion. Later, he says, the consonants were added to express the relation of the emotions

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62. Stein, Jack Madison, Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts, Detroit, Wayne University Press, 1960 p64.

63. Ibid.

64. Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, III-5. Nietzsche condemns the use of the chorus in Euripides' dramas for much the same reason.

to different objects -- to the particular.<sup>65.</sup> Thus, Wagner uses alliteration to establish conceptual relations, for example, between Leid and Lust. The effect of alliteration is heightened when the support of music is enlisted. Key modulation, for example, can introduce relationships between words which cannot be achieved in purely poetic alliteration.<sup>66.</sup> Further effect is given to the poetic line when the climatic tone of the melodic line is identical with the key syllable of the poetic line.<sup>67.</sup> Motifs of reminiscence, which Wagner was responsible for introducing to the opera, were also closely associated and dependent upon the poem. They were derived from a specific thought expressed by a specific individual in a specific situation and their recurrence is meant to remind the listener of this thought. They were not orchestral motifs. "Music cannot think," Wagner says, "but it can materialize thoughts; that is, it can make known their emotional contents as no longer merely recollected, but ~~made~~<sup>made</sup> present."<sup>68.</sup> In short, music found for itself

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65. Stein, op. cit. p70.

66. Wagner gives a concrete example of this. Constructing the poetic lines "Die Liebe bringt Lust und Leid, / doch in ihr Weh auch webt sie Wonnen" (Love brings delight and sorrow, / but into her woe she weaves delights), on the word "Leid", he explains, the music would modulate to a contrasting, but related, key. Remaining in that key until the end of the second line, where a transitional modulation back to the original key would take place on the word "webt", it would thus link "Wonnen" with "Lust" and "Leid" with "Weh" as parallel, while "Lust" and "Leid", originally linked by consonant alliteration, would now be linked by musical alliteration, as contrasting. (Stein, p74)

67. Stein, op. cit. p73.

70. Ibid. p76. The same holds true for motifs of presentiment, likewise dominated by the poet. Wagner says that "at those moments when there is no gesture, and melodic speech is silent, when the drama is preparing its future course in inner moods as yet unuttered, these still

an important place in the Wagnerian art-work, but it is an importance established by the service it renders to the poet. It is nothing in itself.

However, Wagner's creative genius was to outdistance the confining rules of his detailed theoretical writing. Sooner or later Wagner had to break loose even from his own pedantry. The change is foreboded in the striving of his early masterpieces, from The Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, where the dramatic situation transforms music into a vehicle for fuller exploitation of emotional intensity, and where music takes upon itself the task of expressing the universal so powerfully that it threatens the autonomy of the poetic line. But the role that music was to take in Tristan was unexpected even by Wagner himself, who was more swallowed up in it than going into it as the logical fulfillment of the striving of his earlier work. His theoretical writings, as we have seen, gave no place for such a role to music. Nietzsche sums up this radical about face by saying that Wagner had found in music a language of the will itself, speaking directly out of the abyss-- a "telephone" from beyond, something which needed a priest, a mouthpiece of the "in-itself", in short, the musician.<sup>69.</sup> Wagner came to feel that it was the words which held the music in bounds-- at least, he now began to vent his wrath upon the recitative in opera, condemning the arias as musically incomplete

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unspoken moods can be expressed by the orchestra in such a manner that their manifestation acquires the character of a presentiment conditioned by the poet's aim." cited by Stein, op. cit. p77.

69. Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, III · 5

rather than for being overly musical. Nietzsche says, quite correctly, that there "exists a complete theoretical contradiction between his earlier and his later aesthetic creed-- the former set down, for example, in Opera and Drama, the latter in the writings he published from 1870 onwards." <sup>70.</sup>

This is because, as Nietzsche says, "he grasped all at once that with the Schopenhauerian theory and innovation more could be done in majorem musicae gloriam-- namely with the theory of the sovereignty of music as Schopenhauer conceived of it: music set apart from the other arts, the independent art as such." "Henceforth he uttered not only music, this ventriloquist of God-- he uttered metaphysics." <sup>71.</sup>

Naturally Wagner had an interest in maintaining and perfecting the synthesis of the arts. Music obtained for itself a new role in this synthesis, no longer the "woman", the servant of poetry, but also not quite the sovereign and independent position it was given by Schopenhauer. Wagner largely ignored the obvious difficulties in accepting Schopenhauer. In Zukunftsmusik, the first theoretical work that Wagner published after his contact with Schopenhauer and shortly after the completion of Tristan, Wagner attempted a "reconciliation" between the newly accepted

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70. Ibid. Nietzsche's part in the outpour of theoretical writings from Wagner's pen was quite sizeable. These writings (Beethoven, Destiny of Opera) correspond to their closest friendship. Nietzsche's influence on Wagner is pointed out by his sister in the Correspondance, pp 72, 73.

71. Ibid. At the time of The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche followed this metaphysics. But by the time of the Genealogy of Morals he had come to recognize that it led into morality. The above quote ends-- "no wonder one day he finally uttered ascetic ideals."

philosophy of music, the latest work of art, Tristan, and his earlier theories, paying little heed to accuracy on either side. In fact, Wagner had not even re-read Opera and Drama, which he claims to be reviewing and clarifying. Old idols must not be allowed to speak for themselves if they are to be forced into the service of new idols. Two other works, published somewhat later in 1870 and 1871 (Beethoven and The Destiny of Opera), also take upon themselves the task of introducing an unwilling Schopenhauer to the Wagnerian synthesis.

Opera continues to be the scapegoat in Wagner's politics of art, but for different reason. Citing the old debate between the Gluckists and the Piccinists on whether or not the ideal of drama was attained in opera, Wagner endorses Voltaire's decisive verdict-- "Ce qui est trop sot pour être dit, on le chante".<sup>72.</sup> Goethe, going against the instincts of his own poetic genius, involuntarily sided with Voltaire. When writing for opera he kept his texts as trivial as possible, realizing that a profound text would be unsingable. Music was so predominant in opera that it swallowed up the poetry, and so with it, the drama. Opera thus had failed to achieve the unity of poetry and music outlined in Opera and Drama.

It would seem at this point, therefore, that the old Wagnerian system is still intact. He speaks of "reaching the supreme height of Drama through a union of Poetry and

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72. Wagner, Zukunftsmusik, p310.



Music" and of how the poet had "found in Opera a clamped and bolted scaffolding of musical forms". He seems, therefore, to go on, as he did in Opera and Drama, to insist upon the subordination of music to poetry. Indeed, he still insists that the tyranny of music over poetry is opera's greatest fault. It is a tyranny as damaging to the tyrant as the slave, however. Thus, if the relationship of music to poetry is not one of tyrant to slave, as it is in opera, but one of cooperation, then the decisive verdict of Voltaire does not apply; the music would not incapacitate the poet, but serve him. Thus Wagner could write ten years later in Destiny of Opera, just as he had in Opera and Drama, that the true task of music, according to both Goethe and Schiller, was to breath ideal life into the figure of the drama, and that this gave the theatre a good cause to envy the opera with such a means to effect at its disposal.<sup>73</sup> This does not necessarily contradict Wagner's endorsement of Voltaire's verdict, nor does his attempt to set Goethe's Faust to music contradict Goethe's law of opera text writing; Wagner is not writing opera. Wagner called his works music-dramas in order to emphasize that the relation of music to poetry was not as it was in opera. He claimed his librettos to be great poetry in themselves. About Tristan he said that there was no word repetition-- that the structure of the melody was erected by the poet.<sup>74</sup> Wagner struggled to find

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73. Wagner, Destiny of Opera, p134.

74. Wagner, Zukunftsmusik, p331.

a technique of diction and orchestration in which every single word would be audible.<sup>75.</sup> The lines would be declaimed rather than sung,<sup>76.</sup> the orchestra providing the musical "ground".

All of this sounds deceptively familiar. It conceals a profound turning around in what Wagner is saying as regards to the relation between poetry and music. To be sure, the foundations of the old ideas remain-- the idea that poetry expresses particular relations while music the universal emotions, the idea that no art, including music, is able to stand alone and by itself without enlisting aid from the other arts in order to make up for its deficiencies. So, music itself, the music of a symphony, for example, fails us. Music needs poetry in which the spoken thought is entirely dissolved in feeling, yet which somehow adds consistency and form to the otherwise disturbing effect of the music<sup>77.</sup> in which we may "feel as if we were on high seas, with nothing firm under our feet." But how different now is the relation between poetry and music. Now poetry seems to support the music, seems to be its servant, its "woman". While the symphonists, the lonely bachelor seeking Wagnerian redemption-- a woman-- still timidly gropes

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75. This is achieved best in Parsifal (Also Act I of Die Walküres) It is not, in fact, achieved in Tristan.

76. In a highly successful performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in 1846, Wagner had the most ecstatic phrases proclaimed, not sung.

77. Zukunftsmusik, op.cit. p320

78. The critic Hanslick used these words to describe the music of Parsifal, Wagner's last work. If we are to believe Hanslick, Wagner only fooled himself into thinking he had solved the problem.

back to the original dance forms, now the poet cries to him--  
 "Launch without a fear into the full flood of Music's sea...  
 you shall stand on the solid ground of the Drama's action...  
 the most directly understandable of all poems. Stretch  
 boldly out your melody, that like a ceaseless river it may  
 pour throughout the work: in it say you what I keep silent,  
 since you alone can say it; and silent shall I utter all,  
 since my hand it is that guides you."<sup>79.</sup>

Wagner characterized the union of music and poetry as  
 the union of the Beethovenian symphony with the drama of  
 Shakespeare; the Dionysian and the Apollinian, he says,  
 adopting Nietzsche's formula. The Dionysian element of  
 music, which Wagner believed he saw present in, among others,  
 Mozart's Don Juan<sup>80.</sup> and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, attains  
 the height of Drama, transporting the mere actors and the  
 mere words to the sphere of the Ideal by virtue of the  
 Schopenhauerian formula that music is itself an Idea.<sup>81.</sup> In  
 this way, Wagner claims, music is reconciled to poetry in  
 the way that Schopenhauer wanted them. Citing the old  
 philosopher himself, (and with a recent conversation with  
 Nietzsche no doubt in the back of his mind) Wagner writes  
 in Beethoven that all aesthetics hitherto sought to make

79. Zukunftsmusik, op. cit. p337

80. It was, among other things, the realization that there was  
 nothing Dionysian about Mozart's music that lead Nietzsche to question  
 Wagner's music.

81. Wagner, Beethoven, pl06

music as cold as plastic art. Other artists must be inspired by will-freed, pure beholding of the object, while music, being a direct objectification of the will, works the opposite effect. That is to say, the individual will, silenced in the plastic artist (the poet) awakens in the musician as the universal will.<sup>82</sup> However, the universal remains inaccessible to the individual. Artistically this means that it must somehow be shown to the spectator, that is, it must "appear". Music itself, music unassisted, untempered, unrestrained by the plastic arts, would for the spectator be too much. It would break him, shatter him like glass thrown upon the stone. Speaking of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Wagner speaks of the previous movements as a movement into the most terrible dissonance, a "dissonance of existence itself" which Beethoven explores with all the Dionysian "force of his doubt", until he seems to reach the shattering point with his music, the point at which the dreamer awakens from his nightmare. At this point the Apollinian intervenes. Wagner writes that "it was with a veritable leap of despair that the divinely naive master, inspired by nothing save his magic, set foot on that new world of Light from out of whose soil the long-sought godlike-sweet and guileless-human melody bloomed forth to greet him with its purity."<sup>83</sup>

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82. Ibid. p72.

83. Ibid. p101

It is as if music itself did not truly sound until, to reverse the instruction Mephisopheles cited at the beginning of this chapter, it rings with light. Nietzsche described a similar aesthetic phenomenon-- "the Hellenic poet touches the sublime and terrible Memnon's Column of myth like a sunbeam, so that it suddenly begins to sound--<sup>84.</sup> in Sophoclean melodies."

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## CHAPTER. THREE

### THE SPIRIT OF MUSIC AND THE MUSIC-PRACTICING SOCRATES

The sun I did not see,  
Nor saw I land and people:  
yet, what I saw,  
I can indeed not tell you.

Tristan and Isolde,     Act III

#### THE DEATH OF TRAGEDY

We can see from Nietzsche's analysis of the myth of Prometheus the extent to which the outcome of the synthesis of the Apollinian and Dionysian is to make myths accessible, not so much to the intelligence, but to the "whole" man. The most powerful function of music, says Nietzsche, continuing his Wagnerian analysis of Greek tragedy, is to "invest myth with a new and most profound significance". More than that, music was responsible for saving myth for tragedy and for the poet, saving it from death in the hands of the emerging Greek historical consciousness. "For this is the way," Nietzsche warns us, "in which religions are wont to die out: under the stern, intelligent eyes of an orthodox dogmatism, the mythical premises of a religion are systematized as a sum total of historical events; one begins apprehensively to defend the credibility of the myths, while at the same time one opposes any continuation of their

natural vitality and growth; the feeling for myth perishes, and its place is taken by the claim of religion to historical foundations.<sup>1</sup> And by the time that Hercules, in the guise of music, came to the rescue "the Greeks were already fairly on the way toward restamping the whole of their mythical juvenile dream sagaciously and arbitrarily into a historico-pragmatical juvenile history". But myth was not yet dead, and in tragedy she enjoyed one last jubilant dance, one last tumult of blood, one last "measureless pleasure in the twilight atmosphere" heavy "with the fragrance that awakened a longing anticipation of a metaphysical world", and then-- its final collapse, left to the "mocking Lucians of antiquity" who "catch at the discoloured and faded flowers carried away by the four winds". This "wounded hero, and its whole excess of strength", are like to remind us of Tristan, who, in expectation of the arrival of Isolde, tears off his bandages in a last jubilant dance of death, singing---

Aha, my blood!  
 flow now, exulting!  
 She who can close my  
 wound forever  
 most valiantly comes,  
 she comes for my own good!  
 let earth now pass  
 in my jubilant haste!

