

The Rhetoric of Sexuality in the Age of Brahms and Wagner

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Music

Chapel Hill
2011

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Abstract

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(Under the direction of Jon Finson)

As an enduring theme in histories of nineteenth-century music, the Brahms-Wagner debate often takes the problem of form as its main thesis: it has long been cast as the struggle of “absolute” versus “program” music. Recent musicology has focused on its intersections with nationalism and politics, historicism, and the nascent fields of music history and theory. Employing a discourse analysis that reveals overlooked cultural influences, I have examined the debate through the lens of sexual rhetoric employed in music criticism, such as Wagnerian attacks on the “chaste” Brahms, or the accusations of “wanton lust” in Wagner. By incorporating documents that relate music explicitly to sexuality, gender roles, and notions of the body, I argue that we reassess the debate as a fundamental struggle between sensuality (*Sinnlichkeit*) and purity (*Reinheit*) in music. This global approach extends the debate beyond traditional generic boundaries and modes of scholarly inquiry, and contextualizes it against cultural ideas of sexuality, purity, and the women’s emancipation movement.

To my parents

Acknowledgements

Many people and organizations have helped me research and write this dissertation. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor, Jon Finson, for his encouragement, advice, and attention to detail; he struck a fine balance between guiding me and allowing me to explore my ideas, for which I am grateful. Other committee members—Mark Evan Bonds, Annegret Fauser, Severine Neff, and Felix Wörner—devoted their time and care to helping me improve the dissertation. My scholarship has also benefited from conversations with Kevin Karnes, Daniel Beller-McKenna, Marcia Citron, Eva Rieger, Rick Cohn, Ryan Minor, Dörte Schmidt, and many others.

My final year of writing was supported by the Karl Geiringer Scholarship in Brahms Studies, granted by the American Brahms Society. I was able to conduct research thanks to a fellowship from the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies, which allowed me to spend ten months in Berlin. Our program director Karin Goihl and the other interdisciplinary fellows made seminars both enjoyable and stimulating. The Berlin Program also funded my research trips to Munich, Vienna, Dresden, and Leipzig, where I had the pleasure of working with the librarians at the Louise Otto-Peters Archive. In addition, UNC-CH's own Graduate and Professional Student Federation provided me funds to present dissertation research internationally.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge those who have given me the most moral support through the years: my friends, colleagues, and family. Thanks are due to Anne

Rebull and Sarah Summers, whose insightful comments helped me improve both ideas and prose. My colleagues at UNC were always there to help me through the ups and downs of this journey, and coffee breaks with librarian Phil Vandermeer were a welcome escape from everyday hassles. On the subject of coffee, I offer special thanks to John Nádas, who shared not only countless lunches and coffees with me, but also his wisdom, humor, and appreciation for Brahms. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, who introduced me to music and encouraged me to develop my passion for it into a scholarly pursuit.

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List of Abbreviations

ADF *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*

AmZ *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*

JAMS *Journal of the American Musicological Society*

NZfM *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*

VMS *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*

Chapter One: Introduction

On one hand, music is the most formless and intangible of all arts, on the other, it is the most material of all. Its perception alone is considered an enjoyment. It can be slurped up like champagne foam and, of all the arts, it exercises the greatest and most direct effect upon sensual people.¹

With this statement, Wilhelm Mohr, writing in 1872, summarized the two prevailing aesthetic views of music in his time. The paradox that music existed simultaneously as both the most formless and most material of arts exercised a profound influence on the aesthetic disputes of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Though this paradox had manifested itself in various conceptualizations of music from ancient philosophers onward, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it appeared in a heated, politically-tinged debate over sensuality and purity in music. These competing elements may best be traced through the subtle thread of sexual and gendered rhetoric in music criticism, which reveals deep-seated cultural constructions of music and its effects on listeners.

Analyzing the sexual rhetoric helps to recontextualize the debate in terms that provide more historical context concerning social and gender roles, as opposed to prevailing scholarly models of analysis that privilege form or politics. This also helps us expand the analysis beyond generic problems of “absolute” or “program” music into the broader terrain of musical style. Genre-related studies can reinforce the conceptual

¹ “Von der einen Seite die körperloseste und ungreifbareste aller Künsten, ist die Musik von anderen Seite die materiellste von allen. Ihre Perception allein wird als Genuss bezeichnet. Sie lässt sich einschlürfen wie Champagnerschaum und übt von allen Künsten die unmittelbareste und grösste Wirkung auf den sinnlichen Menschen aus.” Wilhelm Mohr, *Das Gründerthum in der Musik. Ein Epilog zur Bayreuther Grundsteinlegung* (Cologne: M. DuMont-Schauberg’schen Buchhandlung, 1872), 31–32.

dichotomy between absolute and program music while eschewing the rich implications of sexual and gendered rhetoric at play in the music criticism. In particular, this rhetoric demands a more nuanced approach that questions the dichotomy of “masculine” and “feminine” prevailing in gender-related studies of this period. The present discourse analysis suggests that we understand the aesthetic debate in terms of sensuality and purity, licentiousness and chastity, and their concomitant shades of meaning.

Notwithstanding methodological differences, scholars generally agree on the historical outlines of the aesthetic conflict, commonly known as the “Wagner-Hanslick” debate, or the “War of the Romantics,” terms that suggest a personality-based framework of understanding.² The strife began around mid-century, in conjunction with the revolutionary stirrings of the late *Vormärz*, when composers and music critics such as Richard Wagner began agitating for reformed musical works that would reflect the mood of the times and inspire people to work towards a future utopia. These so-called progressives, who relied on Young Hegelian philosophy, styled themselves as leaders of the new art, and became known in musical circles in the late 1850s as the *Neudeutsche Schule* (New German School). Wagner, in particular, demanded a musical art that would more completely unite different types of art (poetry, dance, music). This *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he argued, represented the next logical, progressive step in a long developmental line of German music. His “Zürich Writings,” which were undertaken in exile due to his activities in Dresden, and which include *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849), *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849), *Oper und Drama* (1850), and *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (1851), offer a core philosophy inspired by revolutionary

² See Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, vol. 2, 1848–1861 (New York: Knopf, 1983).

ideals, and by Feuerbachian notions of sensuality in particular. These ideas drew attention as the critic Franz Brendel and his cohorts promulgated Wagner's theories and similar ideas in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and other journals, sometimes beyond the realm of musical specialists.

Engaged in this environment of heightened criticism was a new generation of young composers. Many of them associated with Franz Liszt and formed a school in Weimar, dubbed the "Neu-Weimar Verein" in 1854. Responding to the precedent set by Schiller and Goethe in first part of the century, this group attempted to provide music and the arts with a revitalized platform of progress. Its members included Joachim Raff, Alexander Ritter, Eduard Remenyi, Hans von Bülow, Carl Tausig, Peter Cornelius, as well as other artists. Many of these composers would constitute the "New German School" when Franz Brendel invented the title in 1859.

Reform-minded artists such as Brendel took the *Neue Zeitschrift* as their journalistic platform for expressing ideas. The journal often ran articles with tones of self-righteous suffering: those who truly understood the situation of music and its future were far and few between. Those who opposed the musicians of the future were thus inhibitors of "progress." Of course, for one party of a political debate to decry the other as impeding progress is nothing new, but this situation is noteworthy for its political overtones. Other composers such as Robert Schumann, who had seemed to be involved with musical progress, had failed to take part in politics as fully as the self-designated progressives desired, and thus came to be viewed as adversaries on both aesthetic and political grounds. Certainly Wagner, who had been forced into exile, might have been resentful toward Schumann and his comfortable post in Düsseldorf, where Schumann

persisted in writing music that seemed to be a step backwards from his more avant-garde works of the 1830s.

Backlash to the “Music of the Future” came not only from musical institutions such as conservatories, but also from leading composers such as Robert Schumann, who had in mind a different type of musical future that made its debt to tradition more audible. This side promoted a less clearly defined set of values, but they could find common ground in their skepticism about the efficacy, quality, and aesthetic justifications of Wagner’s and Liszt’s proposed new art.³ Composers generally depended on more traditional formal structures and fewer successions of chromatic harmonies in their music, whereas critics adhered more closely to Hegelian notions of ideal art.⁴ Eduard Hanslick made one of the most significant and long-lasting contributions to the debate in 1854 with the publication of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*.⁵ In this aesthetic treatise, he argued that music could not represent feelings and should be contemplated as beautiful without reference to extra-musical elements. Thus, despite Hanslick’s own support of Wagner in the early 1840s, he came to be known as the main critic of Wagner’s own revolutionary theories and his stage works; indeed, Hanslick continued to publish anti-Wagnerian criticism well into the 1880s.

³ Of course, though Wagner and Liszt allied artistically in the mid 1850s, they too experienced deep-seated aesthetic and cultural differences on the direction of music. For more on their competing aesthetic views, see *Franz Liszt und Richard Wagner: Musikalische und Geistesgeschichtliche Grundlagen der Neudeutschen Schule: Referate des 3. Europäischen Liszt-Symposiums, Eisenstadt 1983*, ed. Serge Gut (Munich: Katzschler, 1986); John Williamson, “Progress, Modernity and the Concept of an Avant-garde,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 287–317; Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*.

⁴ For more on the philosophical distinctions between groups of critics see Sanna Pederson, “Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

⁵ Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1854).

Robert Schumann had introduced the twenty-year old Johannes Brahms to the musical world in the *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1853, the year preceding Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*. Schumann's article, "Neue Bahnen," made a timely appearance in this politically-charged critical atmosphere, and its messianic rhetoric would influence the debate and the particular reception of Brahms for decades afterward. Though known initially as a composer of chamber music, Brahms would come to the foreground in the 1870s as the leading antipode to Wagner.

Although scholars agree on these general points, they diverge in the interpretive structures of various narratives constructed from them. Even the main players in the debate can vary from generation to generation, composer to composer, but narratives usually include Wagner, Brahms, Hanslick, Liszt, and later Bruckner, Mahler, and Richard Strauss. For the purposes of this project, the time period is limited to 1848–1883, the beginning of the revolutions to Wagner's death. Though the strand of rhetoric developed continually as the *fin de siècle* approached, this timeframe highlights the nature of its development and its intersection with Wagner reception during his lifetime.

Historiography

Historiography of this conflict is necessarily deep and far reaching, but studies may be organized according to basic themes that emerge. Due to the broad cultural, political, and social resonances of this musical debate, scholars have taken a variety of methodological lenses to analyze the nature of the ideological conflict in this period.⁶ The dominant

⁶ See, for example, the literature treating Brahms as "progressive," as an historicist academic, or some combination of both. Arnold Schoenberg, "Brahms the Progressive," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 399–409; Thomas Krehahn, *Brahms der fortschrittliche Akademiker: das Verhältnis der Tradition und Innovation bei*

historiographical narrative depicts the conflict in terms of formalist aesthetics, often informed by general notions of political categories that appeared to influence these aesthetics. Recent musicological work has eschewed grand historical narratives and focused instead on composers' works within certain cultural trends and contexts such as historicism, memory, commemoration, religion, and nationalism. While Wagner scholars tend to focus on political and philosophical contexts for the composer's writings and stage works, Brahms scholars more often situate their composer in terms of historicism, nostalgia, and Viennese politics.⁷ Most studies of this period still focus on one composer, despite the obvious overlap in their musical circles and their awareness of other developments in the music world. Although many such studies rely on print sources in the public realm, scholars have overlooked the broader cultural implications of polemical rhetoric involving sexual or gendered meanings.

For years, the standard narrative of this debate was built on the opposition of Wagnerian music drama and program music on the one hand, and "absolute music" (*absolute Musik*) on the other. Scholars have devoted much effort to understanding the precise meaning and function of the term "absolute" in the musical-critical discourse of the nineteenth century, building on the work of Carl Dahlhaus, who saw a paradigm shift in the replacement of vocal music by symphonies and string quartets as the highest goal

Johannes Brahms (Munich: Musikverlag Katzschler, 1998); John Daverio, "Fin de siècle Chamber Music and the Critique of Modernism," in *Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling, *Studies in Musical Genres and Repertoires*, ed. R. Larry Todd (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 349–50.

⁷ For recent examples, see Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Thomas Krehahn, *Der fortschrittliche Akademiker*; Mark Jon Burford, "The Real Idealism of History: Historical Consciousness, Commemoration, and Johannes Brahms's 'Years of Study'" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2005).

in music.⁸ The continued historiographical focus on the term “absolute music,” however, risks a reduction focusing on genre, a reduction that misses the cultural implications of much critical rhetoric employed in the debate. Sanna Pederson’s discussion of the term brings this problem to the foreground in her attempts to organize genres of music into “absolute music,” “music drama,” “program music,” and hybrids thereof.⁹ This succeeds in showing how ineffectively the term functions as a conceptual distinction for actual pieces of music. As Daniel Chua writes, “What is the essence that so powerfully discriminates between what is and is not Music? . . . When asked to disclose the criteria for musical purity, absolute music deliberately draws a blank.”¹⁰ Indeed, contemporaries too were aware of the limitations of genre and its application to absolute music. It was possible for symphonies to be too “theatrical,” as the reception of Max Bruch’s First Symphony demonstrates, or for Lieder to be composed by “absolute” musicians, as in the case of Robert Schumann.¹¹

As Sanna Pederson and Mark Evan Bonds note, the word “pure” (*rein*) occurs far more often in the debate than “absolute;”¹² indeed, Pederson has even called for a

⁸ See Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁹ Sanna Pederson, “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically,” *Music & Letters* 90 (2009), 240–62.

¹⁰ Daniel K. L. Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

¹¹ See Jürgen Thym, “Schumann in Brendel’s *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* from 1845–56,” in *Mendelssohn and Schumann: Essays on their Music and its Context*, ed. Larry Todd and Jon Finson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 21–36.

¹² Sanna Pederson, “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically,” *Music & Letters* 90 (2009), 240–62; and Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

“history of pure music.”¹³ Such a history has yet to be written, but exploring the implications and historical associations of “pure music” offers a new lens through which to view the debate, a lens that brings into focus cultural influences beyond the problems of form and musical autonomy.