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In such a way, "Greek tragedy met an end different from that of her older sister arts: she died by suicide, in

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1. B.T. § 10. p75

2. Tristan and Isolde Act III Scene II

consequence of an irreconcilable conflict; she died tragically, while all the others passed away calmly and beautifully at a ripe old age."<sup>3</sup> The irreconcilable conflict between the divine and the human orders, for the sacrilegious bringing together of which she was willing to atone for with eternal suffering, the inevitable suffering of dismemberment-- this was the suicide of tragedy. He passing, therefore, unlike the passing of her sister arts, who left the world no poorer, but on the contrary, left the world with even "fairer progeny", left the Greeks with "the deep sense of an immense void",<sup>4</sup> for what now would, with Heraclean strength, hold the two orders, divine and human, together? So, "just as Greek sailors in the time of Tiberius once heard on a lonesome island the soul-shaking cry, 'Great Pan is dead,' so the Hellenic world was now pierced by the grievous lament: 'Tragedy is dead! Poetry itself has perished with her!'"<sup>5</sup>

#### EURIPIDES

A new art-form had to emerge to replace the dying tragedy, an art form which, when it emerged, bore all the features of her mother-- "but those she had exhibited in her long death struggle". This progeny of tragedy was the drama of Euripides, sacrilegious Euripides, who "sought to compel this dying myth to serve you once more", but

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3. B.T. § 11 p76.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.



who ended by killing myth, and with it, music-- both of which perished under his "violent hands". A pattern begins to emerge, in the death of tragedy, and in Nietzsche's interpretation of it, which is familiar enough to modern men that it almost seems to blur before our eyes, and seems to us merely modern, a question only of historical curiosity and as something to which we must adjust ourselves, but certainly not of "universal" concern, certainly nothing that could also have bothered the Greeks, those idyllic, naive people nestled in the bosom of their mythic inheritance.<sup>6</sup> The death of myth-- so burning a problem to Wagner, and still the subject of enquiry by anthropologists and psychologists, appears to us as if of very recent origin, appearing, at the earliest, with the Renaissance and the Reformation, during which time the "scientific" and historical began to so radically undermine "traditional values". We like to visualize myth as performing some psychological function, so that when myth dies, when man finally sees the truth and is no longer able to believe in myth, he nevertheless clings to them and seeks to invest them with new meaning by giving them an allegorical, or, depending on his level of "progress", a psychological interpretation, in order to preserve the function of myth without the superstition. Yet many people lament that, among other things,

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6. For this reason we may be inclined to believe, as did many of Nietzsche's contemporaries, that Nietzsche is distorting the picture before our eyes and making a modern problem into a Greek problem-- a judgement which is fortified by the manifest intention of The Birth of Tragedy to prop up the claims of Wagner to provide a solution to this ancient problem, and not merely to be a symptom of some modern disease.

Christianity died in this way (Wagner was one who so lamented-- and blamed the Jews, among others). Churches struggle in vain to hold their congregations, confused and bewildered that the old myths no longer have the power to hold the allegiance of the masses under the spell of modern values, despite the tremendous erudition and effort of their ministers to give new meaning to the myths via every trick, sociological, anthropological, psychological or historical, that they can muster to their aid.

But, if we are to believe Nietzsche, the Greeks faced a similar crisis. The complete decline of myth, and with it of tragedy, Nietzsche blames on Euripides and Socrates. Euripides was, according to Nietzsche, the first critic-artist. He observed the "comet's tail" of Aeschylean tragedy, that element of the unknown, the unknowable, the enigmatic depth, indeed, that "infinite" which could never be illuminated-- he observed all of this as a questionable treatment of myth, questionable because it defied all critical understanding.<sup>7</sup> For Euripides, for that critical half of him, not the poet but the thinker, who sat in the theatre as a spectator, as well as for that other ever present spectator, Socrates, whom Euripides so looked up to, understanding was the real root of all enjoyment and creation. And so Euripides, sitting in the theatre pondering uneasily the works of his great predecessors, Sophocles and Aeschylus, must have fancied himself, like Anaxagoras,

as the first sober person amid a crowd of drunken ones. According to this aesthetic criteria the great and sublime poets Sophocles and Aeschylus must be included among the crowd of drunken ones. While Sophocles praised Aeschylus because he did what was right, although he did it unconsciously, Euripides felt that Aeschylus, because he created unconsciously and did not subject his creativity to critical judgements, did what was wrong.<sup>9.</sup>

What was most offensive to both spectators, Euripides and Socrates, was the total lack of any connection in the old tragedy between virtue and knowledge, between faith and morality, and the total lack of the kind of justice demanded by the critical, theoretical mind -- that is, the justice demanded by the Apollinian principium individuationis. Individuals, whom previously the Greeks could not suffer upon the stage, now dominate it. Euripides is accused of bringing the "public" (whatever that may be), the mob, the masses, onto the stage. With this "the fifth estate, that of the slaves, now comes to power".<sup>10.</sup> Immediately the necessity forces itself upon the poet to delimit these individuals, to measure them and keep them in their place. Yet the "Aristophanean Euripides" who "prides himself on having portrayed the common, familiar, everyday life and

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8. B.T. § 12 p85.

9. Ibid. In the light of Wagner it is important to note that Nietzsche says though. Wagner may well have said because.

10. B.T. § 11 p78.

activities of the people" had in so doing taught the masses how to speak, "how to observe, debate, and draw conclusions according to the rules of art and with the cleverest sophistries". He is, therefore, faced with an "entire population [that] now philosophized, managed land and goods, and conducted lawsuits with unheard-of circumspection".<sup>11.</sup> And so it was necessary that the characters of a Euripidean drama present themselves as psychologically convincing caricatures, and everything that they do upon the stage must be immediately and obviously understandable in terms of motivation, and in terms of the caricature presented to us. Nietzsche protests against this "un-Dionysian, myth opposing spirit" of "character representation" and "psychological refinement" because then "the character must no longer be expanded into an eternal type, but, on the contrary, must develop individually through artistic subordinate traits and shadings, through the nicest precision of all lines; in such a manner that the spectator is in general no longer conscious of the myth, but of the vigorous truth to nature and the artist's imitative power ... The movement in the direction of character delineation proceeds rapidly: while Sophocles still portrays complete characters and employs myth for their refined development, Euripides already draws only prominent individual traits of character."<sup>12.</sup> We can see clearly in this situation that these individuals are not

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11. B.T. § 11 pp77-78.

12. B.T. § 17 p108

any longer, could not possibly be, masks for the gods, for whom motivation is unworthy and for whom a caricature is simply out of the question, being too narrow, too particular, too incomplete to represent even the personality of a noble man, let alone a god. They are, rather, the smooth talking reflections of the mob, of the spectators, who have now found their way onto the stage, thanks to Euripides.

Thus it became necessary that the hero become a dialectician, continually justifying himself, continually explaining himself. The transcendental justice of Prometheus must be replaced by mob morality, by poetic justice. The most aesthetically crude mechanism, the deus ex machina, is employed in order to circumvent the contradiction of reality. This optimistic dialectic, says Nietzsche, drives music out of tragedy, "that is, it destroys the essence of tragedy, which can be interpreted only as a manifestation and projection into images of Dionysian intoxication"<sup>13</sup>. But it can no longer do this because the Apollinian tendency, which once performed this function, has degenerated.

"Philosophic thought," Nietzsche says, having in mind the dialogues of Plato, whose literary style he objected to, "overgrows art and compels it to cling close to the trunk of dialectic. The Apollinian tendency has withdrawn into the cocoon of logical schematism."<sup>14</sup> This "logical schematism" is, perhaps, what is really meant by the deus ex machina -- a mechanical nightingale which lures us away

from the true object of our love. With the coming of this mechanical nightingale the chorus, the whole musical-Dionysian substratum of tragedy, now appears only as something accidental, not as the cause of tragedy.

#### SOCRATES

And now the "one great Cyclops eye of Socrates", that eye to which is denied the "pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses", is fixed on tragedy. Socrates, like Euripides, sees in tragedy only "something unreasonable, full of causes apparently without effects, and effects apparently without causes", something that "could not but be repugnant to a sober mind".<sup>15.</sup> "We know the only kind of poetry he comprehended:" Nietzsche says scornfully, "the Aesopian fable; and this he favoured no doubt with the smiling accommodation with which the good honest Gellert sings the praise of poetry in the fable of the bee and the hen:

Poems are useful: they can tell  
The truth by means of parable  
To those who are not very bright."<sup>16.</sup>

And so the fatal question is asked--"what is the usefulness of tragedy?" According to Socrates, says Nietzsche, it did not even tell the truth. And surely the representation of the suffering of the gods has no use. "What gods?" Socrates

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15. B.T. § 14 p89.

16. B.T. § 14 pp89-90

is made to ask in Aristophanes' Clouds, "with us, gods are not legal tender." And so the critic asserts himself in the strongest possible terms. "Legal tender" consists only of denominations known and determinable. The gods are not determinable.

In this way Socrates, like Euripides, "killed" tragedy. Under his brutal hands, and his demand for reason and usefulness, myth lost its power over the mind, which was invaded by criticism. In such a way "the youthful tragic poet Plato first burned his poems that he might become a student of Socrates". Henceforth Plato devoted his art to the discovery of "reality", the "idea which underlies this pseudo-reality"--the older art, he believed, had been a mere "imitation of a phantom". And with this critic's interference with art the subject-object distinction first finds its way into art--to the detriment of all aesthetic appreciation. The critical prejudice that "to be beautiful a thing must be known", which is almost to say "useful", requires an individual, knower, complete with all the boundries of individualism and the distinction between knower and known. Plato's misunderstanding of art is due to his inability to understand the effect of the subject-object distinction in art. So great does his confusion become that, according to Nietzsche's interpretation of Ion, he criticizes, perhaps unintentionally, the very idol of his master--Euripides. Because the deity who speaks through Euripides is no longer Apollo or Dionysus, "but an altogether newborn demon, called Socrates" there

the Socratic-- and the art of Greek tragedy was wrecked on this".<sup>17.</sup>

What arises out of this new opposition is not the lyricist who, as we have seen, was able to transcend the subject-object distinction because of the unity of the Apollinian and Dionysian art tendencies; nor is it the "solemn rhapsodist of old times". Rather it is the younger rhapsodist who is portrayed for us in Plato's Ion.

Plato almost always speaks only ironically of the creative faculty of such a poet. He places it on a par with the gift of the soothsayer and dream-interpreter. The poet is able to compose only when he is unconscious and bereft of understanding.<sup>18.</sup>

"Like Plato, Euripides<sup>19.</sup> undertook to show to the world the reverse of the 'unintelligent' poet." It is, therefore, with a great sense of irony that Nietzsche turns the tables on both Plato and Euripides by characterizing Euripides as Ion, making Plato seem to condemn his master's idol and making Euripides, by virtue of being Socratic, also the most un-Socratic. Nietzsche writes--

"In the Platonic Ion, the younger rhapsodist describes his own nature as follows: 'When I am saying anything sad, my eyes fill with tears; and when I am saying something awful and terrible, then my hair stands on end with fright and my heart beats quickly.' ... Euripides is the actor whose heart beats, whose hair stands on end; as Socratic thinker he designs the plan, as passionate actor he executes

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17. B.T. § 12 p82.

18. B.T. § 12 pp85-86.

19. B.T. § 12 p86.



it. Neither in the designing nor in the execution is he a pure artist. Thus the Euripidean drama is a thing both cool and fiery, equally capable of freezing and burning. It is impossible for it to attain the Apollinian effect of the epos, while, on the other hand, it has alienated itself as much as possible from Dionysian elements. Now, in order to be effective at all, it requires new stimulants, which can no longer lie within the sphere of the only two art-impulses, the Apollinian and the Dionysian.. These stimulants are cool, paradoxical thoughts, replacing Apollinian contemplation-- and fiery affects, replacing Dionysian ecstasies; and it may be added, thoughts and affects copied very realistically and in no sense dipped into the ether of art." <sup>20.</sup>

#### THE MUSIC-PRACTISING SOCRATES

Socratism, therefore, poses a danger to art; art seems to be helpless against this poison. The Socratic web of logic spreads itself, in ever-widening circles, like a net over the whole world of appearance, whilst the theoretical man craves to weave this web impenetrably tight. And so the history of science, and of its so-called opposite, or composite, art, up to modern times. Nietzsche, however, sees a ray of light, a hope that science, when pursued to its limits, will give birth to a new art, art in the pro-

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20. B.T. § 12 p83. And perhaps we may see here the birth of Romanticism. Wagner fits well Plato's criteria for poets, as he also fits the description which follows of the rhapsodist, the completely subjective artist. The realization may have dawned on Nietzsche that Wagner did not transcend the subject-object distinction and that he was, in fact, merely the other face of Socratic rationalism.

foundest, metaphysical sense of the word. "For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, e'er half their time and inevitably, such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination. When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail-- suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, tragic insight which, merely to be endured, needs art as a protection and remedy."<sup>21.</sup>

As evidence of such a need for tragic insight and for art in the highest sense intrinsic in science itself, Nietzsche cites the examples of Socrates and Euripides, once again turning around our conceptions of them as if to show us the reverse side of the coin. "In the evening of his life" Euripides himself, Nietzsche says, put to the question the whole of his un-Dionysian art-tendency, and ends in his Bacchae by refuting the very possibility of such an un-Dionysian art. The question of whether the Dionysian is entitled to exist, or whether it ought not to be forcibly uprooted from Hellenic soil, becomes to a certain extent irrelevant. "Certainly, the poet tells us, if it were only possible: but the god Dionysus is too powerful; his most intelligent adversary-- like Pentheus in the Bacchae-- is unwittingly enchanted by him, and in this enchantment

runs to meet his fate... This is what we are told by the poet who opposed Dionysus with heroic valour throughout a long life-- and who finally ended his career with a glorification of his adversary and with suicide, like a giddy man who, to escape the horrible vertigo he can no longer endure, casts himself from a tower."<sup>22.</sup>

Euripides' recantation, although it comes too late, nevertheless indicates to us that the Dionysian is still alive and only waiting to assert himself. The same is true in the case of Socrates, that other profound enemy of Dionysus, who nevertheless was unwittingly enchanted by him. Nietzsche finds in Socrates, and in the Platonic dialogues, an indication that "we are not entitled to regard it [the phenomenon of Socrates] as a merely disintegrating, negative force." And so, "though there can be no doubt that the most immediate effect of the Socratic impulse tended to the dissolution of Dionysian tragedy, yet a profound experience in Socrates' own life impels us to ask whether there is necessarily only an antipodal relation between Socratism and art, and whether the birth of an 'artistic Socrates' is altogether a contradiction in terms."<sup>23.</sup> Socrates himself had enough "Apollinian insight" to feel that somehow logic failed. He knew, for example, that he was the only man in Athens that did not know anything, but who knew that he did not. And so he "occasionally had the feeling of a gap, a void, half a reproach, a possibly neglected duty." In

other words, his "Apollinian insight" had told him that he had neglected its brother and composite-- music. "As he tells his friends in prison, there often came to him one and the same dream apparition, which always said the same thing to him: 'Socrates, practice music'.<sup>24.</sup>" He did not understand the instructions and finally, his approaching death filling him with a sense of urgency, and in an uncertain and clumsy effort to fulfill the instructions of the dream apparition, he wrote a prelude to Apollo and turned a few Aesopian fables into verse. Although Socrates' attempts to fulfill the instruction were misdirected and incomplete, they nevertheless indicate the right direction-- the redemption of the late repentant and an indication that the god Dionysus, although forced underground, is not dead. "The voice of the Socratic dream vision is the only sign of any misgivings about the limits of logic: Perhaps-- thus he must have asked himself-- what is not intelligible to me is not necessarily unintelligent: Perhaps there is a realm of wisdom from which the logician is exiled: Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of, and supplement for science?"<sup>25.</sup>

#### MODERN ALEXANDRIAN CULTURE

At this point The Birth of Tragedy might well end. Its task of interpreting the birth and death of tragedy in ancient Greece has been accomplished. Indeed, as we mentioned earlier, the original version did in fact end here.

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24. Ibid.

25.

B.T.

§ 14

pgs.

Nietzsche, however, felt compelled by the very insight of his understanding of Greek tragedy, to take the "torch of this thought in our hands" and illuminate the present. And so the last section of the first part of The Birth of Tragedy ends by winding down the focuses of our binoculars with dizzying speed to the nineteenth century. "Here we knock, deeply moved, at the gates of the present and future: will this 'turning' lead to ever new configurations of genius and especially of the Socrates who practices music? Will the net of art, even if it is called religion or science, that is spread over existence be woven even more tightly and delicately, or is it destined to be torn to shreds in the restless, barbarous, chaotic whirl that now calls itself 'the present'?"<sup>26.</sup> This dual concern of The Birth of Tragedy with the past and the present led Cosima to write that "you have thrown the most resplendent radiance over two worlds, one of which we do not see because it is too remote, and the other, we do not apprehend because it is too near."<sup>27.</sup>

Cosima, of course, took particular delight in this because it was only by this bold application of the theories of Greek tragedy to the problem of the "present" that Nietzsche is able to launch himself on his Wagnerian crusade.

After its displacement by Socratism, the Dionysian enters its long subterranean period. Socratism grows, over the course of the centuries, into what Nietzsche calls the Alexandrian culture. "It proposes as its ideal the theo-

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26. B.T. B 15 p98.

27. Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondance, op. cit. p95.

retical man equipped with the greatest forces of knowledge."<sup>28.</sup>  
 The glories of Alexandria, with its immense library, but<sup>29.</sup>  
 without any great creative achievements of its own, is  
 coupled with the civilization of Rome, also great borrowers.  
 Since the revival of the Alexandrian-Roman antiquity in  
 the fifteenth century and earlier this legacy has belonged  
 also to modern man, who is now one of the species of  
 "Socratic-critical man". Dante, of course, stood like a  
 giant, presiding over the death of the Medieval  
 world order and the birth of the newly revived Alexandrian-  
 Roman order. And this, in turn, is the inheritance of  
 modern culture.

This culture, like all cultures, however, must appear  
 before the unerring judge, Dionysus. The judgement is not  
 favourable. The Alexandrian man cannot understand myth  
 "as a concentrated image of the world" because he no longer  
 believes in miracles.<sup>30.</sup> In art this means that the myth  
 no longer functions as a check to the aimless wanderings  
 of the Apollinian dreams. This culture, therefore, has no  
 primordial home; it is "doomed to exhaust all possibilities  
 and to nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures."  
 In the most important and elevating function of any society  
 and culture-- its ability to stamp its experiences with the

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28. B.T. § 18 p110.

29. Nietzsche seems to pass over many great achievements-- Shakespearean tragedy, for example. Nietzsche, however, does not ignore Shakespeare and his interpretation of Hamlet (p69) is one of the finest passages in The Birth of Tragedy. Shakespeare, however, may be regarded as an exception, and an indication that tragedy is not dead, but has only gone underground and is capable of surfacing in a great genius.

30. B.T. § 23. p135.

eternal-- this civilization is most inadequate. The mythless man, therefore, "stands eternally hungry, surrounded by all past ages, and digs and grubs for roots, even if he has to dig for them among the remotest antiquities. The tremendous historical need of our unsatisfied modern culture.... what does all this point to if not to the loss of myth, the loss of the mythical home, the mythical maternal womb?"<sup>31.</sup>

Thus we may isolate historicism as the first fault of Alexandrian culture which the Dionysian judge would condemn. "According to the method and with the supercilious airs of our present historiography" Greek antiquity becomes assimilated historically, along with other antiquities.<sup>32.</sup> All the power of Greek myth and art is therefore smothered, picked apart by the vulture of historical criticism. The "most vigorous and wholesome nourishment" is changed into "history and criticism". And this vast collection, this Alexandrian library of "history and criticism", is our very questionable culture and heritage, most extravagantly emphasized in French civilization with its grande opera and historical costume acting. "Art has never been so much talked about and so little esteemed", Nietzsche complains, lamenting that it has become the mere parlour talk of the bourgeoisie. Nietzsche emphasizes the serious side of art by stressing its connection to culture (Bildung)<sup>33.</sup> and the

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31. B.T. § 23 p136.

32. B.T. § 20 p122.

33. Nietzsche sometimes switches to use the word Kultur, but the use of Bildung, with its relation to education and self-formation, predominates..

role of culture in education, saying that "the cultural power (Bildungskraft) of our higher educational institutions (höheren Lehranstalten) has perhaps never been lower or feebler than at present. Nietzsche traces the cause of this feebleness to a rift between art and culture, saying that "there has never been another period in the history of art in which so-called culture and true art have been so estranged and opposed as we may observe them to be at present."<sup>34</sup> To this culture the gate to the "Hellenic magic mountain" remains closed, for this culture hates true art and fears destruction from its hands. Because of this rift and estrangement of art and culture, art has degenerated into entertainment, lacking high seriousness, while on the other hand nothing remains of culture "but the metamorphosis, often experienced by now, of fluttering also like a cheerful cultured butterfly, with the 'light elegance' peculiar to this sphere, employing the journalist's style."<sup>35</sup> In the meantime, serious matters are given over to the theoretical men. Our life has been guided by concepts; "the inartistic as well as the life-consuming nature of Socratic optimism had revealed itself to us".<sup>36</sup>

We are led, therefore, from the historical attitude to the Alexandrian "culture" poet and thus to the second and

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34. B.T. § 20. p122.

35. Ibid.

36. B.T. § 24 p142. We may remind ourselves here of Wagner's distinction between the "modern culture poet" and the naive poet of antiquity-- the latter being an inventor of myths, the former finding in the strictly literary poetry leaning to the didactic the best means of elevating the popular play.



third faults of Alexandrian culture-- the critical attitude and optimism, which may often seem to be one and the same, but which are, in fact, distinct, optimism forming, as it were, the bridge between the second fault, the critical attitude, and the fourth, the moral attitude, which otherwise may not have met. The Nietzschean synthesis of Apollinian and Dionysian art-tendencies (and, of course, the Wagnerian synthesis of poetry and music) is broken by the intervention of the critic-artist, the dialectician, whom Nietzsche had characterized using the examples of Euripides and Socrates. Wagner had ruthlessly pilloried criticism and critical discrimination as pedantry and malice, making Beckmesser, in Die Meistersinger, a caricature of this. Wagner loved showing critics how little he respected them. In one infamous incident, Wagner's friends, hoping to facilitate a reconciliation between Wagner and the influential critic, Hanslick, in order to insure the success of the Vienna performance of Tristan (it eventually foundered) invited the critic to hear Wagner read parts of Die Meistersinger. Wagner, however, with his characteristic maliciousness, used the opportunity to insult Hanslick, changing Beckmesser's name to Hanslick and so announcing in the rudest possible way that he did not need critics-- that his art was far above them. The correct attitude to art is indicated by Sachs, who says of Walther's song: "Ich fühl's, und kann's nicht versteh'n",<sup>37</sup> but nevertheless goes on to do his all for the hero. This

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37. Kerman, Thoughts in Season, op cit. p352.

attitude toward critics is passed onto the youthful and enthusiastic Nietzsche. Nietzsche, perhaps foreseeing the storm of criticism that would be raised by his book, full as it was with so many excesses, charged that "no one blight our faith in a yet-impending rebirth of Hellenic antiquity",<sup>38.</sup> shutting his ears in advance to criticism. But beyond this Nietzsche believed that the critic was responsible for the intrusion of morality into art. The critic sat with "half moral and half scholarly pretensions". Everything in his sphere so far has been artificial and merely whitewashed with an appearance of life. The performing artist was really at a loss how to deal with a listener who comported himself so critically... confronted with such a public, the nobler natures among the artists counted upon exciting their moral-religious emotions".<sup>39.</sup> The critic, the theoretical man, after all, follows not only the postulates of pure reason, but is also open to those of practical reason,<sup>40.</sup> and so to morality. This moral attitude is the fourth fault of Alexandrian culture.

To sum up, the intrusion of morality into aesthetics has already been described by Nietzsche as the result of

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38. B.T. § 20 pl23.

39. B.T. § 22 pl33

40. We use the Kantian terms loosely because, of course, critics and artists need not be Kantians, nor accept or understand Kant's aesthetics, in order to feel the difference between a judgement based on pure reason (theoretical, conceptual) and that of practical reason. Unfortunately, in art, the categorical imperative too often reveals itself as a crude, meaningless contradiction which the artist simply lacks the discipline to resolve. Wagner spoke against Kant's imperative in art, arguing for "free inclination" (Religion and Art, p256).

the Apollinian principle of individuation untempered by the Dionysian. The aesthetic phenomenon is twisted to serve as a moral lesson. These "aestheticians" see in the tragic the struggle of the hero with fate and the triumph of a moral world order, or the purgation of the emotions through tragedy.<sup>41</sup> They leave the theatre self-satisfied, their emotions (of pity and fear) discharged like so much bile and convinced in their minds of a moral world order-- indeed, the strength of their conviction corresponds to the level of sufferings inflicted upon the hero. But the fact is that they believe in the triumph of this moral world order, despite all the evidence of their senses, and that they must, in fact, take revenge upon their senses in order to make the moral world order feasible. This revenge is the achievement of the theoretical man. The invasion of morals into aesthetics, Nietzsche says, brings the dialectician into art, whose task it is to construct a new "reality" in order to insure that the world is understood only as "illusion" and therefore offers no contradiction to the moral world order. In this way the theatre was seen as an institution for the moral education of the people. The cheapest of artistic devices follows upon this attitude, the deus ex machina. It comes as a sort of Kantian categorical imperative to rescue the dialectician from the limitations of his logic, ie. to save him from really resolving the contradictions<sup>42.</sup> within the world.

## OPERA AND OPTIMISM

In art the Alexandrian culture described above, with all its optimism and morality, was embodied, Nietzsche says, taking up the old Wagnerian battle cry, in opera. Nietzsche detects in the operatic stile rappresentativo (recitative) a coöperating, extra-artistic tendency. In this way the opera listener is saved from the music by the distinctness of the words in this half-song. Yet, when the singer does burst into virtuoso song the poet comes to his aid with abundant lyrical interjection, word and sentence repetition, so that, in these words the singer need pay no attention to the words at all. It is in this alternation between the endeavour to affect now the concepts of the imagination of the hearer in the recitative, now the musical sense in a display of vocal dexterity, neither of them either Dionysian or Apollinian art-impulses, let alone a union of the two, that the opera is shown as being inartistic. Nietzsche follows Wagnerian theory in condemning the opera with its stile rappresentativo. Rather than being a cohesive union of Dionysian and Apollinian, poetry and music, opera is a conglomeration, a mixture of epic and lyric delivery. It does not represent, as it claims, a return to the Greek ideal.