While the goal of the present study is not to present a comprehensive history of pure music, it should establish an important shift in value judgments concerning pure music that took place over the course of the nineteenth century in relation to Wagnerian notions of sensuality and their reception. This illustrates how the rhetoric of a morally positive purity became a tool of derogatory attack that Wagnerian composers and critics aimed against their ideological opponents after mid-century. In the early part of the century, the concept of *Bildung* heavily influenced the conceptualization of music and its function, and notions of *Kunstreligion* helped imbue the discussion of musical styles with quasi-religious rhetoric.¹⁴ In addition, as seen in the writings of Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut and E.T.A. Hoffmann, the rhetoric of purity often appeared in praise of early music, especially that of the sacred polyphonic variety. The residual value judgments of this rhetoric remained in the impetus towards an “absolute” instrumental music that developed during the debates at mid-century.

With the revolutions of 1848, a host of other political, cultural, and historical influences shaped the notion of purity in response to Wagner’s operatic reforms, which emphasized a sensual artwork that would speak directly to the *Volk*. This sensuality,

¹³ Sanna Pederson, “The Missing History of Absolute Music,” paper presented at National Meeting of American Musicological Society Québec City, Nov. 2, 2007.

¹⁴ See David Gramit, *Cultivating Music: The Aspirations, Interests, and Limits of German Musical Culture, 1770–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

which was rooted in Feuerbach's philosophy, theorized in sexualized language by Wagner in his treatises, and embodied in his stage works, proved threatening to some critics and music lovers. Their "pure music" did not have the negative connotations of "absolute music" that Wagner implied when he first coined the phrase as a conceptual foil to his *Gesamtkunstwerk*; rather, for many music lovers, critics, and composers, the art-religious impulse of the early nineteenth century intensified as certain music assumed an almost salvational role. The rhetoric of purity and the accompanying moral implications associated with early religious music remained strong and were also (dis)placed onto instrumental music as articulated most famously by Eduard Hanslick in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854). Thus, the intensification of the moral force of purity may be seen as a response to the threat posed by Wagner, whose works were often cast as immoral and unhealthy by opponents.¹⁵ On the other hand, the negative reception of musical "purity" by some Wagner-supporting critics demonstrates how some musical characteristics were considered too "chaste," and that the apparent sanctification of certain musical styles and modes of thinking became a thing of ridicule.

Thus, "pure" does not function as a mere synonym for "absolute," even if some critics may have attempted to construct an *a priori* idealized purity without reference to its opposite: impurity and the threat of defilement. It captures more of the deep cultural associations and values that influenced the debate, and it invites the analysis of gendered values in the musical-critical discussion; i.e., how was purity gendered in different contexts? At the same time, it frees us from the strictures of generic distinctions that can obscure the relevance of these cultural issues when the scholarly focus turns to answering

¹⁵ This will be explored more in depth in Chapter Three.

questions such as “can *Lieder* be absolute music?” Understanding the web of meanings associated with purity helps explain how Brahms’s *German Requiem* and his string quartets might be received with similar praise on one side and derision on the other.

Because much of the rhetoric of purity responded to stylistic markers of “early music,” such as fugue and canon, this study also deals heavily with attitudes towards the musical past. Nineteenth-century German interest in the past is often understood through the conceptual frameworks of historicism and nationalism. Along with the development of a general German history and national culture, the concept of the musical tradition and the performance canon came into being, and composers often incorporated tropes of tradition into their works in order to secure their places in the lineage of great composers. Subsequently, scholars have considered these musical tropes in relation to nationalist modes of commemoration and monumentalism. In this way, Ryan Minor interprets the fugue in Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* as a communal “fashioning of the future” through an embrace of the past.¹⁶ Likewise in her work on the Bach revival in Berlin, Celia Applegate accords nationalism the leading role in the appreciation and creation of a German musical tradition.¹⁷ Thus, “historicist” composers such as Mendelssohn and later Brahms assume the role of nationalist heroes reviving and reinventing the past in order to strengthen German culture in the face of morally suspect foreign influences.¹⁸ Recently,

¹⁶ Ryan Minor, “National Memory, Public Music: Commemoration and Consecration in Nineteenth-Century German Choral Music” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005), 98–99.

¹⁷ Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn’s Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ See, for example, *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives: Papers Delivered at the International Brahms Conference, Washington, DC, 5–8 May 1983*, ed. George Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Imogen Fellinger, “Brahms und die Musik vergangener Epochen,” in *Die Ausbreitung des Historismus über die Musik*, ed. Walter Wiora (Regensburg: Bosse, 1969).

Daniel Beller-McKenna has argued that the Brahms-Wagner debate itself fails to be meaningful when studied from a nationalist perspective because it has created a false dichotomy of a German Wagner and a non-German Brahms: in reality, both composers were products of a nationalist age in which German culture was prized as supreme.¹⁹

Despite agreement on the lesser value of foreign musical influences, within German music a battle raged over the proper way to construct a German musical tradition and how to continue it into the future. Indeed, the relation of the musical past to the present takes an ambiguous turn at mid-century with the Young Hegelian, revolutionary influence of Wagner and Franz Brendel, both of whom tried to reinterpret the past in terms of a “Music of the Future.” With this change, the musical past and its styles assumed a pressing moral importance for those who understood Wagner’s reforms to be threatening, and the rhetoric of purity functioned in the discourse not simply as a nationalist indicator, but as a weapon in a high-stakes moral battle over proper German art.

Understanding the debate in terms of purity and sensuality also provides an alternative framework to the famous progressive-conservative dichotomy. Thanks to the proliferation of revolutionary rhetoric around mid-century, the ensuing musical-critical debate has come, rather confusingly, to be known as a struggle between “progressives” and “conservatives,” following the terminology and its value judgments in Wagner’s own writings. “Progress” is a problematic term, and was recognized as such even in its day. Musicologists still often use “progressive” to describe wide-ranging aspects of the

¹⁹ Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

musical world from Wagner to Brahms, including aspects of musical style, ideologies, and political leanings.²⁰ But between 1848 and Wagner's death in 1883, the German, let alone Austrian, political situation reflected a complicated and conflicting range of political beliefs which changed over time; the terms "progressive" and "conservative" barely reflect even Wagner's own art-political views in the period and do not lend themselves to easy situation within a historical context. They were certainly influential during the 1850s, but the terms "progressive" and "conservative" do little to help us understand music aesthetics during the entire length of the debate, which lasted from the revolutions well into the *Kaiserreich*.

Wagner often takes center stage in studies that focus on the relation of music to national trends, due to Wagner's own outspokenness on political issues, his anti-Semitism, and the strong political component informing much of his contemporary reception. Indeed, the field of Wagner studies has incorporated a range of socio-historical contexts, especially in relation to nationalism, the 1848/9 revolutions, and also more cultural phenomena, such as notions of degeneracy, sickness, and homosexuality. As I argue in Chapter Three, these latter analytical contexts help us understand his reception more generally and also demonstrate the influence of his sensual, revolutionary-era theories modified from Feuerbach. Pederson has noted the influence of Feuerbach's

²⁰ Some effort has gone into undermining the dichotomy suggested by these political terms. Since Schoenberg's famous "Brahms the Progressive" radio address in 1933 and its subsequent publication, Brahms, once the arch-conservative, has come to be accepted as a progressive in terms of musical techniques such as developing variation. Likewise, Margaret Notley's work on Brahms and the political climate of Vienna in the 1880s and 1890s demonstrates that the dying breed of liberals believed in scientific ideals of progress and held more tolerant views than many of the Wagner-supporting Christian democrats at the time. See Arnold Schoenberg, "Brahms the Progressive"; Margaret Notley, "Brahms the Liberal: Genre, Style, and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna," *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 107–23.

“anthropological approached based on the immediacy of sensory experience.”²¹

Likewise, George C. Windell mentions Wagner’s adoption of the Feuerbachian belief in the creative power of sexuality.²² But these scholars have not reconciled this method of philosophical-aesthetic analysis of Wagner with the gender studies/sexual cultural studies approach, despite the connection between the two. Laurence Dreyfus, in his work on the erotic impulse in Wagner, argues that Feuerbach’s conception of a “chaste” love contrasted with Wagner’s own sexual nature, and he focuses on Schopenhauer’s influence instead.²³ However, the influence of Feuerbach’s ideas on Wagner’s general views of sensuality deserves more attention.

When musicologists approach the music of this period in respect to sexuality or gender, they often focus on the reception of female performers or the reception of specific musical works. Moreover, they tend to rely on existing theoretical claims about the dichotomized nature of “masculine” and “feminine” values in relation to music and specific musical characteristics. A majority of their work so far has focused on how these characteristics play out in certain pieces of music. This method often involves reading contemporary reviews for gendered rhetoric then applying it to musical elements in a piece of music; perhaps one of the most famous case studies of this nature is Susan McClary’s work on Brahms’s Third Symphony, in which she argues that the “feminine

²¹ Pederson, “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically,” 242.

²² George C. Windell, “Hegel, Feuerbach and Wagner’s Ring,” *Central European History* 9 (1976): 27–57.

²³ See Laurence Dreyfus, *Wagner and the Erotic Impulse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), especially 50–65.

second theme” of the first movement represents a threat to normalized masculine sexuality as represented by the first theme.²⁴

Although such studies help us think about music in terms of its historical social context, they often rely on too much reduction and only offer a model for analyzing music in terms of basic characteristics—a model which implies a predetermined result that the “masculine” will always triumph over the feminine characteristics. For example, Susan McClary and Lawrence Kramer propose an ongoing conflict between the masculine and the feminine in music, either through the narrative of sonata form, or through the violent aesthetics of the “lovedeath.”²⁵ In *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, Catherine Clément makes the famous argument that opera reinforces social fears of women; it suppresses their seductive powers and requires their deaths. As for musical characteristics of the feminine, she claims “Isolde dies as only a woman can die, by small intervals”—as if chromaticism were the exclusive domain of women.²⁶ More recently, Iitti Sanna’s *The Feminine in German Song* suggests a wide range of feminine characteristics, at the expense of masculine ones.²⁷ Through the chapters, we learn that the “feminine” in music was related to chromaticism (Carmen), diatonicism (Micaela),

²⁴ Susan McClary, “Narrative Agendas in Absolute Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony,” in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 337.

²⁵ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Lawrence Kramer, *After the Lovedeath: Sexual Violence and the Making of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁶ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 57.

²⁷ Iitti Sanna, *The Feminine in German Song* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

exoticism, soft and melodic music, but also “improvisation and predominant rhythm.”²⁸ These designations cover almost every conceivable characteristic in the nineteenth-century musical language, and leave little room for the masculine. In addition, such studies often focus on the work of one composer or another, and have not focused yet on the rhetoric in the debate as a whole.

Few studies have begun preliminary work on sexual rhetoric of later nineteenth-century music criticism beyond the context of reception of specific pieces. Susan McClary has made general claims that Hanslick’s theory of the autonomous artwork was conceived in fear of the sexual power of music, yet this idea is not fully explored in her work. In that same article she contradicts her own model of sonata form by ignoring the implications of the “feminine” secondary theme refusing to submit to the “masculine” tonic in the recapitulation.²⁹ However, analyzing musical representations of the feminine and masculine is different from analyzing the way critics used sexualized rhetoric to discuss music and the musical-political parties in general terms.

The masculine-feminine dichotomy does not account for all of the rhetorical nuances of the mid nineteenth-century criticism, in which chastity and virtue are criticized on one side, and lust on the other. The reduction of one side or the other to “masculine” or “feminine” is too simplistic, because those designations will change depending on which critic one reads, and few critics made explicit connections to “feminine” or “masculine.” One study focusing on this dichotomy is Ian Biddle’s

²⁸ The reasoning is that feminine was linked with “chaos” and the pathological, and Hanslick had deemed improvisation and predominant rhythm to be pathological. *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁹ Susan McClary, “Narrative Agendas in Absolute Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony,” 337.

analysis of Schumann's review of the *Symphonie fantastique* where he claims that Schumann constructs a masculine-feminine dichotomy by feminizing France and masculinizing Germany.³⁰

To some extent, musicologists have argued that the conservative emphasis on musical logic, and especially Eduard Hanslick's aesthetics in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854), represented an attempt to divorce music from its "feminine" characteristics of emotional communication. However, Hanslick was not "conservative" in this musical theory; ironically, he was the most radical theorist of his time, and inspired many heated responses from others, some of whom were themselves portrayed as conservatives in the musical press. On the other hand, some men wrote that music *was* Eros, and that there was no problem that Wagner's operas should portray sensual love.³¹ This embracing of what musicologists traditionally regard as "feminine" and therefore, bad, elements of music offers a more complicated picture of how music was valued in terms of gender mores. An alternative approach analyzes the ideological conflict in terms of an emerging acceptance of sexuality as expressed in music and the reaction to it; i.e., in terms of the competing notions of sensuality and purity.

Defining Terms

Exploring the contemporary criticism for the instances of sexual rhetoric reveals a larger current of debate on the problem of sensuality in music. I define sensuality broadly, as physical and related to the senses, rooted in the body and in gesture, with emotional and

³⁰ Ian Biddle, "Policing Masculinity: Schumann, Berlioz, and the Gendering of the Musical-Critical Idiom," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 124 (1999): 196–220.

³¹ Rudolf Benfey, "Die Mittel des Tonreiches nach Inhalt und Form," *NZfM* 64 (1867), 243–44.

physical reactions to music, and by implication, with sexuality and morality. One of the most revolutionary and unsettling aspects of Wagner's theories was their grounding in a Feuerbachian notion of sensuality; a belief that the voice, and thus the expression of emotion, originates in the body, the gesture, and the senses.³² Thus, Wagner's reforms and his music dramas presented a fundamental reclamation of art based upon the sensual as opposed to the abstract, of which the most notable defense came from Eduard Hanslick in his treatise *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*. Though both Hanslick and Wagner modified their ideas over time, the initial radical terms they established in the early 1850s filtered through the critical realm and took on their own lives in the discourse.³³ Notions of sensuality pervaded music criticism through the second half of the nineteenth century, though they took different forms in discussions of performance, composition, virtuosity and improvisation, as well as listener response to music.