With all the confidence and optimism of the theoretical culture which gave birth to it, however, the new style

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42. I have taken certain liberties in the above summary. Nietzsche does not use the example of Kant to describe the effects of moral and theoretical optimism on art, presumably because he insists on placing Kant beside Schopenhauer as a pessimist. However, since Nietzsche's attack on optimism is focusing on its modern manifestation, the example of Socrates loses its meaning for us. Greater clarity is gained if we throw off Nietzsche's self-confessed confusion of language (See Nietzsche's own Self-Criticism-- § 6)

was thought to be a reawakening of the most effective music, the music of the paradisiacal beginnings of mankind; of antiquity when, supposedly, (at least in the imaginations of the unaesthetic) passion sufficed to generate songs and poems-- as if, Nietzsche says scornfully, "emotion had ever been able to create anything artistic."<sup>43</sup> "The premise of the opera is a false belief concerning the artistic process: the idyllic belief that every sentient man is an artist. This belief would make opera the expression of the taste of the laity in art, dictating their laws with the cheerful optimism of the theoretical man."<sup>44</sup> In other words the un-critical "I know what I like" (a helpless interjection which probably means that one does not know why one likes it, or should like it, or what implications this liking has. It presupposes that one will always choose correctly by some inner light or instinct) and the critical disposition (which insists that only what is intelligible to oneself has any value) -- both these are tendencies of opera. And it is natural that we should find both optimism and the theoretical disposition hand in hand, although as un-critical and critical they would first appear to be opposite to each other. Theoretical man has an inherent need for optimism. He must believe that all things are knowable, that knowledge is good, that truth is beneficial (the maxim: "the truth shall make you free") and that the "ideal is not felt as

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43. B.T. § 19 p117

44. Ibid.

unattained nor nature as lost".<sup>45.</sup> In order for man's intellect to become so domineering he must first see himself as being in complete control of his reason, but also of his will (doctrine of free will) and of his feeling, so that these cannot corrupt his intellect. Luther, for example, denied the intellect on the basis of the bondage of the will. The will is held in bondage, of course, because of its association with the body, with the senses. In order to overcome this pessimistic awareness of the corruption of the senses, the optimist must assert the power of reason over the senses. Therefore, in opera, Nietzsche says, the words are thought to be "as much nobler than the accompanying harmonic system as the soul is nobler than the body".<sup>46.</sup> The theoretical content of the words hold the much more sensuous effect of the music in bounds. Yet, the optimist cannot seriously regard the senses as being in conflict with reason. Making no distinction at this point between the modern theoretical optimism and Socratism, Nietzsche seems to be describing a new-fangled Epicurean optimism where whatever pleases the senses is good and whatever the senses tell one is true. As opposed to the so-called pessimism of Kant (where the 'thing-in-itself' is forever hidden and lost in the phenomenon) the optimism of the opera believes that the "man-in-himself", the "eternally piping or singing shepherd .. must always in the end rediscover himself as such, should he

ever at any time have really lost himself."<sup>47.</sup> Despite the disparity between this sort of optimism and the tragic spirit "it was to such a concord of nature and the ideal, to an idyllic reality, that the cultured Renaissance man let himself be led back by his operatic imitation of Greek tragedy. He made use of this tragedy as Dante made use of Vergil, in order to be conducted to the gates of paradise; while from this point he continued unassisted and passed over from an imitation of the highest Greek art-form to a 'restoration of all things', to an imitation of man's original art-world." This Nietzsche terms the "sweetishly seductive column of vapour from the depth of the Socratic world view."<sup>48.</sup>

This cheerful optimism of the opera runs counter to the "old ecclesiastical conception of man as inherently corrupt and lost", so that Nietzsche favourably contrasts the music of Palestrina, which flourished in the same time and place that saw the invention of the operatic art, with the insipid optimism of opera. He finds it difficult to believe that opera, which he describes as incapable of devotion, was looked upon as a rebirth of true music "by the very age in which had appeared the ineffably sublime and sacred music of Palestrina".<sup>49.</sup> In the music of Palestrina Nietzsche senses a vaulted structure to which all of Medieval Christendom had been building up, a music basically opposed to the cheerful optimism of the opera. One might find this un-

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47. B.T. § 19 pl18

48. B.T. § 19 ppl17-118

49. B.T. § 19 pl14.

reserved praise for a music which grew out of the soil of Christianity, within the bosom of Rome and the counter-Reformation, strange words from one who was later to write The Anti-Christ if one did not keep in mind that Nietzsche is not praising Christianity as such, nor even pessimism as such (with which, following Schopenhauer, Nietzsche identifies Christianity) so much as he is trying to point out that all true and fine art arises only out of a profound need for art, for its illusion (that is, for the Apollinian), that comes from facing existence in all its terrible contradiction (that is, as a Dionysian man faces existence). Although Nietzsche dislikes the Semetic myth of the fall because of its emphasis upon so-called feminine sins, it nevertheless serves the purpose of revealing to man his essential nature of lost innocence, of one who has committed a sacrilege, indeed, of one who must by nature commit sacrilege. The myth reveals the sacrilege to us as a felix culpa, as the fall of man is described in the Latin rite for blessing the Easter candles. It is a fortunate crime precisely because it marks our departure from the state of nature and indicates our need for redemption and for art. In opera the truly serious task of art, that of providing the healing balm of illusion and delivering us from the spasms of the agitation of the will, has degenerated "under the influence of its idyllic seductions and Alexandrian flatteries to become an empty and merely distracting diversion."<sup>50</sup> Only the destruction of this optimism will



allow for the re-birth of music and with it of tragedy.

# BEETHOVEN THE CLAIRVOYANT AND ENDLESS MELODY.

What is the place of the Wagnerian art-work in Nietzsche's historical view? What is its role in the re-birth of tragedy and so in the revitalization of true religious feeling? It becomes clearer and clearer that it stands in a very central position, and that it does so not by accident, but by design. The polarization of the artist against the critic, of "art" against science, was a typical theme of Wagner's diatribes and pamphlets. Wagner too complained of art which betrays itself as "false pathos", which seeks to elevate itself to the ideal by "the vehicle of notions", by the "lofty sentence alone"-- namely, word-speech, rhetoric, or, ultimately, the didactic and literary style of Plato which employs poetry to "set philosophic theses in a quasi-popular <sup>51.</sup>light".

Wagner argued passionately for a metaphysics of art where the limitations of reason and theory would be transcended. Endorsing Schopenhauer's description of Beethoven as "clairvoyant", and adopting Nietzsche's formulations, Wagner established Beethoven as his predecessor, the man who came closest to achieving the synthesis of word and music, Apollinian and Dionysian, and so transcending the limitation imposed on art by the critics and the pedants. The breaking

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50. B.T. § 19 p118.

51. Wagner, Destiny of Opera, op. cit. p139.

forth of music in the Beethovenian symphony, especially in the Fourth Movement of the Ninth Symphony, Wagner compares to the breaking forth of Christianity upon the Ancient world-- "so music breaks forth from the chaos of modern civilization. Both say aloud: 'our kingdom is not of this world'. And that means: we come from within, ye from without; we spring from the Essence of things, ye from their Show."<sup>52</sup> Beethoven is the "Clairvoyant" of this other world, this other world of Night and Dreams. The individual will, which is merely silenced in the plastic arts, awakens in the musician the universal will. He goes deep into a world "beyond the bounds of time and space" -- "the world's both One and All." This is the world of Night, into which Wagner stepped when, "sleepless one night in Venice", where he was writing Tristan, he heard arising from the breathless silence the strident cry of a gondolier just woken on his barque, evoking a response from another gondolier, again and again "until finally the sound from far and near died softly back to new won slumber."<sup>53</sup>

Beethoven, Wagner believed, penetrated into this world of Night and Dreams. His deafness effectively shut him away from the outside world, from all the noise and crass clatter of that world. "What saw the spellbound dreamer," Wagner asks, "when he wandered through Vienna's bustling streets, with open eyes fixed hard on distance; and animated

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52. Wagner, Beethoven, pl20.

53. Ibid. pp73-74.

solely by the waking of his inner tone-world?"<sup>54.</sup> The Clairvoyant, mediator between the worlds of Night and Day, is very much like the dreamer who "sees things that our consciousness merely feels as vague sensations".<sup>55.</sup> "What it here has seen," Wagner says, "no tongue can impart." Thus, in the words of Tristan in Act III --

The sun I did not see,  
nor saw I land and people:  
yet, what I saw,  
I can indeed not tell you.

"As the dream of deepest sleep can only be conveyed to the waking consciousness through translation into the language of a second, an allegoric dream which immediately precedes our wakening, so for the direct vision of its self the Will creates a second organ of transmission,-- an organ whose one side faces toward that inner vision, whilst the other thrusts into the reappearing outer world with the sole direct and sympathetic message, that of Tone. The will cries out; and in the countercry it knows itself once more: thus cry and countercry become for it a comforting, a last and entrancing play with its own self."<sup>56.</sup> Wagner, following Schopenhauer, establishes music as the language of the will, the means by which the will knows itself, just as we know ourselves by looking in a mirror. So it is that from the most terrifying of dreams "we wake with a scream, the immediate expression of the anguished will, which thus makes

54. Ibid. p91.

55. Ibid. p69.

56. Ibid. p73.

definite entrance into the Sound-world first of all, to manifest itself without." Wagner finds the scream, "in all the diminutions of its vehemence, down to the gentler cry of longing... the most immediate utterance of the will" through which the will manifests itself without. The scream is, for Wagner, the "root-element of every human message to the ear", meaning, supposedly, that there is nothing to communicate besides will. We have less cause to wonder at the immediate intelligibility of the scream, Wagner says, than "at an art arising from this element: for it is evident upon the other hand, that neither artistic beholding nor artistic fashioning can result from aught but a diversion of the consciousness from the agitations of the will."<sup>57</sup> The problem is two-fold: first, how does art originating from the agitations of the will transcend this will and redeem us from it, and secondly, how is the individual to survive the transcending without the destruction of his individuality?

The answer to the first question is provided in the sentence quoted above that the individual will, which is only silenced in the other arts, awakens in the musician as the universal will. Wagner adopts Schopenhauer's monism. The will is the "World's both One and All", or, as the Upanisad says "This is Thyself".<sup>58</sup> The answer to the second question is provided, in part, by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony,

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57. Ibid. p69. In short, Schopenhauer's theory of pure will-less knowing as achieved in the plastic arts, i.e. painting, esp. still-life. Wagner's interpretation of dreams, of the dream of deepest sleep and the lighter allegoric dream, he owes to Schopenhauer.

58. Cited by Wagner in Religion and Art, p226.

of which the open fifths of its first phrases reminded Wagner of his childhood when the tuning of an orchestra, or the mere sounding of a fifth had appeared to him as a "spirit message".<sup>59.</sup> In this first movement, Wagner says, we are shown the "Idea of the world in its most terrible of lights". It is a "frenzy of despair that overwhelms each fresh appeasement", in which Beethoven unleashes all the force of his doubt. Nietzsche speaks of the First Movement in similar terms-- "The opening movement strikes the keynote of passion and its course. Without a moment's respite the music surges forward on its journey through forests and chasms and Nature's prodigious phenomena."<sup>60.</sup> In comparison to the First Movement, Wagner says, we hear the "anguished cry of one awakening from a nightmare", and we "see the master... falling of a sudden out of Music, in a manner, as if stepping outside the magic circle he himself had drawn, and appealing to a mental faculty entirely distinct from that of musical conception", namely poetry, the word-speech. "In truth," Wagner continues, "this unprecedented stroke of art resembles nothing but the sudden waking from a dream, and we feel its comforting effect upon the tortured dreamer; for never had a musician led us through the torment of the world so relentlessly and without end."<sup>61.</sup> The breaking forth of the human voice in the Hymn to Joy, is for both Nietzsche and Wagner, the awakening of the individual to a higher community. Nietzsche describes the Fourth Movement

59. Guttman, op. cit. p22.

60. Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondance, op cit. pl18

61. Beethoven, op. cit. pl01.

as a "heart-breaking cry" after the first three movements in which the individual is lead through all the agitations of the will. "The soul," he says, "is no longer able to bear its burden, no longer able to endure the unceasing transports of passion. Even the vision of eternal rest is rudely pushed aside and the soul agonizes, it suffers inexpressible torture. Now it recognizes the curse laid upon it by this soul-solitude, this soul-isolation [individuation] for even the immortality of the individual is nothing more than a curse. It is then that a human voice is heard speaking to the lonely soul, as to all lonely souls, and exhorting it to return to the friends and joys of the multitude. This is the burden of its song! At last the song of universal human passion bursts in stormily with its full impetus, reaching heights which it would never have been able to attain had not the passion of the solitary, onrushing individual been of such terrific force."<sup>62.</sup>

The mystic community emphasized here is the community of the "world's both One and All." Yet it is at this point that the boundless power of music, which is in itself like to shatter the individual, is restrained by the vocal element, so that over the Dionysian abyss an Apollinian net is cast. Out of the abyss and over the abyss we are still able to affirm the human, represented here by the human voice, as for example occurs in Kundry's awakening in Parsifal, acts ii and iii. This deepest want, therefore, is the catalyst that affects the synthesis of poetry and music." "The

musician," Wagner says, "reaches forth a plastic hand, so to speak, to strike a compact with the waking world of semblance; just as the allegoric dream so far makes contact with the Individual's wonted notions that the waking consciousness, albeit at once detecting the great difference of even this dream-picture from the outer incidents of actual life, yet is able to retain its image."<sup>63</sup>.

This synthesis leads to a new element-- drama. Through the drama the myth is made manifest. The myth, as Nietzsche says, "does not at all obtain adequate objectification in the spoken word."<sup>64</sup>. For this reason both Nietzsche and Wagner condemned the recitative; its tendency towards notions and concepts destroyed the mythical consciousness. And for this reason the breaking out of the human voice in the Ninth Symphony is incomplete. It is not yet a complete synthesis. Nietzsche's observation that Hamlet, like the heroes of the Greek poets, talked more superficially than he acted, points the way to drama. Poetry must be transformed through music into drama. The poet's greatness is therefore measured not by what he says, but by what he leaves unsaid. This unsaid enables the drama to emerge more fully and unhindered in the music, the most naturally dramatic medium. The musician brings this untold mystery to clarion tongue in "endless melody", what Wagner calls the "ceaseless river". "Endless melody" is a concept which Wagner developed to counter the operatic technique whereby a series of arias are strung together by

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63. Wagner, Beethoven, p75-76.

64. B.T. § 17 p105.

recitative. Wagner cites the example of Beethoven, who, he says, gave the interspaces, the connecting links between the melodies, the full character of melodies themselves.. Wagner is rightly credited with the "discovery" of Beethoven's Quartet in C#m, "Whose seven movements flow into one another without a pause", as one critic said, "sustaining the progress with an unparalleled certainty and beauty."<sup>65</sup> Wagner noted that one theme in the last movement was very similar to the fugue subject of the first movement-- in other words, he found in the Quartet the ancestor of the leitmotif, or what Wagner himself called not "leitmotif", but "ground theme" (Grundthemen). Beethoven had taken the first step towards organic unity by welding the movements of the symphony into a psychological whole lasting thirty or forty minutes. As such it had dramatic power, although, as purely symphonic music, Wagner felt that the direct revelations of music still confused the human understanding, ie., that the Beethovenian synthesis, the composer's compact with the world of semblance, was incomplete and needed something more, something supplied by the stage.

When, therefore, Beethoven's symphonic techniques are applied to the music-drama, the dramatic action is greatly enhanced since it now flows continuously. We now face the question of what it is that the poet leaves unsaid which opens the flood-gates of endless melody. In answer to this we may note that Wagner said that his earliest opera, Rienzi (in which he successfully applied all the techniques of

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65. Kerman, Joseph, Opera as Drama, Op. cit. p205.



French grande opera), was just an opera text because it was overly concerned with historical detail (first fault of Alexandrian culture). In The Flying Dutchman he foresook history for legend (myth), never to return. All that detailed description and exhibition with which grande opera was so encumbered he could thus pass over. Drama, forced off the stage by Goethe and Schiller, who made it reflective (the second fault of Alexandrian culture, now returns to the stage.<sup>66.</sup> Legend seizes the purely human content and is so better suited for poetry and music. The legendary colouring helps the poet to silence the question "Why?", so putting the mind in a dream-like state. Yet Wagner found that all he achieved in so doing was to translate the theoretic "Why?" into the tragic "Whence?". He cites the example of Elsa in Lohengrin. This cry of "Whence?" from the inmost want of a woman's heart for a long time banned him from the magic of his art. He only overcame it when he overcame optimism (third fault of Alexandrian culture)-- when in a fit of pessimism he gave himself up to Tristan.<sup>67.</sup> Here he is concerned only with inner motives, action only as the soul demands it-- in other words, music from the will, the "thing-in-itself". Tristan took him beyond the values of the Day (fourth fault of Alexandrian culture) and into the Night, into the realm of music. The orchestra is like the tragic chorus, accept that, while the tragic chorus' interest is of the reflective kind (Wagner, not yet having been enlight-

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66. Wagner on Music and Drama, op cit. pp135-136  
 67. Zukunftsmusik, op. cit. , p330

ened by The Birth of Tragedy is unaware of the origins of the chorus in music), the orchestra has a much more intimate relation to the motives of the plot. It does not break in here and there with questions, nor serve as an aid to the poem, but rather flows through it, often overwhelming the voices, revealing the mysterious motivations of the will.

#### WAGNER AND GREEK TRAGEDY

The easy parallelism between Nietzsche's and Wagner's attitudes, as I have suggested, is far from accidental. Although at many points one really has to force their arguments in order to make them agree (one has even to force Wagner at times to agree with Wagner), the significant factor is the extent to which both Nietzsche and Wagner were eager to reach this agreement, even at the expense of consistency. Nietzsche, marked as he later confessed, by every "defect of youth", "without the will to logical cleanliness", lacked the discipline necessary to overcome these inconsistencies. He shared too much a mutual passion with Wagner to make the sacrifice of recognizing him. He therefore adopted Wagner's interpretation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony wholeheartedly, declaring in The Birth of Tragedy that it was Wagner's Beethoven essay with all its heavy debt to Schopenhauer, which inspired him to "approach the essence of Greek tragedy."<sup>68</sup> Nor was he in so doing acting upon the whim of connecting his master's name with that of the Greeks.

Wagner himself believed that his art-work was modelled on what he called the Greek "archetype".<sup>69.</sup> He believed that he was following the example of Goethe and Schiller, except that while Goethe and Schiller, he said, made the Greek ideal an object of research, he sought to discover its religious significance and bring it into living expression in art. He believed that he had discovered in the Greeks the connection between art and religion.

We need neither accept this nor refute it at this point. It is not our task here to determine the correctness or incorrectness of the correlation between Greek tragedy and Wagnerian art. We need only understand that Nietzsche does make the connection. And it is only on the basis of this connection that we can understand what Nietzsche is saying about Tristan and the meaning that Tristan holds, for Nietzsche, in the modern world. Only having journeyed through Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek tragedy and, without letting go of it, made our adjustment to the modern world, are we entitled to take up the task of understanding Nietzsche's interpretation of Tristan and what it means for religion.

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69. Zukunftsmusik, op. cit. p302.

CHAPTER FOUR  
TRISTAN AND THE EXTINCTION OF THE INTELLECT

Oh, now let the light be quenched!  
Put out its frightening glare!  
Let my beloved in!

Tristan, Act II, Scene I

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE AS RELIGIOUS DRAMA

In Art-work of the Future Wagner declared that for the Hellenic "races" the "lyric and the dramatic art-works were each a religious act" and that "tragedy was the religious rite become a work of art, by side of which the traditional observance of the genuine religious temple rite was necessarily docked of so much of its inwardness and truth that it became indeed a mere conventional and soulless ceremony, whereas its kernel lived on in the artwork."<sup>1</sup> Much later, in a pamphlet entitled Religion and Art Wagner, condemning both Jews and Jesuits for destroying both art and religion, claims that only art can save a religion that has grown artificial. Art saves it through the power of the mythic symbols.<sup>2</sup> Wagner was, in fact, in the process of writing his last music-drama, Parsifal, which he designated as a "Consecration stage piece", believing that in so doing he was reviving true Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Parsifal is, however, only

1. Wagner on Music and Drama, op. cit. p81.
2. Wagner, Religion and Art, p213.

the final culmination of Wagner's tendencies. Nietzsche, although later revolted by the crass and vulgar form Wagner's "religious art" took in Parsifal, was certainly not hostile to, nor unaware of, the form that it took in Tristan. In fact it was the insight offered to Nietzsche by Tristan of the relation between tragedy and religious feeling that led him to proclaim the "mystery doctrine of tragedy" as if it were a new religious creed. Many critics, however, find this connection between tragedy and religion incomprehensible. They insist that Tristan is not a tragedy but a religious drama, as if religious drama were the opposite of tragedy and irreconcilable to it. Despite the Schopenhauerian pessimism of Tristan, Joseph Kerman, for example, quite correctly said that "the fundamental sense [of Tristan] is of a progress towards a state of illumination which transcends yearning and pain",<sup>4</sup> and concludes that Wagner never even intended Tristan to be a tragedy. If the latter is the case, however, Wagner's enthusiasm over The Birth of Tragedy would lose its meaning. Furthermore we should have to ignore instances where Wagner compares himself to Aeschylus, and Wagner's own insistence that tragedy is a religious rite, which is echoed emphatically in The Birth of Tragedy, would all have to be regarded by us as meaningless. Despite the apparent difficulty of reconciling tragedy with religious

3. Wagner believes not only that he is saving Christianity from artificiality, but also from its mortal enemies, the Jews. The racial doctrine of Parsifal is exposed by Robert Gutman in his chapter entitled "Moral Collapse: 'Heldentum' and Parsifal."

4. Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama, op. cit. p195.

drama, the weight of the evidence compels us to do so. Tragedy is identified by both Wagner and Nietzsche with religious drama and it is important for us to understand how each of them makes the identification and how they differ from each other.

We may begin by noting that the above mentioned sense of progress in Tristan need not be considered uncongenial to tragedy if the function of tragedy is to lead to resignation. Progress then takes the form of a negation-- a negation which tragedy is well suited to accomplish. And this is the kind of illumination that takes place in Tristan. The religious drama of Tristan seems to follow from this sort of resignationism, i.e., out of its peculiar tragedy.

Tristan emerged from the years of Wagner's greatest despair. Wagner, who as Nietzsche observed, had begun darkly and restlessly and who had tempestuously striven to gratify his desires, "to taste those rapturous delights from which he often fled in disgust", now "wished to throw off the yoke, to forget, to be negative, and to renounce everything."<sup>5</sup> Wagner himself describes his moods best in a letter to Liszt of December, 1854. He says-- "If I think of the storm of my heart, the terrible tenacity with which, against my desire, it used to cling to the hope of life, and if even now I feel this hurricane within me, I have at least found a quietus which in wakeful nights helps me to sleep. This is the genuine, ardent longing for death,

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5. Nietzsche, Wagner at Bayreuth, 82

for absolute unconsciousness, total non-existence." He confesses that it is his frustration in love, his realization that "pure" love cannot ever be achieved in the world of deception, of egoism, of pretense, in short, of the Day, that leads him to this pessimism. He writes that, "as I have never in life felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head Tristan and Isolde, the simplest but most full-blooded musical conception; with the 'black flag' which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself and die."<sup>6.</sup>

Wagner's idea of tragedy as religious drama therefore seems to follow from his acceptance of Schopenhauer's doctrine of denial of the will-to-live. Such a concept of tragedy is specifically attacked by Nietzsche in his Self-Criticism, but at the time he wrote The Birth of Tragedy he had not yet freed himself from the "language" of such "resignationism". He found it difficult to express himself outside of Schopenhauer's aesthetics and pessimism. Part of the reason for his inability to free himself from this frame of reference is surely due to the debt that Nietzsche's doctrine of tragedy owes to his understanding of Tristan. Despite this restriction, as we have already pointed out, Nietzsche's own concept of tragedy as religious drama took a somewhat different form, one which revolves around his distinction between the Apollinina and Dionysian art-impulses. Although struggling to free itself from ethics and resignationism,

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6. Wagner on Music and Drama, op cit. pp271-272

this doctrine nevertheless grows out of the "soil" of pessimism. In the same way it grows out of Tristan. Just as Wagner's ideas on the synthesis of poetry and music led to Nietzsche's synthesis of the Apollinian and Dionysian, so the pessimistic world view of Tristan suggests many of the themes of The Birth of Tragedy, such as the theme of sacrilege, which, although originating in pessimism, at the same time overcomes and goes beyond it. In a letter to Liszt in which he expresses his ideas on the negation of the will-to-live Wagner praises the doctrine of the Brahmins, and of Buddhism, which, he says, "expounds the myth of the creation of the world by God, but ... does not celebrate this act as a boon, but calls it a sin of Brahma which he, after having embodied himself in this world, must atone for by the infinite sufferings of this very world."<sup>7</sup> Brahma, although seen by Wagner, who follow Schopenhauer, in a pessimistic light, can be seen as the counterpart of Prometheus, who in turn is only a mask for Dionysus, who always appears to us in a variety of forms, entangled in the net of individual will and suffering the typical Dionysian suffering, dismemberment. Seen in this light the sacrileges of Prometheus and Brahma are identical. The distinction between the individual and universal wills, so important in the understanding of the origins of the Apollinian and Dionysian art-impulses respectively, is central to any understanding of the themes of Tristan, as we shall see. In Tristan the vehicle by which the universal will, or



the Dionysian, asserts itself is love. The jealousy of Aphrodite, which destroyed the hero of Euripides' tragedy, Hippolytus, is easily compared to the jealousy of Dionysus, which destroyed Pentheus in Euripides' Bacchae.

To sum up, Nietzsche did not feel, as others do, that tragedy and religious drama were mutually exclusive. In fact he regards tragedy as a necessary pre-condition to religious drama. The idea that the function of tragedy is to lead us to regard the principle of individuation as the origin of all suffering, as Nietzsche says in The Birth of Tragedy, is not far from Wagner's belief that it should lead to the negation of the will-to-live wherein the individual will is negated in favour of the universal will, represented in Tristan by a love so strong and irrational that it destroys the individuals involved. Although Wagner's tragedy leads to a resignationism, and to Schopenhauerian ethics, Nietzsche need only distort the picture a little in order to make it seem that it is beyond ethics, regarding the destruction of the values of the Day in Tristan as the destruction of all religious ethics and hypocrisy, rather than merely leading to a new ethics based upon the most radical, "Buddhistic" and "Christian", denial of the world. In other words, Nietzsche believed that the tragedy of Tristan, like the tragedy of Aeschylus, told us-- "That is your world! A world indeed!"<sup>8.</sup>

But beyond this will to self-deception on the part

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8. From Faust, cited on p72, B.T.

of Nietzsche, there is a sort of logical necessity which compels him to draw this most radical affirmation of the world and triumph of religious ecstasy out of Tristan, and out of tragedy in general. Negation always contains within itself an equal affirmation, according to certain Indian philosophers. If tragedy seems so radical a negation, ie., of the hero and of the individual, it must contain within itself an equal affirmation. That is why, for Nietzsche, the destruction of the hero is so pleasing to us. It has nothing to do with the purgation of such emotions as pity or fear. Rather it has to do with the fact that through the destruction of the hero the world is most radically affirmed-- providing, that is, that one has the strength to cope with the tragic vision. Wagner, Nietzsche believed, had that strength. He only appeared to have succumbed to resignationism. Emerging out of the fires of tragedy, out of the apparent defeat in Tristan, he re-emerged stronger than ever to write Die Meistersinger.

#### THE THEMES OF TRISTAN: LOVE AND THE UNIVERSAL WILL

Wagner borrows his theme from the art-form of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance-- the Romance. But while the artist of the Renaissance, according to Wagner, "seized only the outer surface to flee from his inner discord,"<sup>9</sup> Wagner takes the Romance and attempts to lay bare the inner drama. More than one critic, however, has noted the almost total lack of dramatic action in Tristan. Hanslick, for

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9. Wagner on Music and Drama, op cit. pl25

example, lamented the lack of plot in the first act, saying-- "where is the plot? where the actual drama? We shall certainly not be expected to accept the two subsequent acts as drama!" He goes on to speak of Wagner's "insatiable longwindedness", his "intolerably boring musical expression" and his want of dramatically motivated plots. This want of "dramatically motivated plot" led Hanslick to denounce Tristan as un-tragic; the interference of the "magical" love-potion and its purely "chemical powers" left no room for character motivation. "From a tragedy," Hanslick insists, "we demand above all that its characters act of their own free will and that they suffer and succumb accordingly. The origin of their fate must lie within themselves." The fate of Tristan and Isolde, on the other hand, "has its origin in a mistake for which neither is to blame. They are the helpless victims of a purely superficial pathological process, free of moral responsibility and thus the very opposite of the tragic heroes of a drama."<sup>10</sup>.