As this basic debate over sensuality and abstraction developed in the wake of the 1848/9 revolutions, it assumed a pressing moral component. Thus, "pure" music, its rhetorical roots in the early music revival of the early nineteenth century, developed as an ideological counterpart to Wagnerian notions of sensuality at mid-century. Though pure music did not usually involve text or program (much like today's better-known "absolute" music), the term "pure" was applied more generally to a compositional style based on tonal counterpoint, lacking in ornate lines, colorful orchestration, and chromatic

³² See Wolfgang Wahl, *Feuerbach und Nietzsche: Die Rehabilitierung der Sinnlichkeit und des Leibes in der deutschen Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Ergon, 1998).

³³ Wagner scholarship generally adheres to a standard view of Wagner as initially influenced by Feuerbach in the 1840s, then by Schopenhauer in the 1850s. For the difference between Hanslick's views and his critical practice, see Kevin Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History: Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

harmonies. Supporters of “pure” music considered it spiritually uplifting as opposed to the threatening, morally suspect sensual music.

Focusing on the extreme rhetorical strategies as seen in remarks about Wagner’s “animalistic sensuality,” or in Wagner’s own attacks on Brahms, “Holy Johannes,” reveals deep-seated fears and beliefs about the nature of music and people’s reactions to it.³⁴ When considered with related discussions of “music as Eros,” or the analogies between musical creativity and sexual potency, this reveals an ideological divide that reached beyond the boundaries of musical and political aesthetics. Supporters of the Wagnerian reforms valued the sensual for its immediate communicative power and for its expression of emotion, especially human love, at the same time devaluing abstract, pure music as “impotent,” chaste, and unexpressive.

Methods and Sources

This strand of rhetoric is not present in every music review, feuilleton, or theoretical piece, and thus represents an extreme type of rhetorical device used to inflame public opinion in the already hotly-contested debate. However, I argue that especially outrageous statements can reveal as much to us about music culture in the period as the many mainstream pedestrian declarations of music’s depth, truth, feeling, and other such common-place statements. Situating these statements within a larger cultural discourse,

³⁴ Quoting Eduard Hanslick, “...Die treibenden Motive in Rheingold sind durchwegs Betrug, Lüge, Gewalt und thierische (!) Sinnlichkeit; sogar bei den Göttern; Habsucht, List und Vertragsbruch.” “Nibelungen-Referate,” *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 7 (1876), 519; Richard Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” in *Richard Wagners Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: C.F. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 332. All translations are mine unless cited otherwise.

therefore, requires knowledge of the trends in other arts as well as political and social movements. They reveal deeper attitudes about music, creativity, and sexuality in a period when these issues were at the foreground of social consciousness.

Sources for this project stem mainly from the musical-critical realm, which saw increasingly more and more journals through the 1870s. The growing bourgeois culture and the high place of music within notions of *Bildung* helped produce an increasing demand for music publications such as specialist journals, newspapers, and individual treatises and pamphlets. Within daily newspapers, feuilletons also reported on new musical projects and performances. While it is important to take into account the opinions and biographical circumstances of individual critics, it is beyond the scope of this project to analyze this information for every one who produced a musical review. While the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw an increasing split between amateur and professional music making, between amateur and specialist music research and theorization, many of the sources in the public sphere were written by the educated burghers who were involved in music, but not for a living. Literary authors, feminist rights activists, jurists, lawyers, doctors as well as music professors, musicians, and composers contributed to the debate and its culture-historical theorizations. I try to offer background information and social context for the writers whose works I analyze in depth, but will not be focusing on a certain set of music critics, since few were actually professional music critics.

While the thread of sexual rhetoric constitutes the over-arching organizational principle, within that larger category, sources are organized by subtopic rather than by specific musical piece. Eschewing case studies organized by “great-work” reception

history allows us to see more general trends that may or may not be related to specific works by Wagner or Brahms. For example, examining reception of Brahms as a priest of music, in both its positive and negative guises, offers more insight into the cultural values that shaped music criticism in subtle ways and shows how modes of critical thinking extended beyond the boundaries of piece- and genre-specific reception.

Discussions of music appearing in non-music sources, such as newspapers and journals devoted to other topics also help to illuminate how musical values were shaped in ways for non-specialists. After all, there were very few professional music critics during this period, and many of them brought their own specialties and causes into the critical discussion. Critics used metaphors and analogies relating music to other arts, such as the numerous comparisons between Wagner and the painter Hans Makart. For example, women's rights activists such as Louise Otto contributed music reviews and feuilletons to journals for women readers; such pieces might focus on the portrayal of female characters in Wagner operas or stereotypes about "women's music."

The wealth of music criticism demonstrates that although there existed a theoretical dichotomy between men's and women's spheres, the qualities of purity and sensuality could cut across it. The three decades between 1850–80 constitute a transition period during which the cultural struggle about religion, sexuality, and gender roles complicated notions of the masculine and feminine. The nature of music itself, with its generally acknowledged ability to appeal to emotions and its early nineteenth-century background as an intimate art in salons or chambers, helps to complicate notions that the creation of music could be (or was preferably) an entirely masculine endeavor. In addition, music critics often recognized the more fluid nature of gendered musical values

and argued that musicians needed both feminine and masculine characteristics to communicate most effectively.

As always, the proliferation of various ideals of musical gendered values suggests that there was no consensus on the status of what constituted “masculine” or “feminine” behaviors or characteristics. The historian Karin Schmersahl has argued in her work on nineteenth-century psychological history that the women’s rights movement at mid-century helped produce a backlash of more conservative writings that attempted to define masculine and feminine norms against a “sick” other.³⁵ This movement also had effects on the understanding of musical values, seen in the reaction of some critics to the support of Wagner by women’s rights activists. The notion that gender roles are acted and continually constructed and reconstructed thus offers a guiding principle through my research. Though I offer that we understand the musical-critical debate in terms of sensuality and purity, I argue that these terms should not be mapped onto a pre-existing feminine-masculine dichotomy of gendered values. As I hope to show, this dichotomy itself continually underwent challenge and redefinition.

Organization

Chapter Two of the dissertation focuses on the concept of musical “purity” and how it was related conceptually to the revival of early music in the first half of the century, which was considered spiritually healthy for the amateur performers who took part in it. The focus on contested value judgments associated with musical purity reveals how the notion of musical purity underwent change, and it helps support a reassessment of “absolute” music. I begin with early nineteenth-century notions of a healthy, pure church

³⁵ Katrin Schmersahl, *Medizin und Geschlecht: Zur Konstruktion der Kategorie Geschlecht im medizinischen Diskurs des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998).

music, which Hanslick and others later applied to instrumental music, and end with the Wagnerian counterattack, which devalued pure music in favor of a more sensual art form. Scholars should conceptualize the debate in terms of “pure” music rather than “absolute,” as this cuts across generic boundaries and captures the moral overtones with which the rhetoric was imbued.

Careful examination of the negative reception of Brahms’s music demonstrates deep-seated currents of thought in polemical writing. In light of the newer Wagnerian imperative for sensuality, rhetoric depicting Brahms as ascetic and chaste calls into question earlier notions of musical purity and demonstrates how such notions became something that half the musical critical world could deride by 1870. This study brings together traditional frames of Brahms scholarship (academicism, historicism) with the more fundamental debate over sensuality and purity.

Chapter Three, the central chapter, focuses on the multifaceted concept of sensuality as it pertained to Wagner’s art, emphasizing the overlooked influence of Feuerbach’s sensual worldview to Wagner. In the first part, I analyze the nature of Wagner’s philosophical borrowing from Ludwig Feuerbach, and argue that this modified notion of the sensual artwork constitutes the main feature of Wagner’s artistic conception, as opposed to Feuerbachian notions of myth or revolution. This also constitutes the main threat of Wagner’s stage works, as can be seen in the various types of negative reception of them. Consequently, the second half of this chapter focuses on the various rhetorical strategies in Wagner reception, their common link being the perceived threat of sensuality. Case studies include the critical reception of Wagner as a musical Makart, and of his relation to the infamous novelist Leopold von Sacher-Masoch.

While comparing Wagner to Makart constituted one strategy of anti-Wagnerian criticism, another included comparing him to “blue stocking” feminists. To explore the further relation of proto-feminists and Wagner in this period, Chapter Four focuses on the Wagner reception of such proto-feminists as Louise Otto, who proved to be an outspoken supporter of Wagner. An ardent women’s rights activist and revolutionary, Otto became involved in musical politics in the late 1840s and saw in Wagner’s artistic endeavors a parallel to the struggle in women’s rights throughout the following two decades. This research serves partly as a corrective to scholarship that depicts Wagner and his works as conservative in terms of contemporary women’s issues; it also offers nineteenth-century women a voice in their own construction of Wagner. Analyzing their criticism in women’s journals helps deepen our knowledge of sources beyond Wagner’s own writings and stage works, as well as the standard music journals and newspapers of the period. The visible support of women’s rights activists for Wagner thus offered more ammunition for critics who perceived the social upheaval of this movement as related to the threatening sensuality in Wagner’s stage works and theories.

Chapter 2: From “Priests of Art” to “Castratos of the Spirit”: Changing Valuations of Musical Purity in Nineteenth-Century German Music

In 1869 Richard Wagner took aim at his ideological opponents. Irritated with the performance of classical works and with the state of musical composition in general, he claimed they were “like eunuchs in the Grand Turk’s harem” defending “musical chastity.”¹ While it might be tempting to dismiss Wagner’s comment as the product of an “abnormally highly sexed” individual, such rhetoric constituted a subtle yet pervasive thread running through music criticism in the latter half of the nineteenth century.² The rhetoric against Wagner himself, which painted his work as immoral and unhealthy, has been explored in conjunction with Wagner reception studies, but the counterattacks on “chaste” and “pure” composers have received less attention.

This chapter deals largely with Brahms because as the standout figure of the “conservative” group and as the last composer to receive Schumann’s blessing, he received the most critical scrutiny, especially after the breakthrough success of the *German Requiem* in 1868. By examining the rhetoric that depicts Brahms as a kind of priest of pure music, this study sheds new light on Brahms reception. It demonstrates how both supporters and detractors applied the rhetoric of purity to him, characterizing him on

¹ “Hiermit gerathen diese sonderbaren Wächter der musikalischen Keuschheit zu unserer grossen klassischen Musik in die Stellung von Eunuchen im grossherrlichen Harem...” Richard Wagner, “Über das Dirigiren,” in *Richard Wagner’s Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: C.F. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 320.

² Bryan Magee’s phrase, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 66.

one hand with the positive qualities of a priest of music, while also attacking him on the other for being too pure, lacking in human qualities, sexually impotent, and guilty of sanctimonious posturing.

Approaching the conflict in German music from the perspective of purity helps contextualize Brahms and others not within the dominant scholarly frames of nationalism, historicism, and academicism, but within a framework of ethical and moral values (explicit and implicit). These values developed and changed over the course of the nineteenth century, in direct relationship to Wagnerian currents in musical-critical discourse and changing attitudes towards gender and sexuality. If gender analysis enters the scholarly discussion of nineteenth-century German music, it usually appears in the form of the masculine-feminine dichotomy, which functioned more as prescription than actual reflection of bourgeois gender roles in this period. Analyzing the rhetoric of purity in terms of gendered implications ultimately yields a far more nuanced picture of musical values, which suggests that music served as a complicating factor in the contemporary binary framework of masculine and feminine.

Purity and the Early Music Revival

A major component influencing the rhetoric of purity in the nineteenth century was the discovery and performance of early music, especially religious polyphonic vocal music before Bach. Critics praised this music for its purity, simplicity, holiness, and its distance, both temporally and conceptually, from corrupting influences. The music, which was drawn from a range of stylistic periods, drew such criticism for a number of reasons beyond simply its musical characteristics. Many of the value judgments associated with

early music, especially the rhetoric of purity, remained in the musical discourse through the latter part of the century. Indeed, by 1868, a watershed year for German music with the premieres of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, the revival of early music had already been underway for decades and tropes of early music in both those works brought with them a host of long-standing associations and values.

The revival of early music was made possible by a growing bourgeois market for music, including performances, print editions, and journals with critical commentary and anecdotes, in addition to a growing scholarly interest in the study of older musical artifacts.³ The nascent field of musicology was exemplified by the work of Carl Georg Vivigens von Winterfeld (1784–1852), who spent months in Italy researching and transcribing music from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Likewise, the Berlin Kapellmeister Johann Friedrich Reichardt traveled to Italy in 1783 and 1790; a composer and music journalist, he took an interest in the Italian sacred music style, collected music of early composers from Palestrina to Pergolesi, and discussed them in both his *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin* and the short-lived *Berlinische Musikalische Zeitung* (1805–6).⁴

As seen in activities of enthusiasts like Reichardt, the distinction between composer, performer, and researcher had not developed at this point. These same amateurs performed or arranged concerts of music before Bach; thus, the spread of early

³ For more see William Weber, "Mass Culture and European Musical Taste," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 25 (1994), 179–90.

⁴ Erich Doflein, "Historismus in der Musik," in *Die Ausbreitung des Historismus über die Musik*, ed. Walter Wiora (Regensburg: Bosse, 1969), 11. See also Paul Sieber, *Johann Friedrich Reichardt als Musikästhetiker: seine Anschauungen über Wesen und Wirkung der Musik* (Strassbourg: Heitz, 1930), 44–45.

music through performance provided further opportunities for its increased consumption and its use as model for new compositions. By 1883, music historian Philipp Spitta felt compelled to argue that art scholarship should exist for its own sake, rather than as justification for certain types of modern art.⁵ This points to the notion that earlier art *should* act as explanation for, justification of, or model for recent art, and, indeed, those who took interest in early music often deemed it a model for younger composers, mostly in the context of modern church music and the Caecilian reforms.⁶ The separation of composition, performance, and scholarship would develop later in the century.