However, it seems that Hanslick, for all the insight of his criticism, which Wagner would have done well to listen to, does not succeed in meeting Tristan on its own ground and so condemns Tristan for failing to achieve a goal antithetical to its aims to begin with-- that is, to present us with the outer surface of dramatic action. His protest about the lack of dramatically motivated plots seems rather unjust; his charge that the love potion is a completely undramatic and un-tragic device since it repre-

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10. Eduard Hanslick, Musical Criticisms, 1846-99. trans. and edited by Henry Pleasants, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1950, p216.

sents a mere "chemical" power, rather than a psychological character motivation, does not apply to Tristan since the inner motivation which Hanslick demands is bound up with the individuality of the characters and is, in the metaphysical system of Tristan, not an inner motivation at all, but an entirely outward pretense of the principium individuationis. Without facing this metaphysical system dead on and destroying it Hanslick's criticism is ineffective.

The love potion is significant in Tristan precisely because it destroys the motivations of the individuals involved. Henceforth the individuals, Tristan and Isolde-- become mere shells, as Nietzsche would have it, Dionysian masks of a universal will. The drama is not the conflict between various motivations of the individuals, as for example, between Tristan and Isolde, Tristan and Mark, or Tristan and Melot. This drama, in so far as it was ever developed, is cut short with the drinking of the love potion. Henceforth the drama is in the conflict between the universal will, which is taking over the individuals Tristan and Isolde, and what remains of their individuality. Of course there is no drama in Hanslick's sense; the drama is acted out within (within in a very different sense than Hanslick's within). All the movements of the inmost will-- love, suffering, eternal yearning, death, night-- these are the themes that are acted out in the words and the music, especially in the music,

No other work of Wagner's is born more completely out of the "spirit of music" than Tristan. The music, Wagner

tells us, began to assert its chromatic will even before he drew up the dramatic scenario. He says that he "poured" himself out in music as if he were "writing a symphony". Tristan is, therefore, a dramatic whole even without the words, which, in any case, are often carried along by the orchestral wave, sometimes sinking in it. If we remember the role of music in Schopenhauer's philosophy, which is so prominent in Tristan, then we easily recognize that dramatic action of the kind that Hanslick is longing for is entirely contradictory to the spirit of Tristan. A dramatically motivated plot, imprisoned as it is in the relation between cause and effect, would prevent our plunge into the music, which is beyond causality. It would chain us to the characters of Tristan and Isolde as they exist in the world of Day, under the rule of the principle of individuation, the world of pretext and motivation. That is the kind of drama that Nietzsche characterizes <sup>as</sup> Euripidean, as the "un-Dionysian myth-opposing spirit" of "character representation and psychological refinement" which "reveals itself most plainly in the dénouements of the new dramas". The task of tragedy is to overcome the principle of individuation.

If Elsa in Lohengrin, therefore, was brought down by the voice of her consciousness, by the principle of individuation, by the tragic "Whence?" for which the world of Day demands an answer, Isolde will not be so defeated in her quest. By extinguishing the torch in Act II Isolde demonstrates that she extinguishes the intellect, the last trace of light,

and returns to the primitive unity, to unconsciousness and to night. This is death in the Schopenhauerian sense, the abolition of the intellect and return to a state in which there no longer exists any distinction between subject and object.<sup>11</sup> No longer can "Why?" or "Whence?" divert her from her desire for union in love. Sans writes that "le second act peut être considéré comme l'illustration des théories schopenhaueriennes sur la négation de la Volonté en ce sens que la possibilité d'une réunion des amants se fonde sur la conscience qu'ils acquièrent du caractère illusoire du monde des phénomènes."<sup>12</sup> Their own identities are included in this illusion. Thus at the end of the love-duet Isolde sings, "Tristan I," and Tristan replies "I Isolde". In another passage they praise the word "and" which connects their names and so breaks down the boundaries of their individuality. Elsewhere in the love-duet they even sing the wisdom of the Upanisads, à la Schopenhauer--

I myself  
am the world.

thus emphasizing the degree to which their love goes beyond their individuality, and so cannot be realized in the world of phenomena and illusion. The impersonal power of the love potion serves to emphasize that they are not in love so much with each other as they are in love with love.

This music of Tristan swells like a powerful tide following the movement of the universal will. A continuous melody runs through Tristan as through a symphony, pursuing

11. Edouard Sans, Richard Wagner et la pensée schopenhauerienne, Paris, C. Klincksieck, 1969 p353

12. Ibid.

a strange sort of Buddhistic nirvana. This is hardly surprising considering that Wagner, while in Venice writing Tristan, also read a history of Buddhism and planned an opera called The Victors on the life of the Buddha. Sans points out that the "transfiguration" of Tristan in the Leibestod of Isolde resembles a Buddha image. She sings--

See him smiling,  
softly, gently

and of him being born to the stars and of "wondrous strains of music" "sounding from him", and of perfumes swelling from his body into which she dives, as into the billowy surge of the ocean of sound, "in the World Spirit's Infinite, to drown now." Nietzsche speaks of this as the yearning "to be transfigured through love" and suggests that it may be the opposite tendency of the unnatural need simply to be nothing.<sup>13.</sup> although in fact Wagner described it as such in the letter to Liszt cited above.

The close connection between Love and Death, poetically embodied in the confusion between the two potions, may to some be less profound and transfiguring, however, than simply morbid, a product of the "disease of hyperaesthesia"-- the unhealthiest eros, the boundless desire for union with the infinite. If the music seems intolerably boring to some, even insufferably painful, it is because its pessimism is beyond communication to healthy minds, and its wanton pleasure in the destruction of Day, of propriety, of reason

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13. Nietzsche, Wagner at Bayreuth, § 11.

and all things "healthy", can be naught but painful-- especially as the force which destroys them, far from being a mere "chemical" power of the love-potion, is a deep metaphysical reality, a contradiction in the nature of things, which even in the most healthy mind is only glossed over, masked, so to speak, by healthy illusions. Nietzsche, therefore, gave thanks after his break with Wagner that he was once unhealthy enough to experience Tristan. Tristan is the experience of death, the experience of the Dionysian. Musically this is achieved by the use of dissonance. If, as Schopenhauer maintained, the unexpected movement into a remote key is like death, then, as one critic points out, the second and third acts of Tristan are like a continual dying. And so, indeed, should they be.

In Tristan we are presented with the psychologically profound observation that love is often experienced as a form of death. Yet we are not merely left with a psychological observation, but are given as well a metaphysical implication-- all suffering arises from individuation; the only redemption is in the denial of the Will, a manifestly Schopenhauerian philosophy. Love is the process of depersonalization, the experience that the once strong walls of the individual have broken down and, in the most extreme cases, it is the experience not simply of opening up to another individual, but to the "World's One and All", as if the sand castle of the individual had been washed away into the waves of the boundless ocean. Some confusion arises, how-



ever, due to the fact that both Tristan and Isolde remain as individuals. They are necessary for the drama. According, therefore, to what Thomas Mann calls the "pan-erotic doctrine" of Tristan, sexual desire is equated with the will-to-live. But according to Sans, Mann wrongly sees the conflict in Act II as the conflict of this eroticism with the purely spiritual needs, compounding his error by saying that it is only in the second act that this conflict is resolved in the intellectual negation of the will. In the third act, says Mann, the will is affirmed, love is affirmed.<sup>14.</sup>

Sans points out that Mann misses the distinction between individual and universal will, which in the philosophy of Schopenhauer are shown to be both in conflict with each other and at one with each other, and which in Tristan are artistically dealt with by making the identification of love with will, that is, with the universal will. The love of Tristan and Isolde has no place in the world of Day, the world of wedlock, of society, of even the most powerful of human loyalties, all of which become mere pretense and egotistical delusion, and to which the lovers become at first indifferent (as when Mark and his retainers and court make their appearance at the end of Act I) and towards which they finally become hostile (as when, after their futile attempt to realize their love in this world in Act II, Tristan throws himself on Melot's sword, beckoning Isolde to follow him in death). Their love is never consummated in this world, as

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14. Sans, op. cit. pp354-355.

it is repeatedly consummated in the medieval legend, because Wagner felt that such a love could only be consummated in death. Mark's magnanimous gesture, therefore, appears to us very shallow. He does not seem to recognize that he himself poses but a very superficial, almost symbolic, barrier between the lovers. Kurvenal's revenge on Melot, also, must appear to us as very superficial. He too fails to realize that it is neither Melot's wound nor Tristan's sorrow over the loss of Isolde that brings Tristan's death. Rather it is that very thing which Kurvenal so ardently hopes will return his lord to health-- namely Isolde's return. This is the cause of Tristan's death. The healing hand of Isolde brings not medicines and salves from her box of potions, but death. Death is the only thing that can cure Tristan from his eternal longing.

The nature of this worldly existence, as Schopenhauer shows us, is that "awakened to life out of the night of unconsciousness, the will finds itself as an individual in an endless and boundless world, among innumerable individuals, all striving, suffering, and erring; and, as if through a troubled dream, it hurries back to the old unconsciousness. Yet till then its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible, and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one. No possible satisfaction in the world could suffice to still its craving, set a final goal to its demands, and fill the bottomless pit of its heart."<sup>15</sup> In short, to sum up, what is denied by Tristan and Isolde in the second

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15. Schopenhauer, op. cit. Vol II, Ch 46, p573.

act is the individual will, characterized above by Schopenhauer as a bottomless pit of desires. What is affirmed in the third act is the universal will, characterized as the "old unconsciousness". This is achieved artistically in act III in the music. Wagner speaks of the leitmotifs of this act as "restlessly emerging, developing, separating, then again reuniting, growing, diminishing, finally clashing, embracing and well-nigh engulfing one another".<sup>16.</sup> The final clash in Tristan's heart occurs when, in his delirium,<sup>17.</sup> he gradually returns to consciousness, gradually recovers his memory. Then, in a fit of disgust with his worldly existence, he attains a higher consciousness-- and hurries back to the old unconsciousness, to return to his "own estates" and to take Isolde with him, there, only there, where their love may be consummated.

Thus might we die  
that together,  
ever one,  
without end,  
never waking,  
never fearing,  
namelessly  
enveloped in love,  
given up to each other  
to live only for love.  
18.

#### TRISTAN AND THE RE-BIRTH OF TRAGEDY IN THE MODERN WORLD

What is the significance of the Tristan themes as we have outlined them to Nietzsche's much hoped for re-birth

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16. Cited in Zuchermann, The First 100 Years of Wagner's Tristan, p19.

17. A brilliant analysis of Tristan's delirium is given by Joseph Kerman in Opera as Drama.

18. Tristan and Isolde, Act II

of tragedy? Nietzsche says that he who wishes to destroy opera must take up the fight against Alexandrian cheerfulness which has annihilated myth and made poetry homeless.<sup>19.</sup> This means, above all, destroying the scientific optimism of the theoretical man; of Socratism which originally caused the death of tragedy. Isolde's extinction of the torch in Act II, the relentless journey into Night affected by the music of Tristan and described by Wagner in his essay on Beethoven, is able to achieve such a victory over scientific optimism through an art-work. But in many ways such an art-work would have been inconceivable had not the way been prepared by others. Wagner himself acknowledged his debt to Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche says of both Kant and Schopenhauer that they "succeeded in gaining the most difficult victory, the victory over the optimism concealed in the essence of logic-- an optimism that is the basis of our culture." This optimism had believed that all the riddles of the universe could be known and fathomed, and had treated space, time and causality as entirely unconditional laws of the most universal validity."<sup>20.</sup> Theoretical man, like the builders of the Tower of Babel, attempted to take heaven by storm, and like all such attempts, their's failed and they were fittingly punished for their sacrilege by being reduced to babbling and empty logistics. Nothing short of a corruption of language is the fate of modern man. This is made clear in the second essay of Thoughts Out of Season

where Wagner is declared to be the "first to recognize an evil which is as widespread as civilization itself among men; language is everywhere diseased, and the burden of the terrible disease weighs heavily upon the whole of man's development."<sup>21.</sup> Language has retreated from its true province-- the expression of strong feeling, and has been strained toward the impossible, the communication of what is the reverse of feeling,-- thought. "Man can no longer make his misery known unto others by means of language," Nietzsche says, "hence he cannot really express himself any longer. And under these conditions, which are only vaguely felt at present, language has gradually become a force in itself which, with spectral arms, coerces and drives humanity where it least wants to go. As soon as they would, vain understand one another and unite for a common cause, the craziness of general concepts, and even of the ring of modern words, lays hold of them. The result of this inability to communicate with one another is that every product of their co-operative action bears the stamp of discord, not only because it fails to meet their real needs, but because of the very emptiness of those all powerful words and notions already mentioned."<sup>22.</sup> In this way it "oppresses the souls of artists and converts these into slaves." Convention rules, the "incorrect feeling" dominates, governs and drills them unremittingly.

Despite this rather gloomy, unfavourable verdict on the end of theoretical civilization, its adverse effect upon

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21. Wagner at Bayreuth, § 5      23. Ibid.

what is essentially the religious life of man, there seems little doubt that the cause of it, traced in The Birth of Tragedy to Socratism, is, like the sacrilege of Prometheus, a felix culpa, a fortunate crime enabling man to transcend his predicament, in this case, to transcend science, logic and philosophy. Only philosophy is able to negate philosophy. And this is the achievement primarily of Schopenhauer, who, following Kant, uses a stunningly clear logic to demonstrate the limits of logic. According to Schopenhauer, the philosopher can only infer the "idea" or the "thing-in-itself" from the objective phenomenon before him, from the facts of self-consciousness as they are to be found in everyone. Thus, Schopenhauer infers the universal by means of the will, which is, in its embodiment in individuals, that which constantly cries "I", "mine and to me", and which is therefore the root of all suffering, the principle of individuation, but which nevertheless is that which the individual has in common with every other individual-- the "will-to-live". But philosophy must confine itself to this world, to the manifestations of the universal in this world. It cannot go beyond and speak of the universal in itself, that which is beyond the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and which is inaccessible to all knowledge. Just as the poet Vergil could only lead Dante through Hell and through Purgatory, but could not lead him into Paradise, so the Philosopher's task is to lead men out of egoism and the bondage of the will, but yet not lead him beyond. Schopen-

hauer says-- "when my teaching reaches its highest point, it assumes a negative character, and so ends with a negation. Thus it can speak here only of what is denied or given up; but what is gained in place of this, what is laid hold of, it is forced... to describe as nothing."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps, Schopenhauer goes on to say, that realm is only accessible as something positive to the mystics and ascetics. Or perhaps-- to the artists.