The rise of singing societies, which provided performance opportunities for early music, constituted one important avenue for early music distribution. Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut, the music critic and jurist famous for his 1824 treatise *Über Reinheit der Tonkunst*, also founded a small amateur chorus in Heidelberg. Both his treatise and the society would prove influential in the nineteenth century; Schumann, whose own forays into early music would inspire a generation of composers, had known Thibaut and visited the society.⁷ However, the most famous of the early singing academies was the *Berliner Sing-Akademie*, founded in 1793 by Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch and taken over in 1800 by Carl Friedrich Zelter. Both Mendelssohn and his sister Fanny took part in

⁵ Philipp Spitta, “Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst,” in *Zur Musik: Sechzehn Aufsätze* (Berlin: Brüder Patel, 1892), 1–14.

⁶ For more on the specific reforms, see James Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); *Palestrina und die Kirchenmusik im 19. Jahrhundert*, 3 vols. (Kassel: Bosche, 1989–99).

⁷ Wolfgang Schröter, “Quand le droit mène à la musique: Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut et Robert Schumann,” *Revue musicale de suisse romande* 56 (2003), 46–61.

Zelter's *Sing-Akademie*, and Mendelssohn would later conduct the ensemble for the famous revival of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829.

Because of both the sacred context of this early repertoire and its musical characteristics, early nineteenth-century critics often employed terms such as "pure" (*rein*) "simple" (*einfach*) "childlike" (*kindlich*) to discuss it. Some focused on homophonic simplicity as a positive characteristic, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann in his "Alte und Neue Kirchenmusik," published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1814. In addition, the modal harmonic palette of sixteenth-century composers such as Palestrina and Lasso contributed to the effect of "music from the other world," offering both temporal and musical distance from the present.⁸ Hoffmann famously remarked that "Palestrina is simple truthful, childlike, pious, stark and powerful, genuinely Christian in his works, as in the paintings of Pietro von Cortona and our Albrecht Dürer."⁹

Thibaut held more extreme views than Hoffmann and he emphasized the purity of Palestrina and other vocal polyphony from the sixteenth century in the first edition of *Über Reinheit der Tonkunst* (1824). Unlike Hoffmann, who offered that certain kinds of modern instrumental church music could be acceptable, Thibaut focused exclusively on a *cappella* polyphony that lacked the color of orchestration and modern day harmonies.

Two years later, in the second edition, he described church music as a style

passionless, but pure and noble, with manly power, with manly calm and warmth, but expressed without the excitement of nerves, without gaudiness and

⁸ Hoffmann, "Musik aus der anderen Welt," 254.

⁹ "Palestrina ist einfach, wahrhaft, kindlich fromm, stark und mächtig, echt christlich in seinen Werken, wie in der Malerei Pietro von Cortona und unser Albrecht Dürer." E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Alte und Neue Kirchenmusik," in *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musikalische Schriften*, ed. H. vom Ende (Cologne: H. vom Ende's Verlag, 1899), 255.

embellishment, thus a language that makes you forget the trumpery of this world, and brings you into contact with a higher realm.¹⁰

Thibaut's rhetoric of calm, passionless, and noble music echoes the famous art criticism of Winckelmann, whose notion of "noble simplicity, quiet grandeur" (*edle Einfalt, stille Grösse*) would influence the discourse on idealist aesthetics, philology, and classicism well into the nineteenth century.¹¹ For Thibaut the qualities of simplicity, calm, and purity constituted a beauty that could be gendered masculine. In the second half of the century, however, purity and its gendered identities were to undergo critical scrutiny from some Wagnerian critics, who considered purity to be asexual.

Thibaut's and Hoffman's writings on Palestrina are similar to the reception of other early composers such as Handel and Bach. Reviewing a new edition of Handel anthems, Reichardt wrote in the *Berlinische Musik Zeitung* of 1806, "In Händel one finds the highest truth and power of expression achieved through the simplest, most naïve material in such a definitive way...and the simple truth of expression appears here to be

¹⁰ "... leidenschaftslos, aber rein und edel, mit männlicher Kraft, mit männlicher Ruhe und Wärme, aber ohne Nervenreiz, ohne Prunk und Zierrath ausgesprochen, also eine Rede, welche euch den Tand dieser Welt vergessen macht, und euch mit eine höhern Welt in Verbindung bringt..." Thibaut, *Reinheit der Tonkunst*, ed. 2 (1826), 51. For more, see Detlef Altenberg, "Thibauts Idee der 'Reinheit der Tonkunst,'" in *Studien zur Kirchenmusik im 19. Jahrhundert. Friedrich Wilhelm Riedel zum 60. Geburtsag*, ed. Christoph-Hellmut Mahling (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1994), 34–47.

¹¹ See Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauerkunst* (Dresden: Walther, 1755). The Winckelmann literature is vast; for his relation to musical aesthetics, however, see Otto Riemer, "Winckelmann und die Musikforschung des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Jahresgabe 1942 der Winckelmann-Gesellschaft Stendal* (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co.), 51–58; Mark Evan Bonds, "Idealism and the Aesthetics of Instrumental Music at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," *JAMS* 50 (1997): 387–420; Leon Botstein, "Brahms and Late Nineteenth-Century Painting," *19th-Century Music* 14 (1990): 154–68. Recently, scholars have noted a subversive quality to the gendered implications in Winckelmann's ideas, in his elevation of female sculpture to the pure, austere sublime ideal, of male sculpture to a more sensual beauty. For more on this particular aspect, see Alex Potts, *The Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), and Robert Aldrich, *The Seduction of the Mediterranean: Writing, Art, and Homosexual Fantasy* (London: Routledge, 1993).

united with pure, thorough, and thought-out work...”¹² Bernd Edelman considers this to be typical for Handel reception in the first half of the nineteenth century, and typical, indeed, for much early music reception in general. The unity of purity and strength constitutes a recurring theme in the reception of early music, as well as the implication that the listener and performer could benefit morally from engaging with the music.

The discussion of purity in early music did not constitute a unified movement in that its basic premises about musical characteristics were not codified. What in the music of Palestrina and Allegri struck musicians as pure? For some critics such as Hoffmann, the simple triadic harmony and homophonic compositional style made the music pure and powerful. As we will see later, the use of mode often evoked the sense of distance.

Counterpoint itself became a subject of contention as some considered the most complicated counterpoint to be too ornate and difficult, which partly explains why Bach had been slower to catch on.¹³ On the other hand, some critics such as the composer Eduard Grell embraced the Fuxian style of counterpoint. Hoffmann offered, even if he himself did not agree entirely with the viewpoint:

¹² “In Händel findet man die höchste Wahrheit und Kraft des Ausdrucks durch die einfachsten, naivsten Mittel auf eine so bestimmte Weise erreicht, dass man an jeder andern Möglichkeit eines wahren, naiven und kräftigen Ausdrucks derselben Empfindungen verzweifeln möchte, und einfache Wahrheit des Ausdrucks erscheint hier vereint mit reiner, gründlicher und gedachter Arbeit, wiewohl die eigentliche grosse ausgeführte contrapunktische Arbeit mit all ihren Künsten und Künsteleien, dem reinen gefühlvollen ist, als in freien Nachahmungen und Umkehrungen zum Behuf der Kraft des Ausdrucks und des heiligen Charakter des Ganzen angebracht und benutzt werden könnte.” Johann Reichardt, *Berlinische Musik Zeitung* 2 (1806), 173. Cited in Bernd Edelman, “Der bürgerliche Händel: Deutsche Händel-Rezeption von 1800 bis 1850,” in *Händel unter Deutschen*, Musik-Konzepte 131, ed. Ulrich Tadday (Munich: Schönig & Co. Gebrüder Schmidt, 2006), 23–51.

¹³ See Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*.

Many have suggested the fundamental reason for this lack [of good church music] is that current composers have completely neglected the thorough study of counterpoint that is entirely necessary for writing in the sacred style.¹⁴

Instrumentation in church works also garnered debate as to whether composers could produce pure works with modern instrumentation. Thibaut argued against this, whereas Hoffmann and others including Mendelssohn attempted to create a modern eclectic style that appealed to a German national sense of an imagined past.

Despite the different valuations of compositional techniques, supporters of early music generally acknowledged that there was a morally superior element to the older sacred music in comparison to modern music. Zelter characterized his *Sing-Akademie* as a temple of virtue (*Tugendtempel*), and, as Ryan Minor and Elizabeth Kramer have noted, the icon of the temple itself made common rhetorical appearances in discussions of commemorative musical space during this period, as well as in architectural renderings of concert halls.¹⁵ Zelter's *Tugendtempel* stressed the implications of a temple, and Thibaut, too, strongly asserted the moral purity of the singers in his society.¹⁶ Introducing the third edition of *Die Reinheit der Tonkunst* in 1851, K. Baehr explained that Thibaut's idea of *Reinheit* was one of moral purity:

¹⁴ "Viele haben als Ursache dieser Armut angegeben, dass die jetzigen Komponisten das tiefe Studium des Kontrapunktes welches durchaus nötig ist, um in Kirchenstil zu schreiben, gänzlich vernachlässigten." Hoffmann, "Alte und Neue Kirchenmusik," 249.

¹⁵ Ryan Minor, "National Memory, Public Music," 73–74; Elizabeth Kramer, "The Idea of *Kunstreligion* in German Musical Aesthetics of the Early Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2005), 145–58.

¹⁶ "... das Institut steht jetzt, vier Jahre nach Faschens Tode, als einzig in seiner Art, wirksam für den Geschmack und als ein Tugendtempel für Jugend und Alter, zur Freude aller Einwohner Berlins da; erhält sich selber und kann sich fortwährend auf beständige Zeiten selber erhalten." *Carl Friedrich Zelter und die Akademie: Dokumente und Briefe zur Entstehen der Musik-Section in der Preussischen Akademie der Künste*, ed. Cornelia Schröder (Berlin, 1959), 106.

With this ‘purity’ he is, of course, referring not to the technical, the purity of the setting or performance, but of the art of *music* for him it was a very different [purity], a higher, I would like to say *moral*, one, and one if fully justified in calling his book a moral act in the musical realm. He had an inborn sense for the truly ideal and sublime, for everything noble, exalted, and pure, and he combined it with an extremely fine and secure tact, to find it everywhere and call our attention to it... This view of ‘purity’ made him an irreconcilable enemy of everything soft, common, unhealthy, and light. This view guided him not only in the selection of the pieces that he had to sing, but also in the selection of members for his choir.¹⁷

In that sense, Thibaut’s plan was reciprocal: singers were chosen for purity, but they experienced a type of purification by virtue of engaging with the music itself.

Thibaut’s and Zelter’s explicit moral program resonated with the more general movement of *Bildung*, in which participants in the arts improved their moral well-being through engagement with life-long education. As James Garratt notes, “It was the elevation of ethical concerns that fostered the composition of quasi-liturgical music and encouraged the replication of earlier styles.”¹⁸ Musicologists have noted a similar philosophy of moral uplift among the Nazarenes, a contemporary group of German Romantic artists who moved to Rome to create religious paintings inspired by the art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. According to John Irving, it is no surprise that “the ‘rediscovery’ of old church music and the *Bildung* movement comes at the same time as the creation of tradition, the hallowing of it, rather.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Quoted in Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 18.

¹⁸ James Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63.

¹⁹ John Irving, “The invention of tradition,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 181.

If Hoffmann, Thibaut, Weber, and others did not agree exactly on what musical characteristics made old music pure, they could at least concur on a negative definition: it was not theater music. The designation of early music as pure and morally beneficial went hand-in-hand with the idea that modern theater music was morally suspect. Thibaut distinguished sharply between the moral purity of early church music and opera, which he deemed “the impure” (*das Unreine*). Of course, the distinction between holy church music and corrupt opera substantially predates the nineteenth century. Palestrina enthusiasts of the late eighteenth century had already noted this difference; Reichardt had deemed Italian opera a corrupting force in his *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin* in the early 1780s.²⁰ Even before the “invention” of opera, secular music with its bawdy lyrics and dance rhythms had garnered disdain of the more prudish critics, and as Ellen Rosand has demonstrated, despite its lofty aspirations, seventeenth-century opera often crossed moral and sexual boundaries.²¹ Perhaps the most famous articulation of the strife between old style counterpoint and corrupting “modernisms” had occurred in the famous late seventeenth-century Monteverdi-Artusi debate, around the time of the development of opera itself.²²

It might seem obvious that the music praised by reformers such as Thibaut would be morally pure due to its function within a sacred context. However, James Garratt has noted that at least one critic argued for the moral purity of Palestrina based on musical

²⁰ *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin* 1 (1782), 135.

²¹ Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 56–59.

²² For more on the gendered rhetoric employed in that debate, see Suzanne Cusick, “Gendering Modern Music: Thoughts on the Monteverdi-Artusi Controversy,” *JAMS* 46 (1993), 1–25.

characteristics, rather than its sacred text and setting. He argues that in “Alte und Neue Kirchenmusik” Hoffmann downplays the importance of text, so as to associate the music itself with purity. Garratt, in a Dahlhausian turn, refers to this phenomenon as “absolute Palestrina.”²³ Moreover, the fact that this music received more performances and garnered written analysis and attention, making its way into historical treatises of the time, is more important than it being the property of one religious group or another. The rhetoric of purity cut across boundaries between Protestant and Catholic religious beliefs.

A rhetoric of purity, with its strong ties to religious movements, such as the Caecilian movement in southern Germany, persisted unabated through the nineteenth century. Those associated with the Catholic Church certainly continued to view music in a dichotomy of pure church music versus corrupting theatrical music. This subset of purists formed an important vocal component in the culture war against Wagner because their rhetoric of purity was informed by the certainty of religious conviction. A prime example was the active music critic and historian, Dominicus Mettenleiter (1822–1868), who worked as vicar at then Kapelle Unserer Lieben Frau in Regensburg.²⁴ He penned a four-volume *Musik Geschichte [sic] der Stadt Regensburg* as well as a two-volume text dedicated to music history and aesthetics, entitled *Musica: Archiv für Wissenschaft, Geschichte, Aesthetik und Literatur der heiligen und profanen Tonkunst* (1866–68).