Like Faust, such a philosopher has plumbed the depths of a well in search for water. He has heard only the hollow sound of a dry well. Amidst the "desolation and exhaustion of contemporary culture", Nietzsche says, such philosophers have come to grips with a terrible and pessimistic view of the world. "In vain we look for a single vigorously developed root, for a spot of fertile and healthy soil: everywhere there is dust and sand; everything has become rigid and languishes. One who is disconsolate and lonely could not choose a better symbol than the knight with death and devil, as Dürer has drawn him for us, the armoured knight with the iron, hard look, who knows how to pursue his terrible path, undeterred by his gruesome companions, and yet without hope, alone with his horse and dog. Our Schopenhauer was such a Dürer knight; he lacked all hope,<sup>24</sup> but he desired truth. He has no peers."

But all cultures that have outlived themselves, such as this one, must face the unerring judge, Dionysus. In

23. Schopenhauer, op. cit. Vol II, p612.

24. B.T. § 20 p123.

this sense Kant and Schopenhauer may play the role of these judges. They made it possible to destroy Socratism's complacent delight in existence by establishing its boundries.<sup>25.</sup> These two philosophers showed causality to be the work of maya, whereby mere phenomenon is elevated to the position of sole and highest reality and thus makes any knowledge of the inmost essence of things impossible.<sup>26.</sup> Now, however, "a tempest seizes everything that has outlived itself, everything that is decayed, broken, and withered, and whirling, shrouds it in a cloud of red dust to carry it into the air like a vulture."<sup>27.</sup> Science will turn into art. The chaotic mess that calls itself the present, this Alexandrian culture of librarians, will be swept away. An anti-Alexander will arise-- a man capable of "gathering up, of binding together, and joining the individual threads of the fabric" of Greek culture, of tying together, so to speak, the Gordian knot that Alexander cut in order to build his world state and culture.<sup>28.</sup> Wagner was such an anti-Alexander. A spiritual brother to Aeschylus, as Nietzsche would have us think, Wagner heralds the return of the language of correct feeling. Wagner is the reformer of language. He brings his reformation through his music.

Like Wagner, Nietzsche believed that German music was especially endowed for the task of reviving the Dionysian

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25. B.T. § 19 pl20.

26. B.T. § 20 pl23.

27. Ibid.

28. Wagner at Bayreuth, § 4.



spirit, citing the German Reformation with its "chorale of Luther sound" as that which protected Germany from the cultural fate of Alexandrian France and Italy, and which, he says, will one day reawaken German myth.<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche's rhapsody of Wagner and his "Tristanizing" thus begins, bringing us to the central issue of our analysis. In chapter two we showed that Wagner felt the need to re-theorize after the writing of Tristan. Nietzsche's process is in many ways the opposite. He must fit Tristan into the scheme of his theories on Greek tragedy and of his ardently longed for re-birth of tragedy. Tristan is, so to speak, the litmus paper by which Nietzsche must test the truth of what he is saying. It is his only concrete example or evidence of a re-birth of tragedy and he must either show it as such or lose the only solid ground on which he stands.

To many it seems as if Nietzsche is just being careless at this point, carried away by a passion to proclaim the re-birth of tragedy. Why else should he abandon his brilliant and much more respectable argument for a metaphysics of art strictly from Greek tragedy and place all his hopes in a demonstration from Tristan, which is brilliant, but much more questionable. Yet it may be that Nietzsche is not demonstrating his carelessness here so much as he is his courage. The Tristan sections seem to be more than just a footnote, a careless addition to a book whose proper subject is Greek tragedy. Greek tragedy may be the proper subject of The Birth of Tragedy, but Tristan is inevitable,

an ingredient without which the book would have been lacking something basic to it-- without which the book would have been dishonest-- a pretender, a deceiver.

Tristan is, for Nietzsche, the model example of the co-operation and proper relation between Apollinian and Dionysian art-tendencies. This, and the *nature* of its music, leads him to "take a bold running start and leap into a metaphysics of art by repeating the sentence written above that existence and the world seem justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon."<sup>30.</sup> It is the "metaphysical intention of art to transfigure" and this it does through the myth. The myth is, of course, a major factor in Wagner's art and theory. We have noted, for example, that Wagner portrayed his artistic development, from Rienzi through Lohengrin and to Tristan, as moving away from the historical and into the mythical. Lohengrin, although standing midway in this development and thus only realizing it incompletely, was a critical and decisive step in Wagner's realization of his genius.<sup>31.</sup> Nietzsche cites Lohengrin in this context, speaking of the "unexpected and totally unintelligible effect that a successful performance of Lohengrin, for example, had on" the critical barbarian; that is to say, on the theoretical man. Nietzsche says that "perhaps there was no helpful interpreting hand to guide him; so the incomprehensibly difficult and altogether in-

30. B.T. § 24 pl41.

31. Actually The Flying Dutchman was by far the biggest and most decisive step. Lohengrin, however, is a more complete and mature example of the so-called "tragic 'whence?'".

comparable sensation that thrilled him remained isolated and, like a mysterious star, became extinct after a short period of brilliance. But it was then that he had an inkling of what an aesthetic listener is".<sup>32.</sup> The inability of the modern theoretical man to experience an art-work like Lohengrin, or to retain that experience, rests upon his historical prejudice, which cannot understand myth<sup>33.</sup> and he therefore cannot surrender himself to a purely aesthetic state of mind-- for which reason he is unable to let art perform its metaphysical task of transfiguring reality.

The problem of Wagnerian art is the problem of how to make myth accessible; how to make myth effective, especially how to make myth accessible and effective for modern man, who seems so closed to it. The logical scepticism of Kant and Schopenhauer, by undermining the optimism inherent in a theoretical culture, may have prepared the way for a revitalization of myth, but the actual construction of mytho-poetical art-works remains a problem. To intellectually appreciate the limits of logic and theory is not to transcend them, as Schopenhauer shows us. Schopenhauer believed that the task of actually preceiving a higher reality was accomplished not by philosophers, but by

32. B.T. § 22 ppl34-135.

33. Myth plays an enormous role in The Birth of Tragedy. By and large myth is placed in juxtaposition to historicism and theoreticism, which represent a failure to apprehend the universal. They rest on the particular. Myth needs the particular in which to manifest the universal but at the same time it transcends the particular. Thus myth is the crucial bond between the Apollinian and the Dionysian. It shows us Dionysus, a god, the universal, suffering, become man, an individual.

mystics and ascetics. Wagner (and Nietzsche) believed it accomplished by art. The means that Wagner used to this end were primarily gigantic effects, stage effects as well as musical effects. In order to make the mass of mythical material of The Ring, for example, acceptable to the viewer, along with the enormous illogicalness and absurdity of the plot and character development (the old catch), at least the absurdity it presented on the surface, Wagner had to lull the audience into a sort of semi-conscious dream state. Psychologically speaking it means that he must open the door to the sub-consciousness and totally repress the intrusion of the consciousness, of day values. The technical question of how this is done we leave aside. We are only interested in Nietzsche's interpretation of what is done (in terms of the Apollinian and Dionysian art tendencies), and specifically we are interested in what is being done in Tristan

#### NIETZSCHE'S INTERPRETATION OF TRISTAN

On the practical level a very serious problem presented itself to Nietzsche in attempting his criticism of Tristan as a whole art work-- he had not, at the time of writing The Birth of Tragedy, had the opportunity of seeing any complete performance of Tristan. He was thoroughly familiar with the piano score by von Bülow, had heard orchestral performances of the Prelude and Liebested, and had possibly been subjected to various of Wagner's private performances of sections of the work during his visits to

Tribschen. While, therefore, Nietzsche's discussion of the Dionysian elements of *Tristan*, because an appreciation of this requires only a knowledge of the music, music being the Dionysian medium, does not disturb us, we feel slightly uneasy and unsure when he endeavours to speak authoritatively on the Apollinian elements of *Tristan*, this being primarily the medium of the stage and stage effects, including the actors, scenery and costumes.<sup>34</sup> When, therefore, Nietzsche says that "with the Apollinian art sphere he (the spectator) shares the complete pleasure in mere appearance and in seeing, yet at the same time he negates this pleasure and finds a still higher satisfaction in the destruction of the visible world of mere appearance", we may be suspicious that this is based not on a genuine experience, but on a felt need on Nietzsche's part to compensate for his not actually having seen the opera himself. As one critic says, Nietzsche "had an extrinsic reason for restricting his discussion of *Tristan* to those readers who did not need scenery and actors to help them to understand the work".<sup>35</sup> When Nietzsche says that "those who have never had the experience of having to see at the same time that they also longed to transcend all seeing will scarcely be able to

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34. This author is similarly limited. No matter how many hours may be spent listening to recordings of the opera, nothing can make up for that lack of seeing it performed on stage. Wagner himself wrestled with the disparity between the effects that he hoped and envisioned would be achieved on the stage and the often ludicrous effects that were actually produced.

35. Zuckerman, op.cit. p74

imagine how definitely and clearly these two processes co-exist and are felt at the same time as one contemplates the tragic myth", we are, I think, justified in asking whether Nietzsche can say that he has had the experience himself in respect to Tristan, or whether in respect to Tristan his experience was, in fact, the exact opposite. On the other hand, perhaps we should credit Nietzsche with enough intellectual ability and vision to make up for his lack of first hand experience. Great thinkers, like great writers, do themselves a great wrong if they confine themselves too literally to the maxim of writing only about their experiences.

In any case, Nietzsche's instruction that we should both see and long to get beyond seeing was taken seriously by the master himself. When von Bülow invited Nietzsche to attend performances of Tristan in the summer of 1872, Wagner wrote the following instruction to Nietzsche -- "Take off you glasses! You must pay attention to nothing but the orchestra."<sup>36</sup> Wagner may have had the above passage of The Birth of Tragedy in mind when giving these strange instructions. They may be interpreted to mean that Wagner wished Nietzsche to experience Tristan solely as a symphonic poem, as music alone-- which would, of course, negate all of Wagner's theories of Gesamtkunstwerk (if indeed he intended his instructions to be carried out literally).<sup>37</sup>

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36. Correspondance, op cit. p135.

37. Possibly he did. He suspected that the staging of the performance was badly done and feared that the spectacle of such a performance would detract from the otherwise good quality of the music, which was under

Symbolically, spectacles, like the torch that Isolde so resolutely extinguishes in Act II, represent the light and penetrating vision of the intellect, including the light and vision of criticism, which Wagner wished so ardently to exclude from all his art-works. Taken together, both literal and symbolic interpretations of Wagner's instruction to Nietzsche seem to stand together. Of all the elements of Tristan bent upon the destruction of the intellect, of calm reflection and interference from the consciousness, music plays the most overwhelming role. Wagner recognized this importance of music in Tristan and was willing to endanger his Gesamtkunstwerk in order to guarantee its effectiveness.

Music, as we have already seen, represented for Nietzsche the Dionysian. "Quite generally," Nietzsche says, "only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon." It is the task of music to "convince us that even the ugly and disharmonic are part of an artistic game... But this primordial phenomenon of Dionysian art is difficult to grasp, and there is only one direct way to make it intelligible and grasp it immediately: through the wonderful significance of musical dissonance... The Dionysian, with its primordial joy experienced even in pain, is the common source of music and tragic myth."<sup>38</sup>

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the capable baton of van Bülow. (See Zucherman, op cit. p74).

Continuing his discussion of musical dissonance Nietzsche offers us a picture of the metaphysical role of musical dissonance which is impossible to separate from his interpretation of Tristan.

"Is it possible," he asks, "that by calling to our aid the musical relation of dissonance we may meanwhile have made the difficult problem of the tragic effect much easier? For we now understand what it means to wish to see tragedy and at the same time to long to get beyond all seeing: referring to the artistically employed dissonances, we should have to characterize the corresponding state by saying that we desire to hear and at the same time long to get beyond all hearing. That striving for the infinite, the wing-beat of longing that accompanies the highest delight in clearly perceived reality, reminds us that in both states we must recognize a Dionysian phenomenon: again and again it reveals to us the playful construction and destruction of the individual world as the overflow of a primordial delight. Thus the dark Heraclitus compares the world-building force to a playing child that places stones here and there and builds sand hills only to overthrow them again." 39.

This is achieved in the music of Tristan, which is primarily responsible for Nietzsche's clinging to the notion that music is Dionysian. But it is also responsible for his understanding of the Apollinian. Through the music of Tristan, the destruction of the intellect, of individuality, is achieved until it is as if the listener's "visual



faculties were no longer merely a surface faculty but capable of penetrating into the interior, and as if he now saw before him with the aid of music, the waves of the will, the conflict of motives, and the swelling flood of the passions, sensuously visible..<sup>40.</sup> In this light Nietzsche's cryptic remark in Wagner at Bayreuth that in Wagner's music "sound incarnates itself in sight"<sup>41.</sup> is more understandable. In terms of the Apollinian-Dionysian synthesis what occurs is that the Apollinian comes to the aid of the Dionysian. It redeems it and it redeems dissonance. "If we could imagine dissonance become man-- and what else is man?-- this dissonance, to be able to live, would need a splendid illusion that would cover dissonance with a veil of beauty. This is the true artistic aim of Apollo."<sup>42.</sup> This incarnation of sound in sight, we may say, is the artistic parallel of the incarnation of god in man, or of the universal in the particular.

Nietzsche's analysis of the third act of Tristan reveals why it is necessary for the Apollinian to come to the aid of the spectator. He says-- "to these genuine musicians I direct the question whether they can imagine a human being who would be able to perceive the third act of Tristan and Isolde, without any aid of word and image, purely as a tremendous symphonic movement, without expir-

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40. B.T. § 22 pl30

41. Wagner at Bayreuth, § 6

42. B.T. § 25 pl43.

ing in a spasmodic unharnessing of all the wings of the soul?" The injunction to remove one's spectacles is thus reversed. Enclosed in the "wretched glass capsule of the human individual", with his ear to the "heart chamber of the world will" and feeling "the roaring desire for existence pouring from there into all the veins of the world", how could the individual, that incomplete, miserably poor manifestation of being, how could he help not shattering, as Homunculus, misled by Proteus, is shattered in Goethe's Classical Walpurgis-Night? This music is too much for us and we need the intervention of the words and actors. Wagner, in his Prelude to Tristan and Isolde, wrote that-- "Here, in music's most unrestricted element, the musician, who chose this theme as introduction to his love drama could have but one care: how to restrain himself, since exhaustion of the theme is quite impossible."<sup>43.</sup>

"Here," Nietzsche says, "the tragic myth and the tragic hero intervene between our highest musical emotion and this music-- at bottom only as symbols of the most universal facts, of which only music can speak so directly. But if our feelings were those of entirely Dionysian being, myth as a symbol would remain totally ineffective and unnoticed, and would never for a moment keep us from listening to the re-echo of the universalia ante rem. Yet here the Apollinian power erupts to restore the almost shattered individual with the healing balm of blissful illusion: suddenly we imagine we see only Tristan, motionless, asking himself

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43. Wagner on Music and Drama, op. cit. : p273

dully: 'The old tune, why does it wake me?' And what once seemed to us like a hollow sigh from the core of being now<sup>44.</sup> merely wants to tell us how 'desolate and empty the sea'". It must be remembered that the set designs of Adolphe Appia for Tristan, or any of the designs for performances of Tristan in Bayreuth in recent times, which exploit Tristan's apparent compatability with stark and simple stage settings, (the full effect of electric lighting and the use of shadows and darkness giving the setting an eerie, mysterious atmosphere and thus throwing the viewer more completely into the music) would probably not have been looked upon with favour by Wagner. It destroyed the Gesamptkunstwerk. The original settings for Tristan were as extravagant and epic as any grande opera, the tapestries, costumes and the<sup>45.</sup> Makart literalness of the scenic paintings having the effect of distracting the spectator from the music, an effect for which Wagner criticized grande opera, but which he seemed to have thought excusable, even necessary, for Tristan. This distraction is the important thing. When the viewer sees Tristan he sees him in all the epic clarity of the Apollinian illusion. So also, "where, formerly after such an excess and superabundance of consuming agonies, the jubilation of the horn cut through our hearts almost like the ultimate agony, the rejoicing Kurvenal now stands between us and this 'jubilation in itself', his face

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44. B.T. § 21 pl27.

45. Makart was Wagner's favourite painter and his style was imitated in the scenic painting for the first production of The Ring.

turned toward the ship which carries Isolde ... The glorious Apollinian illusion makes it appear as if even the tone world confronted us as a sculpted world, as if the fate of Tristan and Isolde had been formed and molded in it, too, as in an exceedingly tender and expressive material."<sup>46.</sup>

Ultimately, however, the victory of the Apollinian is short-lived. Dionysus triumphs. The climax and essence of Apollinian art-- to justify the world of the individual-- is not maintained because of the music. Indeed, the whole apparatus of the Apollinian artist seems to have been used to create something whose real purpose is to be destroyed. Like the playful child of the world-creating spirit, the artist creates illusions only for the pleasure of again knocking them down. "He beholds the tragic hero before him in epic clearness and beauty, and nevertheless rejoices in his annihilation. He comprehends the action deep down, and yet likes to flee into the incomprehensible. He feels the actions of the hero to be justified, and is nevertheless still more elated when these actions annihilate their agent. He shudders at the sufferings which will befall the hero, and yet anticipates in them a higher, much more overpowering joy. He sees more extensively and profoundly than ever, and yet wishes he were blind."<sup>47.</sup> This destruction is carried out by the myth, which is inseparable from the music. "The myth leads the world of phenomena to its limits where it denies itself and seeks to flee back again into

46. B.T. § 21 ppl27-128.

47. B.T. § 22 pl31.

the womb of the true and only reality, where it then seems to commence its metaphysical swan-song, like Isolde--

In the rapture ocean's  
billowing roll,  
in the fragrance waves'  
ringing sound,  
in the world breath's  
wafting whole--  
to drown, to sink--  
unconscious-- highest joy!"  
48.

During this final solo of Isolde the waves of orchestral sound frequently overwhelm the words. Thus this "vast Dionysian impulse then devours his entire world of phenomena, in order to let us sense beyond it, and through its destruction, the highest artistic primal joy, in the bosom of the primordially One."<sup>49.</sup> It is through this destruction that the tragic art-work is able to redeem, or, as Nietzsche says, "justify".

#### ART, RELIGION AND REALITY.

But what is, in the final analysis, behind phenomena? What is the reality, to be specific, behind the appearances

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48. In des Wonnemeeres  
wogendem Schwall,  
in der Duft-Wellen  
tönendem Schall,  
in des Weltathems  
wehendem All--  
entrinken-- versinken--  
unbewusst-- höchste Lust!

Steward Robb translates the lines "in des Weltathems/ wehendem All--" with a great deal of freedom as "in the World Spirit's/ Infinite All." Although somewhat stretching the point this brings out the feeling Nietzsche sensed in it of the "primordial One."

49. B.T. § 22 p132.

and how is it able to justify existence and the world? If the answer to this has remained puzzling and vague it is because Nietzsche is puzzling and vague. As Nietzsche confesses in his Self-Criticism, it is a "book for initiates", which speaks to those with "uncommon and rare aesthetic experiences" and which is for that reason "distant of proof, mistrustful even of the propriety of proof."<sup>50</sup>

However, we might at least make the problem clearer by clarifying what Nietzsche means by "reality". Nietzsche means, in fact, two things-- "crude reality", which he often distinguishes from the "higher reality" simply by putting inverted commas around the word, "reality"<sup>51</sup>. Reality without inverted commas designates, generally, the higher, transcendent reality, the "thing-in-itself", although one must judge, in the last analysis, according to the context in which Nietzsche uses it. Letting, for our sake, "reality" stand for "crude reality" and reality without inverted commas stand for the higher reality, what is Nietzsche saying about them?

It was the insight of Tristan, of its boundless quest, its longing even in death for raptures undreamed of, for union with the "World's infinite All", for the "primordial one", its ruthless hostility to the values of the Day, to the world of individuation and phenomena-- it was this insight which led Nietzsche, observing the lack of comprehension on the faces of the critics, to say that "our

50 B.T. Attempt at Self-Criticism, § 3 p19.

51. For example, p45, p63, p140.

aestheticians... have learned nothing of the contrast of the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself-- or, for equally unknown reasons, have not cared to learn anything about it."<sup>52</sup> Instead they use the false and entirely misleading contrast between the soul and the body. Applied to opera this means that the music represented the body and the words the soul, owing to the false belief that concepts, expressed in the words of the song, could seize reality, while the music, being light and airy, was conducive only to fantasy and illusion, in short, the body, physical "reality". Nietzsche reverses this order between music and "word-speech", and prefers instead of the contrast between soul and body the contrast between two realities, the higher reality and the crude "reality".

On this question Nietzsche praises Plato and is sympathetic with Plato's criticism of art. Nietzsche praises the Platonic distinction between the "ideal" and the "idol".<sup>53</sup> He says that it helped to keep individuals off the stage. It encouraged "ideality" in art as opposed to "realism". Plato's criticism of art was that it "is the imitation of a phantom and hence belongs to a sphere even lower than the empirical world"-- that is to say, art is twice removed from reality since it is but the image or the imitation of the phenomenal world, which is itself an illusion, being

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52. B.T. § 21 p129.

53 B.T. § 10 p73. Here again, with his usual irony, Nietzsche turns Plato's words against Socrates, for Socrates, along with Euripides, is charged by Nietzsche with bringing the individual onto the stage.

at best but the reflection of reality. And so, Nietzsche says, "we find Plato endeavouring to transcend reality and to represent the idea which underlies this pseudo-reality",<sup>54.</sup> using, Nietzsche says, a detour.

Thus, Nietzsche feels that Plato is with him when he condemns all "realism" in art, especially in music, since it does not truly approach reality, but only offers us a paltry replica of phenomena.<sup>55.</sup> For Nietzsche the question of "reality" has nothing to do with art. This crude reality of phenomena, of nature, is totally indifferent. We cannot expect to find redemption, or to justify it, merely by copying or imitating it. We must, therefore, "transfigure" nature. However, the use of concepts in art in order to escape the un-reality of an art which merely imitates has<sup>56.</sup> already been fervently condemned by Nietzsche in his critique of Euripides and Socrates. Therefore Nietzsche says that "art is not merely imitation of the reality of nature, but rather a metaphysical supplement of the reality of nature, placed beside it for its overcoming." But what does Nietzsche mean by a "metaphysical supplement"?

The metaphysical supplement is clearly music. "Quite generally, Nietzsche says in a passage we have already

54. B.T. § 14 p90.

55. The question of realism in Wagner's music is too large a problem for us here. Nietzsche came to see that much of Wagner's success came from his ability as a "tone-painter" and this disillusioned him.

58. B.T. § 24. p140.



cited, "only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon."<sup>57</sup> This is because, although one can "agitate and enliven the figure [of the drama] in the most visible manner, and illuminate it from within, it still remains merely a phenomenon from which no bridge leads us to true reality, into the heart of the world. But music speaks out of this heart; and though countless phenomena of the kind were to accompany this music, they could never exhaust its essence, but would always be nothing more than its externalized copies."<sup>58</sup>

By placing art beside the world we are able to "transfigure it. "But what," asks Nietzsche, "does it transfigure when it presents the world of appearance in the image of the suffering hero? Least of all the 'reality' of this world of appearance, for it says to us: 'Look there! Look closely! This is your life, this is the hand on the clock of your existence'."<sup>59</sup> Faced with this stark vision of our temporality we realize the unreality of appearances. But (and here the real depth of Nietzsche's difference with Plato reveals itself) the knowledge of the unreality of appearances does not lead us into the bright sunshine of reality, but into the night. Nietzsche reverses Plato's order. The bright sunshine of the Day becomes, following

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57. B.T. § 24 pl41

58. B.T. § 21 pl29

59. B.T. § 24 pl40.

the metaphysical system of Tristan, the world of appearance, of deception, deceit and pretense, while the world of Night, of shadows and dark, is the world of the higher reality. The higher reality is no longer the hospitable, life-giving, reality that it was with Plato, and therefore, music, although it presents us with the "real idea of the world", is unbearable and like to shatter us. It needs the illusion in order to be bearable. That is the lesson of Hamlet, who gaining knowledge of reality, of the "essence of things", finds himself so nauseated by it that only art can save him, since only art is capable of taming the horrible.<sup>60.</sup> Man is caught between two abysses. On the one hand is nature, the world of phenomena, which is indifferent, without purpose, not even being "accidental" since an accident presupposes a purpose from which the accident departs. On the other hand, there is the higher reality, which, however, threatens to swallow us up, to subsume us. In between these two abysses is art, the only hospitable realm for man to dwell.

It is the helplessness which Hamlet feels, his awareness that nothing he can do can change the eternal nature of things, that paralyses his capacity for action. Should the Apollinian power of illusion now come and transfigure the "reality" of appearances it would have accomplished very little for Hamlet. It would have changed only the

surface of "reality", which is "in the last analysis, nothing but a bright image projected on a dark wall, which means appearance through and through," while Hamlet remained stuck on the reality beneath appearances. And even were the "cure" successful it would only put Hamlet in the predicament of Schopenhauer's man in the boat, the man wrapped in the veil of maya.

There is only one way out of Hamlet's dilemma, which is, after all, the dilemma of all men-- and that is the sacrilege of Prometheus, the sacrilege of the creative artist. Although the reality "beneath" things cannot be changed, it can be transfigured, something is superimposed over it, which is to say that a sacrilege is committed to it. The Apollinian here is only a mask, a transfiguring mask of illusion for Dionysus. It is Dionysus who commits the sacrilege and who pays the price for the sacrilege, and we rejoice in beholding his punishment because he takes the burden off our shoulders. It is the Apollinian which makes this possible. But lest the Apollinian ("congeal the form to Egyptian rigidity and coldness" Dionysus, from time to time, destroys it, suffering within himself the suffering of dismemberment. This alternation and interplay between the Apollinian and Dionysian art-tendencies, therefore, becomes a sort of artist's game of the world-creating spirit in which we are allowed to participate as in a religious festival. Each artistic tendency is in direct

proportion to the sacrilege. The more Dionysus reveals the true picture of reality, the more the power of the illusion, of Apollo, is necessary in order to heal such "dithyrambic madness". "How much," says an old Athenian, "did this people have to suffer to be able to become so beautiful! But now follow me to witness a tragedy, and sacrifice with me in the temple of both deities!"<sup>61.</sup> Or does Nietzsche really mean to say-- "Come with me to Bayreuth to witness a music-drama and sacrifice with me at the temple of both poetry and music"?

This is the only way to man's redemption-- over reality, over the terrible abyss, art must be superimposed. This involves sacrilege, yet, it is the essence of the religious attitude. But does this justify existence? No-- and Nietzsche was the first to grasp this most profoundly. In The Gay Science he changes the formula that "it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified" and says instead-- "as an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us" and put bearable in italics to emphasize his modification.<sup>62.</sup> In this section, called Our Ultimate Gratitude to Art, he says that "if we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now comes to us

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61. B.T. § 25. pl44.

62. Nietzsche, The Gay Science, § 107.

through science-- the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation-- would be unbearable. Honesty would lead to nausea and suicide." The truth shall not make you free. This is the vision of Nietzsche's Dionysian insight. Certainly the Apollinian power of illusion, the cult of the untrue, can make this bearable, but it could not justify it. Despite Nietzsche's intention of turning around the traditional religious implication of the word "justify"-- the meaning that Luther gave it-- the power of its old meaning is too great and he undoubtedly thought it best simply to abandon the word and substitute "bearable".

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<u>Beethoven</u>	vol. 5
<u>Destiny of Opera</u>	vol. 5
<u>Opera and Drama</u>	vol. 2
<u>Religion and Art</u>	vol. 6
<u>Zukunftsmusik (The Music of the Future)</u>	vol. 3