Though the title suggested a discussion of both sacred and secular music, the moral superiority of sacred music constituted a basic premise of the work. One article, on the religious basis of music, represents the rhetoric typical of such writing: “Music of a

²³ Garratt, 53–54.

²⁴ His brother Johann Georg (1812–1858) was also organist and choir regent at the church.

pious, innocent disposition cannot stir bad desires and thoughts in man,” whereas “lascivious music” (opera and dance) might eventually, working in tandem with immoral literature, lead to the “death of a chaste heart.”²⁵

This may seem like a repetition of the secular-sacred moral dichotomy established centuries earlier, but in the wake of the failed revolutions and concomitant Wagnerian reform attempts, a new set of antagonists developed within musical circles and beyond. Now critics could blame the “degeneracy” (*Entartung*) of art on the “irreligious, rationalistic spirit of the times” (*irreligiösen rationalistischen Geiste der Zeit*) as well as on “sensuality and sentimental world-weariness” (*Sinnlichkeit und sentimentaler Weltschmerz*).²⁶ Such key terms would appear in numerous discussions of Wagner in particular, and, indeed, earlier in the book, Mettenleiter compares Wagner and the “cult of sensuality and luxury” to the “sybaritic Romans,” who will not be guaranteed immortality.²⁷ While it might be easy to dismiss such writing as the extreme rhetoric employed by religious reactionaries whose musical views formed a marginalized minority, similar rhetorical flourishes appeared in mainstream music journals and newspapers across German-speaking lands. As will be explored more in detail in Chapter

²⁵ “...wie eine lascive Musik nicht die Mutter der Tugend, und wie hinwiederum eine aus frommen, arglosen Gemüthe entstandene Musik die Menschen nicht zu bösen Begierden und Gedanken reizen könne.... Was vielleicht eine schlechte Romanenliteratur unvollendet gelassen, ist durch ihre Begleiterin, durch die profane Musik in ihrer Entartung, zu Stande gekommen: Der Tod eines bisher keuschen Herzens.” *Musica, Archiv für Wissenschaft, Geschichte, Aesthetik und Literatur der heiligen und profanan Tonkunst* (1866), 109.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Wer, um den Erfolg seiner Wort- und Tonschöpfungen zu sichern, gleich ganze Gebirgströme, wie die an München vorüberfließende Isar, und Scenerien braucht, die selbst die ausschweifendste Phantasie der im Sinnenkult und Luxus und in der Verschwendung doch zweifellos vorgeschrittensten alten sybaritischen Römer nicht erdachte: dessen Geisteserzeugnisse müssen trotz Allem und Allem auf sehr unsicherer Basis ruhen, sehr gehaltlos sein und sehr wenig Bürgschaft der Unsterblichkeit gewähren.” Mettenleiter, *Musica*, 13.

Three, such rhetoric originated from a variety of sources and colored the debate on Wagner throughout the remainder of the century. Thus, musical purity, despite some authors who may have wished to depict it as an absolute phenomenon, came to function as an antidote to impurity as represented by the threat of Wagner as well as foreign opera.

Despite the religious connotations, the emphasis on purity of old music may also be another manifestation of the wider Romantic sensibility for things distant, especially the past. In the case of early music performance, the past has a specifically positive benefit on the moral constitution of the singer in question, just as a natural mountain scene might bring a sense of peace to the viewer. In Novalis's formulation:

Thus in the distance, everything becomes *poetry* — *poem*. *Actio in distans*. Distant mountains, distant people, distant events, etc., everything becomes romantic, *quod idem est* — from this results our essentially poetic nature.²⁸

As seen in the discussion of both Palestrina and Bach, critics applied similar terminology to sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century composers, not necessarily because of similar musical characteristics among these composers, but because of the way critics conceived of music history before 1750. Mark Burford has noted that Bach reception in this period demonstrates the same Gothic discussions as that of Palestrina and other early church musicians.²⁹ Reviewers and music lovers often compared early composers to artists and authors from different stylistic periods and countries, as seen in Hoffmann's comparison of Palestrina and Cortona, and the extended

²⁸ "So wird alles in der Entfernung—Poësie. Poëm. Actio in distans. Ferne Berge, ferne Menschen, ferne Begebenheiten etc. alles wird romantisch, quod idem est – daher ergiebt sich unser Urpoëtische Natur." Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, in *Schriften*, ed. Richard Samuel and Paul Kluckhorn, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960–88), 302. Translated by Berthold Hoeckner in "Schumann and Romantic Distance," *JAMS* 50 (1997), 1.

²⁹ See Mark Jon Burford, "The Real Idealism of History: Historical Consciousness, Commemoration, and Johannes Brahms's 'Years of Study'" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2005).

analysis of Shakespeare and Handel undertaken by G. G. Gervinus later in the century.³⁰

As James Haar has argued, the music histories of the time did not understand the Renaissance as a distinct stylistic period from the Medieval or Gothic period.³¹ “Early music,” therefore, was a vague and indeterminate concept of the “Gothic” that included medieval chants through Bach chorales. Haar further notes that this inchoate understanding of music history could be another manifestation of the general eclecticism in other arts such as architecture, where Gothic, Roman, Classical and Renaissance styles were mixed freely—a compelling argument given the prevalence of borrowings from art and architecture in the contemporary musical discourse. Indeed, one contemporary Italian traveler through Munich noted the overwhelming mix of architectural styles:

One the way from the station to the hotel, I noted all possible building styles: Greek, Roman, Lombard, Gothic, Byzantine, etc, which seemed to be fashioned with inordinate diligence and mannered eclecticism, so that my impression was one of systematic apery.³²

The first half of the century saw a gradual increase in the study of historical periods in art history, but it was not until 1860 that Swiss cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt published his influential *Die Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, and his student, art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, was not to introduce the term “Baroque” as a stylistic period

³⁰ For more see Martin Geck, “Shakespeare und Händel: Aufstieg, Peripetie und Niedergang eines kulturgeschichtlichen Diskurses,” in *Händel unter Deutschen*, Musik-Konzepte 131 (2006), 53–66.

³¹ James Haar, “Music of Renaissance as Viewed by Romantics,” in *Music and Context: Essay for John M. Ward*, ed. Anne Dhu Shapiro (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 135–36.

³² “Auf dem Wege von der Station bis zum Hotel bemerkte ich an der äusern alle möglichen Bauarten: griechischen, römischen, lombardischen, gothischen, byzantinischen, Styl u.s.w., welche mir mit übertriebener Sorgfalt und mit manierirtem Eclecticismus nachgeahmt schienen, so dass sie auf mich den Eindruck systematischer Nachäfferie macht.” “München, das moderne Athen, geschildert von einem Italiener,” *Münchener Propyläen* 1 (1869), 1184.

until his book *Renaissance und Barock* in 1888.³³ Therefore, if music historians and critics considered both Bach and Palestrina to be Gothic and pure, it only mirrored the general lack of periodization in the arts. Musically, it meant that contemporary composers could create a general sense of a gothic past through a variety of stylistic means.

Even within the camp that valued contrapuntal writing, opinions differed as to the strictness of the writing and how best to incorporate it into modern composition. Some composers undertaking the restoration of Palestrina, such as Eduard Grell in Berlin who advocated only *a cappella* vocal music, formed a minority who took the restoration of early music to extremes. Whereas earlier in the century reformers such as Hoffmann had written in journals with general musical aims, now the reform movements became more marginalized through mid-century, and the production of music modeled so closely on the original never took hold in the mainstream.

While more or less direct imitation of sixteenth-century music formed one contemporary compositional response to the early music revival, some composers incorporated obvious contrapuntal tropes such as fugues and canons. Mendelssohn's studies with Zelter of Kirnberger's *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes* were augmented by his introduction to Bach by his early keyboard teacher, Ludwig Berger, who also taught the music historian Gustav Nottebohm. Of course Mendelssohn's engagement with early music is well known, and the historical landmark performance of Bach's *St. Matthew*

³³ The term "barock" did appear with its original derogatory connotations in music criticism before it became incorporated into the musicological discourse on stylistic periods in the early twentieth century. Note, for example, the *AmZ* 2 (1867), 7, on Brahms's horn trio "deren Sprache tiefsinnig und poetisch, zu Herzen gehend, zuweilen auch etwas barock und keinesfalls für den Alltagsmenschen sofort verständlich ist."

Passion took place under his direction in Berlin 1829.³⁴ In his own music, Mendelssohn incorporated fugues, chorales with simple harmonic settings in his vocal as well as instrumental music. His creation of a concert fugue in E minor, published in 1837, is one example in a trend that changed the venue for an ostensibly religious genre from church to concert hall, and represents both, in the words of Charles Rosen, “an aestheticization of religion” and the invention of “religious kitsch.”³⁵ Nor was the trend towards concertized religious music lost on contemporaries in the nineteenth century; Hermann Deiters noted in a review of sacred music in 1869 that the performance of Bach Passions had made the “church into a concert hall.”³⁶

Rosen and others have pinpointed tonal contrapuntal writing as one indicator of the religious style in music. As a similar example of musical tropes associated with early music, Robert Schumann’s incorporation of modal harmonies and contrapuntal writing tapped into concepts of the Gothic, constituting a “chivalric style,” according to Jonathan

³⁴ For more on Mendelssohn and early music see Martin Geck, *Die Wiederentdeckung der Matthäuspassion im 19. Jahrhundert: die zeitgenössischen Dokumenten und ihre ideengeschichtliche Deutung* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1967); Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn’s Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Felix Loy, *Die Bach-Rezeption in den Oratorien von Mendelssohn Bartholdy* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 2003); Hans Joachim-Hinrichsen, “Jenseits des Historismus: Fuge und Choral in der Instrumentalmusik Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys,” in “*Zu gross, zu unerreichbar*”: *Bach-Rezeption im Zeitalter Mendelssohns und Schumanns*, ed. Anselm Hartinger, Christoph Wolff, Peter Wollny (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 2007), 238–53.

³⁵ Charles Rosen, “Mendelssohn and the Invention of Religious Kitsch,” in *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 594.

³⁶ “Die Bach’schen Passionen in der Kirche, so sehr die geweihte Umgebung ihre Wirkung steigern, sie machen trotzdem die Kirche zum Concertsaal.” Hermann Deiters, “Johannes Brahms’ geistliche Compositionen,” *AmZ* 4 (1869), 267.

Bellman.³⁷ Musicologists have noted the topical use of such diverse musical characteristics as horn fifths, pastoral dance rhythms, modal progressions, as well as fugal and canonic writing in the repertoires of composers through the ages. It is no surprise that in a period when musical tradition weighed heavily on composers, certain musical tropes could be used as tools to evoke the past. The textbook example of Schumann's nod to the musical past comes from *Dichterliebe*, op. 48, "Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome." With its reference to cantus firmus technique, the song evokes a picture of older, more serious musical times. Reinhold Brinkmann has noted a similar use of this style to create a general sense of distance in Schumann's "Zwielicht" from the Eichendorff *Liederkreis*, op. 39.³⁸

Ultimately, the sense of distance and purity could overlap when they involved the stylistic tropes of early music; certain styles of fugal, canonic, or modal writing might suggest an escape into another world removed by time. Scholars have interpreted the use of these stylistic tropes as indicating the importance of a German nationalist musical tradition, and if musical purity enters the scholarly discussion it is cast as a response to non-German factors such as Italian opera, despite its obvious conceptual relation to the music of the past. When Wagner's revolutionary demands for reform took the musical world by storm, some critics began to associate the rhetoric of purity with a wider range of compositional styles as a response to the sensual *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Wagner, and purity assumed a central role in a fundamental struggle *within* German music.

³⁷ Jonathan Bellman, "'Aus alten Märchen': The Chivalric Style of Schumann and Brahms," *Journal of Musicology* 13 (1995), 117–135. See also John Daverio, "Schumann's Ossianic Manner," *19th-Century Music* 21 (1998), 247–73.

³⁸ Reinhold Brinkmann, *Schumann und Eichendorff: Studien zum Liederkreis, op. 39* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1997), 50.

Mid-Century Developments

What a shame! When one reads the many wise instruction books of the new musical theorists, one must consider with deep regret: what could have been made of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven if they had known our books and journals.³⁹

The author of this quip, writing in the 1869 *Signale für die musikalische Welt*, played upon the rise of musical literacy and the pretensions of loftiness that seemed to characterize some critics and amateurs. The latter half of the century saw an explosion of music journals, pamphlets, and books that, in conjunction with the mass availability of pianos, supported and nurtured a growing bourgeois devotion to music. Among music critics, the desire to educate a willing audience sometimes brought with it a need to establish authority during a period when music history and theory were only beginning to gain legitimacy as serious fields of study. Moreover, philosophical developments of the 1840s reinvigorated the musical discourse with the rhetoric of progress and an optimism about the power of music criticism to improve society.⁴⁰ By 1869, then, a critic could complain about the “new musical theorists,” referring most likely to the New German School that had been established in the early 1850s.⁴¹ The series of *bon mots* in which this quotation appeared was entitled “Autographs of Old Musicians,” a series that often

³⁹ “Wie Schade! Wenn man die vielen weisen Lehren der neueren musikalischen Aestheticker liest, so muss man mit tiefem Bedauern denken: was hätte aus Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven werden können, wenn sie unserer Bücher und Journale gekannt hätten.” “Autographen des alten Musikanten,” *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 27 (1869), 263.

⁴⁰ For discussion of the social role of music before the 1848/9 revolutions, see James Garratt, *Music, Culture and Social Reform in the Age of Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁴¹ Once Franz Brendel coined the phrase “New German School” in 1859, it assumed a central role in the discussion, often used synonymously with “Music of the Future,” and “Wagnerian line” for years after Liszt and Wagner had moved in their own directions.

took aim at the ideology of the Wagnerians and played on the tension between old and new that formed an important thread in the debate.

Indeed, if critics in the first quarter of the century believed that older styles could be absorbed and reproduced in order to create viable musical works for the present, then Young Hegelian revolutionaries at mid-century rejected this idea as futile.⁴² The debate, led by Richard Wagner and his two most vocal supporters, Franz Brendel and Theodor Uhlig, took shape in the late 1840s. It focused on the themes of progress, the German *Volk*, and the creation of a sensual artwork that would effect change immediately and resonate with future generations. The sensuality of Wagner's music theories, the grounding of music in the body and through the physical experience of listening, is often overlooked in favor of political overtones in the rhetoric; however, understanding the debate as a struggle between sensualists and purists, rather than "progressive" and "conservatives" or Young Hegelians and Hegelians, brings this aspect back into the foreground as the fundamental aesthetic problem of the day.

Much of the debate during the 1850s and 1860s involved competing notions of progress and conservatism, to the extent that musicologists have borrowed these terms in describing the musical factions as "progressive" and "conservative." These terms may or may not reflect the political leanings of the critics, musicians, and composers to whom they applied. Indeed, the political situation itself was extremely complicated around the 1848 revolutions, with different shades of "liberal," "democrat," and "conservative," coloring the political spectrum. As historian James Sheehan argued in his seminal work on German liberalism, the very inability of liberals to unify around any kind of political

⁴² See Chapter Three for more on the Young Hegelian influence on Wagner.

platform led to their defeat in the revolutions and their ineffectiveness in the years following.⁴³

What, then, do “progressive” and “conservative” refer to? The notion of progress was so widespread and fundamental to bourgeois thinking in the mid-nineteenth century that most bourgeois music lovers would probably ascribe to one or more of the ideals associated with it: the development of science and technology, the appreciation of history and other contributions to knowledge within a nationalist context, the general recession of organized religion as a main determining factor in people’s lives, etc. In short, the scholarly application of the terms “progressive” and “conservative” within a musical context demonstrates an acceptance of the party line of Wagner and the New German School, who sought in large part to justify their platform through the rhetoric of progress.

The recent emphasis on politics and nationalism has led scholars to examine the political rhetoric employed in the debate. As revolutionary optimism infiltrated the criticism and theorization of music in this period, the critical discussion became rife with such words as progress (*Fortschritt*), new paths (*neue Bahnen*), and future (*Zukunft*).⁴⁴ Indeed, the New German School used Wagner’s “Artwork of the Future” as a motto for years after 1849. Despite the failure of the revolutions, the rhetoric remained prevalent in the following years as industrialization boomed, the economy improved, and the general

⁴³ James Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁴⁴ It might be tempting to associate the phrase “neue Bahnen” exclusively with Brahms in the wake of Schumann’s 1853 article of the same name, but it appeared in more general discussions throughout the period; for example, the feminist Louise Otto-Peters used the name for a novel and for her journal devoted to women’s issues. In direct response to Schumann in the early 1850s, however, a brief critical skirmish erupted in which Wagnerians attempted to claim the word, arguing that they were the true trailblazers of the times.

atmosphere settled into a more stable, if repressive society. The most blatant revolutionary rhetoric of the late 1840s and early 1850s, such as critic Theodor Uhlig's comparison of academics' pedantic eye for parallel fifths to the watchfulness of jailers, largely died out by the mid 1860s.⁴⁵ However, certain buzzwords, especially progress (*Fortschritt*), remained in the vocabulary through the late 1850s and 1860s, to the extent that some critics complained about their overuse and misapplication.⁴⁶

In comparison to the political overtones of the debate, the rhetoric of sensuality and its relation to sexuality has received less attention, despite its central role in Wagner's philosophical worldview. Moreover, instead of dying out, such rhetoric became increasingly pervasive in musical discourse through the remainder of the century and reached a height at the *fin-de-siècle*. Wagner's specifically Feuerbachian understanding of sensuality valued the grounding of human experience in the sensual, physical realm, and stressed the importance of sexuality for the creative process. This produced rhetoric describing music in terms of gender and sexual fecundity. Unlike theorists of previous generations, Wagner saw the sensual and sexualized aspects of music as positive qualities, which in turn imbued the growing debate with a pressing moral and ethical dimension. Coming in the midst of revolutionary upheaval, when not only political modes of being were challenged but also gender roles and stereotypes, Wagner's theoretical grounding of music and expression in the body seemed to herald the end of culture for many music critics.

⁴⁵ Theodor Uhlig, *Neue Berliner Musikzeitung* 3 (1849), 227–29. For more on the debate on parallel fifths and its revolutionary rhetoric, see Robert T. Laudon, "The Debate about Consecutive Fifths: A Context for Brahms's Manuscript 'Oktaven und Quinten,'" *Music and Letters* 73 (1992), 48–61; Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms*.

⁴⁶ See Selmar Bagge's lead article in the *AmZ* 2 (1867), 397–99.

The fundamental concept of the complete artwork (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) itself was rooted in Feuerbach's sensualist philosophy, as one brief example will demonstrate. In 1851 Theodor Uhlig (1822–1853), one of Wagner's best champions and a regular contributor to Brendel's *Neue Zeitschrift*, wrote a lengthy article on "Instrumental Music" that appeared in the *Deutsche Monatsschrift für Politik, Wissenschaft, Kunst und Leben*. The article opened with a clear statement of Wagnerian musical politics, a cogent summary of Wagner's theories, rife with philosophical overtones:

The complete human, comprised of body, feeling, and reason, is befitted by the purely human [*reinmenschliche*] complete art, which proceeds from the union of dramatic art, music, and poetry; and only in this union can the creative complete human communicate effectively and the art-loving complete human be entirely satisfied.⁴⁷

The repetition of the word "complete" (*ganz*) makes clear the parallels Uhlig wishes to draw between the creator, artwork, and audience, all of which form a whole based on the unification of essential elements. The human is united through body, feeling, and reason—note that in this grouping reason is last and body first—reflective of Feuerbach's emphasis on the sensual realm and his attempt to undermine the idealism of Hegel.⁴⁸ The "purely human" (*das Reinmenschliche*), which comprised of all these aspects, is a

⁴⁷ "Dem ganzen Menschen, der Leibes- Gefühls- und Verstandesmensch zu gleicher Zeit ist, entspricht die reinmenschliche ganze Kunst, die aus der Vereinigung von Darstellungs-, Ton- und Dichtkunst hervorgeht und nur in dieser Vereinigung dem kunstschaftenden ganzen Menschen zur Mittheilung genügen, den kunstgeniessenden ganzen Menschen vollkommen befriedigen kann." Theodor Uhlig, "Die Instrumentalmusik," *Deutsche Monatsschrift für Politik, Wissenschaft, Kunst und Leben* 2 (1851), 40.

⁴⁸ See *Sinnlichkeit und Rationalität. Der Umbruch in der Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts: Ludwig Feuerbach*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992); Alfred Schmidt, *Emanzipatorische Sinnlichkeit: Ludwig Feuerbachs anthropologischer Materialismus* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1973). For more about Feuerbach's influence on Wagner's theories, see Nicholas Walker, "Wagner amongst the Hegelians," in *Music, Theater, and Politics in Germany, 1848 to the Third Reich*, ed. Nikolaus Bacht (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 31–47; George C. Windell, "Hegel, Feuerbach and Wagner's Ring," *Central European History* 9 (1976), 27–57.

Feuerbachian concept and should not be confused with *reine Musik*, which Uhlig later uses to indicate instrumental music without a program.

Pure music thus enters the debate at mid-century as an imperfect, incomplete form of art representing feeling alone. As Uhlig argued, following Wagner, the main point of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was to unite the arts that appealed to each component of the complete human: body (dance), feeling (music), and reason (poetry). “Pure music,” he writes, “began in vocal music and in the Christian church,” became surpassed by the superior, complete art of the *Tanzlied*, then split again, forming what was to become modern day instrumental music.⁴⁹ Through this brief history, Uhlig admits that “pure instrumental music” began life in a sacred context as vocal music, but he does not make a connection between the repressiveness of the church and the current lack of humanized, disembodied music as Wagner implied in *Oper und Drama*.⁵⁰ In this way the New Germans co-opted pure music, like absolute music, as a negative concept, but its supporters rallied by retaining it in their own contexts as a morally positive force.

⁴⁹ “Die reine Tonkunst begann allerdings in der Vokalmusik und in der christlichen Kirche ihre Entwicklung. Als die Kirche noch alle Kunst und Lebensverhältnisse beherrschte, gab es nur eine Tonweise – die kirchliche – und das etwaige Instrumentalspiel (auf der Orgel) war nur Unterstützung des Gesanges; als die Welt ihre Opposition gegen die Kirche begann und die Kunst ins Leben drang, entstand auch die weltliche Tonweise – der Liedtanz oder das Tanzlied — und in ihr begegnen wir sogleich dem Dreiverein der reinmenschlichen Kunstarten: als die weltlichen Instrumente zu derjenigen Vollkommenheit gediehen waren, die eine selbstständige Hervorbringung der Tonweise gestattete, löste sich der Tanz aus jenem Dreiverein los und die Instrumentalmusik begann...” Uhlig, “Die Instrumentalmusik,” 40–41.

⁵⁰ “Greek Art still apprehended this Man by his outer stature alone, and strove to mould his faithful, lifelike counterfeit—at last in bronze and marble. Christianity, on the contrary, proceeded anatomically: it wanted to find man's soul; it opened and cut up his body, and bared all that formless inner organism at which our gaze rebelled, because it neither is nor should be set there for the eye. In searching for the soul, however, we had slain the body; in hunting for the source of Life we had destroyed its utterance, and thus arrived at nothing but dead entrails, which only in completely unbroken faculty of utterance could be at all conditionments of Life. But the searched-for soul, in truth, is nothing other than the life: wherefore what remained over, for Christian anatomy to look upon, was only—Death.” Richard Wagner, “Opera and Drama,” in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 2, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trüber & Co., 1900), 104–5.

One ongoing and little-explored response to the increasing rhetoric of anti-Wagnerian moral superiority involved turning this rhetoric of purity against itself with mocking irony. As the period following the failed revolutions included a shift toward tradition and sacred music styles, the moral associations with it became revived in the discussion of new and old and in response to Wagner's ideas. Concert programs began to reflect what has become standard repertoire of classical composers, and the growth of public organizations and expanded musical markets helped the traditional to gain greater significance.⁵¹ Wagnerian critics often attacked their opponents as too pure and musically impotent; as we shall see later, this rhetoric would take an especially sharp edge in relation to Brahms as his supporters began crafting a messianic image for him.

On the other hand, detractors from Wagner's and Brendel's "Music of the Future" often countered by arguing that music was neither a social force nor a representation of feelings, thus removing it from both the political sphere and the implications of sensual immediacy. Edward Krüger, critic for the anti-Wagnerian *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and sometime contributor to the *Neue Zeitschrift*, offered that the great influx of philosophical justification in music only proved that some musicians had not yet "learned how to think."⁵² Krüger argued that rather than function as a prime force in any kind of revolution, music could not be created in the midst of social upheaval or war:

⁵¹ For more on growth of musical concerts and amateur music making, see Leon Botstein, "Music and its Public: Habits of Listening and the Crisis of Musical Modernism in Vienna, 1870–1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1985); William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵² "Wahrlich, die Philosophen, die dem Künstler eine merkliche Grösse der unteren Seelenkräfte zuschreiben, werden sich dieses triumphirend in's Gedenkbuch tragen, zum Zeichen, dass die Musikanten auch heute noch nicht denken gelernt haben." Edward Krüger, "Zwischen Kunst und Politik," *AmZ* 50 (1848), 403.

At this moment art must renounce the heights, willing or not, it must recognize that it is not a world-moving power, that also no such work can come about today as long as the waves roar.⁵³

Krüger concluded that music belonged to no political parties and should not be claimed as representing one viewpoint or another. This proved another effort, as Mark Evan Bonds has argued, to depoliticize music and distance some critics from the revolutionary rhetoric so prevalent in the *Neue Zeitschrift*.⁵⁴

While distancing themselves from the political turmoil, critics often depicted Wagner and his ideological kin as leading art down immoral paths. Certainly Wagner's explicit sexual metaphors in his revolutionary treatises may have scandalized some critics; in another sense, his emphasis on effect and on the immediacy and physical aspects of musical communication offered another type of threat. It is not surprising that the rhetoric from this period and onward painted Wagner's work as "degenerate" and "pathological."⁵⁵

Hanslick and Purity

In one of the most influential treatises of the time, Eduard Hanslick responded to these revolutionary agitations by uniting depoliticized art with the subtle agenda against an

⁵³ "Für diesen Augenblick muss die Kunst der Höhe entsagen; willig oder nicht, muss sie erkennen, dass sie jetzt nicht weltbewegende Macht ist, dass auch kein weltbewegendes Werk heutigen Tages erstehen kann, so lange die Wogen brausen." Krüger, *AmZ* 50 (1848), 405.

⁵⁴ Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought*, 211.

⁵⁵ See, for example, E.R., "Die moderne 'grosse' Oper und die Musik im Concert. Meyerbeer, Wagner und—Brahms," *AmZ* 1 (1866), 62; Theodor Puschmann, *Richard Wagner: Eine psychiatrische Studie* (Berlin: Behr, 1872).

immoral Wagner.⁵⁶ His theorization of an absolute music relied heavily on the connotation-laden rhetoric of purity, which already had a long-standing association with morally healthy music. Although he denied the “moral effects” of music in his treatise, Hanslick’s discussion of pathological listening and “pure contemplation” suggest that he valued active engagement with musical forms as opposed to the kind of emotional and physical responses valued by Wagner. Hanslick is often credited as the originator of the modern notion of “absolute,” autonomous music, but it is important to recognize that his arguments and rhetorical flourishes united instrumental music with the rhetoric of purity in a morally-charged debate about listening and the function of music.

Hanslick, who would become the most famous music historian and critic of the time, grew up in Prague and formed close associations with other musicians interested in the poetic and aesthetic aspects of music.⁵⁷ Among his musical friends were August Wilhelm Ambros, Emil Hock, the composer Hans Hampel, and Josef August Heller. These men considered themselves a type of *Davidsbund*, formed after Schumann’s famous *Davisbund*, and they took pride in writing poetic reviews of music after their model critic Schumann. As we shall see in relation to Brahms, this association with Schumann helped position Hanslick and his friends in a kind of moral league against art they deemed unworthy. Hanslick in particular proved an active participant in the journalist realm, but he remained mostly unknown until the publication of his highly influential aesthetic treatise *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (*On the Musically Beautiful*) in

⁵⁶ While in his earlier Prague reviews of Wagner, Hanslick adopts a generally positive tone, after the revolution, Hanslick is less forgiving.

⁵⁷ Bonnie Lomnaes and Dietmar Strauss, eds., *Auf der Suche nach der poetischen Zeit. Der Prager Davidsbund: Ambros, Bach, Bayer, Hampel, Hanslick, Helfert, Heller, Hock, Ulm*. vol. 1 *Erläuterungen, Nachlassregister, Konzertdokumente* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1999).

1854. Many of its phrases would enter the musical discourse and the book saw nine editions in the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Although scholars have questioned the extent to which ideas of absolute instrumental music had infiltrated music aesthetics in the first part of the nineteenth century, they generally agree that Hanslick's *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* is the most complete articulation of the "absolute" idea. Dahlhaus marks him as the first to write comprehensively about the aesthetics of absolute music, specifically its formal aspects, that had already been developing since the late eighteenth century.⁵⁹ Despite the radical bent of Hanslick's ideas, his opponents portrayed him as conservative in the musical press and history has believed their rhetoric. He is often portrayed as the bogeyman of absolute music, a stuffy conservative who feared music's expressive power and sought to contain that power through the objective contemplation of artworks divorced from text or program. When New Musicologists of the 1980s gleefully reinvented the study of social contexts, they often overlooked the fact that Hanslick himself had recognized the value of historical research and contextualization. Representing the recent musicological view of Hanslick, Susan McClary argued in 1993, "The treasured distinction between the musical and the so-called extra-musical is starting to dissolve, allowing hermeneutic readings of compositions traditionally held to be exempt from interpretation."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ I am using the 1854 first edition and, for translation comparison, both the 1891 Gustav Cohen (of the seventh edition) and the 1986 Geoffrey Payzant (of the eighth edition).

⁵⁹ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 108–12.

⁶⁰ Susan McClary, "Narrative Agendas in Brahms's Third Symphony," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 326–44.

Hanslick's basic argument responds to the political and sensual rhetoric of Wagner and Brendel as well as to "feeling-theorists" who argued that the content of music was various emotions. Hanslick countered that music could represent neither concrete objects nor abstract feelings, and that in the act of pure contemplation involves a logical relation to the music rather than aesthetic. Hanslick does not deny that people feel things in response to music; he asserts simply that music does not represent feelings. "The representation of a feeling or affect simply does not lie within the actual ability of music."⁶¹ Having debunked the main idea of the so-called "feeling-theorists," Hanslick proposes, in a passage that became famous in its time—a sound bite in music criticism of the 1850s and onward—that the content of music is its tonally animated forms (*tönend bewegte Formen*).⁶²

Hanslick's emphasis on instrumental music divorced from words or explicit meaning, i.e., on "pure" music retains the implications of purity as it was associated with earlier vocal music in the first part of the century. Despite Hanslick's attempt to create a self-referential world for music, he nevertheless constructs his pure aesthetics in relation to other systems and ways of listening. For example, pure aesthetics is divorced from art-historical inquiry, the kind of which was being practiced by Brendel in the *Neue Zeitschrift*. Hanslick claims that in an age when people have begun to associate music with the spirit of its time, and when art-historical research is fast developing, it takes true

⁶¹ "Um auf festen Boden zu gelangen, müssen wir vorerst solche altverbundene Metaphern schonungslos trennen: Das Flüstern? Ja;—aber keineswegs der 'Sehnsucht;' das Stürmen? Allerdings, doch nicht der 'Kampflost.' In der That besitzt die Musik das Eine ohne das Andre; sie kann flüstern, stürmen, rauschen, — das Lieben und Zürnen aber trägt nur unser eigenes Herz in sie hinein. Die Darstellung eines Gefühles oder Affectes liegt gar nicht in dem eigenen Vermögen der Tonkunst." Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1854), 12. Henceforth, *VMS*.

⁶² "Tönend bewegte Formen sind einzig und allein Inhalt und Gegenstand der Musik." Hanslick, *VMS*, 32.

heroism (*wahrer Heroismus*) to declare that historical understanding of a piece and aesthetic understanding are separate.⁶³ Hanslick's pronouncement here has been taken by modern musicologists to mean that he wishes to deny the social and political context of music. Hanslick, however, offers that musical works are products of their social conditions; he means simply that beautiful or non-beautiful works may be produced, regardless of time or place, and that one can make an aesthetic judgment of a piece with or without understanding those historical and social conditions.⁶⁴ Defining his aesthetics in terms of heroism, however, constructs a narrative with a moral trajectory; if the feeling-theorists and practitioners of art-historical inquiry are not outright villains, they might at least occupy a grey area of moral non-heroism in comparison.⁶⁵

Despite Hanslick's historical association with the phrase "absolute music," the word much more prevalent throughout the treatise is "pure." This effectively added another to the musical connotations of purity at this point. Already in the first half of the century the musical moralists had claimed purity for earlier music, but Hanslick explicitly states that his idea of musical beauty was not limited to classical-era music (which in 1854 ranged anywhere from Bach to Beethoven), but also included Romantics such as Schumann.⁶⁶ This effectively resituated musical purity for a contemporary musical

⁶³ Es ist nicht lange her, seit man angefangen hat, Kunstwerke im Zusammenhang mit den Ideen und Ereignissen der Zeit zu betrachten, welche sie erzeugte... Es gehört heutzutage ein wahrer Heroismus dazu, dieser picanten und geistreich repräsentirten Richtung entgegenzutreten und auszusprechen, daß das 'historische Begreifen' und das 'ästhetische Beurtheilen' verschiedene Dinge sind." *VMS*, 44–46.

⁶⁴ Perhaps it might not be surprising for W.K. Wimsatt to quote Hanslick in *The Verbal Icon* (1954).

⁶⁵ For more on Romantic tropes of the heroic in music, see Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ Hanslick, *VMS*, 44.

language, and more specifically, within the instrumental genres. Thus the style of “pure” composition could be equated, and soon was equated, with the motivic development associated with the play of free musical forms.

In this way, the treatise included a response to the New German rhetoric of pure and absolute music as seen, for example, in Uhlig’s article on “Instrumental Music” and in Wagner’s *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, published in Leipzig in 1849. Wagner’s text includes a famous use of the term “absolute” music, meaning here that it is an expression of yearning with no object; the equivalent of feeling and nothing more. “Absolute music” is only emotion to Wagner.⁶⁷ Hanslick, of course, disagrees with this premise; not only is music not emotion, it requires the faculty of *Phantasie*, a combination of both intellect and feeling, to be understood.

Hanslick furthermore imbued the discussion with the opposite of purity: defilement in terms of pathological listening. He does acknowledge the beauty of the sensuous in music, that is, in the play of musical ideas, and he argues that people have missed the beauty of music precisely by subordinating the sensual enjoyment of music to “feeling.”⁶⁸ He concludes that the feeling-theorists are responsible for this, “In their opinion the music exists for the heart; the ear, however, is a trivial thing.”⁶⁹ For Hanslick, however, the key lies in the way the ear perceives the music: it must be pure observation

⁶⁷ “...sie [absolute music] ist, in ihrer unendlichsten Steigerung, doch immer nur Gefühl....” Richard Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1850), 88.

⁶⁸ “Wenn man die Fülle von Schönheit nicht zu erkennen verstand, die im rein Musikalischen lebt, so trägt die Unterschätzung des Sinnlichen viel Schuld, welcher wir in älteren Aesthetiken zu Gunsten der Moral und des Gemüths, in Hegel zu Gunsten der ‘Idee’ begegnen. Jede Kunst geht vom Sinnlichen aus und webt darin. Die ‘Gefühlstheorie’ verkennt dies, sie übersieht das Hören gänzlich und geht unmittelbar ans Fühlen.” Hanslick, *VMS*, 33–34.

⁶⁹ “Die Musik schaffe für das Herz, meinen sie, das Ohr aber sei ein triviales Ding.” Ibid.

(*Schauen*) of pure musical forms, and he does not consider the physical ear itself to have much import in comparison to the exercise of free imaginative *Phantasie*.⁷⁰ Thus, even in his acknowledgment of the sensual aspect of music, Hanslick undermines the basic physical component of relating to it. Despite his argument that *Phantasie* includes feeling and intellect, his theory still represents a rebuttal of the New German premise that music should speak to feeling, reason, and the body.

In more explicit terms, Hanslick argues against the so-called “moral effects” of music and describes a phenomenon that Adorno was later to call “the regression of listening.”⁷¹ Hanslick establishes that music communicates more directly and immediately to its audience than other arts, but his language betrays the sense in which he views this as dangerous: “The other arts persuade us (*überreden*), music invades us (*überfällt*).”⁷² The rather unusual choice of *überfallen* might be partly on account of the parallel construction and play on words, but it conveys the sense of powerlessness of the listener. Hanslick describes the loss of control when the listener allows the music simply to work as “agitation of the nerves” (*Nervenreizen*), a phrase which would become more and more prominent in the discourse in relation to Wagner’s works.⁷³ Losing control to the “elemental” in music, claims Hanslick, is glory neither for the art nor “the heroes

⁷⁰ “Ja, was sie eben Ohr nennen,—für das ‘Labyrinth’ oder die ‘Eustachische Trompete’ dichtet kein Beethoven.” Ibid.

⁷¹ For more, see Theodor W. Adorno, “The Regression of Listening,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 76–89.

⁷² “Die andern Künste überreden, die Musik überfällt uns.” Hanslick, *VMS*, 59.

⁷³ “Keiner von Beiden handelt aber aus freier Selbstbestimmung, keiner überwältigt durch geistige Ueberlegenheit oder ethische Schönheit, sondern in Folge befördernder Nervenreize.” Hanslick, *VMS*, 74.

themselves” and cannot be considered a moral improvement.⁷⁴ Once again, Hanslick’s language of heroism implies a dichotomy of moral opposites, this time the danger lies in the music itself. When Hanslick denies the “moral effects” of music, he is arguing against the listener allowing the music to work upon them without active contemplation. Thus neither a positive moral effect nor negative moral effect is desirable because the listener surrenders to the music; i.e., feeling overtakes reason.

This may be seen as a response to the more passive version of listening that Wagner recommends in *Oper und Drama*, where he goes so far as to characterize the ear as a loving woman, thereby extending his sexual metaphor of musical creation to the listening act itself. “The Ear is no child; it is a staunch and loving woman, who in her love will make that man the blessedest who brings in himself the fullest matter for her bliss.”⁷⁵ Hanslick might have seen this as a threat to the security of contemplative listening, as it implicitly feminizes the audience.

Following on these aspects of the treatise, feminist musicologists have further suggested that Hanslick’s theory expresses a distinct fear of women.⁷⁶ Iitti Sanna, writing on German art song, has argued that Hanslick associates women and the feminine with the pathological in music; for example, she sees Hanslick’s dislike of “predominant

⁷⁴ “Wenn vollends Menschen in so hohem Grade von dem Elementarischen einer Kunst sich hinreißen lassen, daß sie ihres freien Handelns nicht mehr mächtig sind, so scheint uns dies weder ein Ruhm für die Kunst noch viel weniger für die Helden selbst.” Hanslick, *VMS*, 74.

⁷⁵ Richard Wagner, “Opera and Drama,” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, vol. 2 (London: Paul Kegan, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1900), 271.

⁷⁶ See for example, Robert Fink, “Desire, Repression, and Brahms’s First Symphony,” *Repercussions 2* (1993), 74–104.

rhythm” as a fear of the feminine in music.⁷⁷ This conclusion stems from the argument that the feminine was linked with “chaos,” which would have been represented by predominant rhythm; but while the feminine might represent “nature” in the nineteenth-century German masculine-feminine dichotomy, it did not necessarily represent the violence of chaos, nor was rhythm generally seen as a feminine characteristics in music.⁷⁸

Certainly Hanslick subscribed to some of the typical gender ideologies of the day. At one point he explains why there are fewer women composers, arguing that possibly this is because women understand through feeling rather than logic, and that music is an objective art requiring logic. In general, though, despite his acknowledgement of the sensual beauty of music and of the value of physical performance, Hanslick’s emphasis on purity and logic offered a strong rhetorical counterattack to the sensualist theories of Wagner.

The problems in music criticism, as raised by Wagner and Hanslick, were to intensify over the course of the century, as fundamental questions arose concerning the German nation, the role of progress and history, and the problem of gender roles as raised by feminists. These questions made their way into musical discourse, some working at more obvious levels than others as seen in Wagner’s demand for reform and Hanslick’s aesthetic that implicitly unified the instrumental genre with the rhetoric of purity long associated with early religious music. As time passed and the same personalities in the music world strengthened their arguments with more outrageous rhetoric, the political,

⁷⁷ Iitti Sanna, *The Feminine in German Song* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 95.

⁷⁸ For more on the workings of pre-civilized matriarchal societies, see J.J. Bachofen’s influential work *Das Mutterrecht: eine Untersuchung über die Gynaikokratie der alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur* (Stuttgart: Kraus und Hoffmann, 1861).

personal, and musical mixed, setting the scene for an aesthetic battle of epic proportions—or as Alan Walker has fittingly dubbed it, “the War of the Romantics.”⁷⁹ In this context, the concepts of musical sensuality and purity became issues of central importance, as revealed by polemical writing that erupted on either side of the debate.

Brahms and the “Priesthood of Art”

As a new generation of composers and critics was coming of age after the revolutions, the issues raised by the mid-century debates continued to impact their reception and their own modes of communicating about the value of music. In response to the performative and spectacular qualities of Wagner’s works, some musicians looked inward for spiritual guidance. This subjective attitude towards music and performance helped contribute to notions of a *Kunstreligion* in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though *Kunstreligion* is generally considered to have flourished in the first part of the century, Jan Brachmann has argued that it continued after 1850 as the close circle of Brahms, Joseph Joachim, the Schumanns, and their friends elevated the private performance of music to fulfill a spiritual need.⁸⁰ This involved the performance of a set repertoire of Germanic works from Bach to Schumann and Brahms, but it also emphasized the personal meanings of pieces among members in the circle.

The public reaction to this circle revealed similar attitudes that led to such terms as “priesthood of art,” even though this reception was not uniformly positive. Brahms was the most famous composer of the group, who like Richard Wagner, garnered some of

⁷⁹ See Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt*, vol. 2 (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1983).

⁸⁰ Jan Brachmann, *Kunst-Religion-Krise: der Fall Brahms* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003).

the strongest adversity and praise in the realm of public music criticism. As the chosen one of Robert Schumann and the most successful in the marketplace, he found himself a target for Wagner's personal vitriol toward living composers. Championed by one group, vilified by the other, Brahms proves a necessary figure to examine from the standpoint of contemporary German aesthetics and culture.

Brahms scholarship has recently seen more cultural-historical analyses than previously, and many of these studies focus on national, religious, and political contexts for Brahms and his music. But only a handful deal with Brahms and his relation to issues of gender, sexuality, or any kind of broadly construed sensuality in art. The few scholars who have touched upon the topic often argue for understanding musical aesthetics in this period in terms of a general masculine-feminine dichotomy, with the feminine representing the natural and sensual and the masculine representing reason and restraint.⁸¹ The critical rhetoric situating Brahms as a priest of music, both in its positive and negative formulations, however, suggests that more complicated notions of musical expression were at play. Taken together, the detractors' and supporters' discussions of Brahms highlight a complex web of aesthetic values that cut across religious, sexual, and gendered boundaries. In particular the rhetoric directed at Brahms, "holy Johannes," demonstrates how and to what extent the idea of musical purity had become a negative and false quality for some critics. The style of composition that Brahms developed

⁸¹ Marcia Citron, "Gendered Reception of Brahms: Masculinity, Nationalism, and Musical Politics," Paper read at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society, Washington, D.C. 2005; Susan McClary, "Narrative Agendas in "Absolute" Music: Identity and difference in Brahms's Third Symphony," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley, U.S.A.: University of California, 1993), 326–44; Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

through his study of early music, in addition to the rhetoric of musical purity already associated with such early music, helped shape his reception towards the priest of music trope, in both its positive and negative guises. While situated in a priesthood of art, Brahms proves a unique figure in terms of his reception, which was influenced as well by the developing biographical narrative that he and his circle created, and which came under attack by some detractors.

Brahms reception has been dominated by the shadow of Schumann's famous 1853 article "Neue Bahnen," from the moment it appeared in print and even down to today. Different threads of Brahms reception reflect the themes established in Schumann's article that introduced Brahms to the music world. The piece is rife with the rhetoric of progress, and more famously of messianic overtones. "And he is come, a young blood, at whose cradle the Graces and heroes held watch."⁸² Schumann also suggested that Brahms would reveal "secrets of the spirit world," should he ever write for chorus and orchestra—a comment that many critics later interpreted as a prophecy that Brahms proved true with his *German Requiem*.⁸³ Schumann's prophetic language appeared in more extreme versions in his private correspondence as Norbert Meurs has shown, but by publishing in his old journal after a ten year hiatus, Schumann made a considerable and unavoidable statement about musical politics, casting Brahms as a hero

⁸² "Und er ist gekommen, ein junges Blut, an dessen Wiege Grazie und Helden Wache hielten. Er heißt JOHANNES BRAHMS, kam von Hamburg, dort in dunkler Stille schaffend, aber von einem trefflichen und begeistert zutragenden Lehrer gebildet in schwierigsten Satzungen der Kunst, mir kurz vorher von einem verehrten bekannten Meister empfohlen." Robert Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *NZfM* 39 (1853), 185.

⁸³ "Wenn er seinen Zauberstab dahin senken wird, wo ihm die Mächte der Massen, im Chor und Orchester, ihre Kräfte leihen, so stehen uns noch wunderbarere Blicke in die Geheimnisse der Geisterwelt bevor." *Ibid.*

in relation to the *New German School*.⁸⁴ By hailing Brahms as the new messiah of music, he also unwittingly forged a rhetorical path in Brahms reception that both supporters and detractors would follow through the century, his supporters eventually situating him within a “priesthood of art” along with other members of Schumann’s circle.

One immediate result of the publication of “Neue Bahnen” was the tremendous amount of pressure it threw upon young Brahms, who withdrew into a period of intense self-scrutiny that included the study of much early music.⁸⁵ Brahms examined everything from Bach chorales to the toccatas and canzonas of Frescobaldi.⁸⁶ Inspired by Schumann’s model, Brahms and Joseph Joachim undertook a joint study in counterpoint in 1854, exchanging canons and correcting each other’s voice leading.⁸⁷ For Brahms the work led to faux-Bachian organ fugues, canons, baroque sarabands and gigues, and an unfinished Latin mass. None of this music was published immediately, and so to the public Brahms presented himself as a composer of marketable, small-scale chamber works: the opp. 6 and 7 songs (published 1853 and 1854), the B Major Piano Trio (1854), and the piano works opp. 9 and 10, Variations on a Theme by Schumann, and the ballades. But Brahms’s personal connections, performances, and work with the Hamburg

⁸⁴ “Nun ich glaube, Johannes ist der wahre Apostel...” and “Brahms, das ist der, der kommen musste.” Cited in Norbert Meurs, *Neue Bahnen? Aspekte der Brahms Rezeption 1853–1868* (Bonn: Studio, 1996), 17–18.

⁸⁵ See Georg Predota, “Johannes Brahms and the Foundations of Composition: the Base of his Study of Figured Bass and Counterpoint” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000).

⁸⁶ See Virginia Hancock, “Brahms and his Library of Early Music: the Effects of his Study of Renaissance and Baroque Music on his Choral Writing” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1977); and Thomas Krehahn, “Brahms und die Alte Musik,” in *Brahms der fortschrittliche Akademiker* (Munich: Musikverlag Katzschler, 1998), 23.

⁸⁷ See David Brodbeck, “The Brahms-Joachim Counterpoint Exchange; or Robert, Clara, and ‘the Best Harmony between Jos. and Jo.’” in *Brahms Studies*, vol. 1, ed. David Brodbeck (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

women's choruses through the later 1850s helped him gain a reputation as a student of early music.⁸⁸ It would later be confirmed through his work on editions of early music and his deep associations with musicologists Gustav Nottebohm, Friedrich Chrysander, and Eusebius Mandyczewski.⁸⁹

One overlooked aspect of Brahms's relation to early music is the subtle way in which it informed the reception of him as a priest of music. The association of early music with purity, established earlier in the century, persisted through his lifetime, and when united with mid-century notions of pure form, the resulting discourse on musical purity aligned neatly with much of Brahms's compositional style. A representative example of such criticism, from Eduard Hanslick, demonstrates the way in which the rhetoric of purity was united with certain stylistic markers:

With Schumann, Brahms's music shares above all a chastity, an inner nobility . . . Far surpassed by Schumann in wealth and beauty of melodic invention, Brahms usually beats him in the richness of pure figurative formation [*rein figuraler Gestaltung*]. Here lies Brahms's greatest strength; he took from Schumann the brilliant modernization of the canon [and] the fugue. The common source, from which both created, is Sebastian Bach.⁹⁰

The phrase *rein figuraler Gestaltung* is reminiscent of Hanslick's descriptions of music in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*: the arabesque, the kaleidoscope, and the famous "tonally moving forms" that had become a standard phrase of the musical literature. Once again,

⁸⁸ See Sophie Drinker, *Brahms and his Women's Choruses* (Merion, PA.; S. Drinker, under the auspices of Musurgia Publishers, A.G. Hess, 1952); Virginia Hancock, "Brahms's Performances of Early Choral Music," *19th-Century Music* 8 (1984), 125–41.

⁸⁹ Karl Geiringer, "Brahms as Musicologist," *The Musical Quarterly* 69 (1983), 463–70.

⁹⁰ "Mit Schumann theilt Brahms' Musik vor allem die Keuschheit, den innern Adel...An Fülle und Schönheit der melodischen Erfindung von Schumann hoch überragt, erreicht ihn Brahms häufig im Reichthum rein figuraler Gestaltung. Hier liegt Brahms' grösste Stärke; die geistvolle Modernisirung des Canons, der Fuge, hat er von Schumann. Die gemeinschaftliche Quelle, an der Beide schöpften, ist Sebastian Bach." Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1870), 256.

he equates both this style of pure motivic writing (rather than general instrumental music) and the stylistic tropes of early music (canon, fugue) with the qualities of chastity and nobility. Unsurprisingly, Hanslick also groups Brahms with Schumann, another association that would stay with Brahms throughout his lifetime; however, the reception of Schumann himself enjoyed a less uniform path as it was complicated by his illness and early death.⁹¹

If Hanslick merely implied a connection between certain styles of composition and purity, other critics were less vague. Already in 1862 Adolf Schubring, who had been friends with Brahms since the mid 1850s, incorporated his knowledge of Brahms's study habits into his critical analysis of the composer. He hailed Brahms's "secure and complete mastery over himself, over his own demonic passion"—something he had lacked in his early works, but had attained through careful study of early music.

While Goethe in Italy received mastery effortlessly through practical living in the Hellenic and Roman spirit, Brahms acquired his through the tireless and continual study of the scores of our old masters.⁹²

Schubring thus articulates what would become a standard narrative in Brahms studies: here was a young composer apprenticing himself to the art of early music, the application

⁹¹ For more on Schumann reception see Jürgen Thym, "Schumann in Brendel's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* from 1845–56," in *Mendelssohn and Schumann: Essays on their Music and its Context*, ed. Larry Todd and Jon Finson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 21–36; Bernhard R. Appel, "Robert Schumanns Krankheit und Tod im öffentlichen Diskurs. Zur Konstituierung des Schumann-Bildes in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Robert Schumann und die Öffentlichkeit*, ed. Helmut Loos (Leipzig: Gudrun Schröder Verlag, 2007), 275–312.

⁹² "...was ihm zur Gewinnung der höchsten Meisterschaft noch fehlte, die sicherer und vollständige Herrschaft über sich selbst, über die eigene dämonische Leidenschaft. Während Goethe in Italien seine Meisterschaft durch praktisches Hineinleben in den hellenischen und römischen Geist mühelos zufiel, hat Brahms die seinige durch unausgesetztes Studiren der Partituren unserer Altmeister sich mühevoll erarbeitet...." Adolf Schubring, "Schumannianer Nr. 8," *NZfM* 56 (1862), 111.

of strict self discipline and the study of strict counterpoint combining to overcome any compositional and moral weaknesses.⁹³

As Schubring's "Schumanniana" article suggests, it was becoming more fashionable to discuss composer biography in conjunction with the analysis of music, a phenomenon that would lead to Brahms's subtle control of his own image. The growing musical print culture included sheet music, aesthetic treatises, newspaper feuilletons, and specialized musical journals that juxtaposed concert and music reviews with reports about the performers and composers themselves.⁹⁴ Some journals contained composer biographies and miscellaneous biographical items that occasionally devolved into mere rumor. For example, the *NZfM* felt it necessary to correct a report in February of 1857—not one full year after Robert Schumann's death—that Clara Schumann was engaged to Niels Gade. According to the journal, this was a rumor that Gade himself had fostered because he was not receiving enough publicity.⁹⁵ Unsurprisingly, some artists complained that biographical and personal details unduly influenced critical reception of their works and artistic aims. In defense of Richard Wagner, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch argued that personal battles often influenced critics, and that the composer had already suffered his personal life being pulled perfidiously into the critical discussion.⁹⁶

⁹³ One only has to look at the frequent appearance of Brahms's letter to Clara Schumann from Detmold (Oct 11, 1857), which is so often quoted as an example of his own view towards discipline and controlling passions; see, for example, the agreement of Avins and Swafford on this point. Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 175; Styra Avins, *Johannes Brahms Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 158.

⁹⁴ See Leon Botstein, "Music and its Public; Habits of Listening and the crisis of modernism in Vienna, 1870–1914" (Ph. D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1985); and Samuel Weibel, *Die deutschen Musikfeste des 19. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen musikalischen Fachpresse*, Beiträge zur Rheinischen Musikgeschichte, vol. 168 (Kassel: Merseburger, 2006).

⁹⁵ *NZfM* 46 (1857), 63.

Of relevance to Brahms, this growing interest in composer biography through the nineteenth century opened the doors for critics to correlate the purity of composers' lifestyles with their music. In an 1872 collection of essays, Heinrich Ehrlich offered one example of the tendency to associate biographical detail with the value of a composer's music. Bach and Handel, he argued, had united spiritual music and spotless lifestyles:

And besides this spiritual elevation, what morality, what principles, what purity of private life did the greatest German musicians have! They wanted only to function as geniuses of their art; they despised being clever men of worldly enjoyment as later became fashionable.⁹⁷

He implies that contemporary composers have lost this dedication to art, although he cites Mendelssohn and Schumann as more recent, if deceased, examples of composers who lived what their music preached.

As Schubring had already demonstrated, Brahms's study and compositional habits also influenced the way critics received his works. By the late 1860s his preference for quiet summer lodgings away from cities was also well known. His summer composition routine, which he sustained into the 1890s, may have seemed severe to others: rise at 5 a.m., compose until midday. This studious devotion to composition could have prompted such comments as "near-ascetic" and "John in the Wilderness" already in the 1860s. In

⁹⁶ "Hat man nicht sogar sein Privatleben perfid in die Debatte hineingezogen?" Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Über den Werth der Kritik* (Leipzig: Julius Günther, 1873), 86.

⁹⁷ "Und neben dieser geistigen Erhebung, welche hohe Moralität, welche Sittlichkeit, welche Reinheit des Privatlebens bei den grössten deutschen Musikern! Sie wollten nur als Genie in ihrer Kunst wirken, geniale Lebensmenschen zu sein, wie es später Mode wurde, verschmähten sie." Heinrich Ehrlich, *Schlaglichter und Schlagschatten* (Berlin: Guttentag, 1872), 63.

contrast to Wagner's well-documented extravagance in matters of personal accoutrements, Brahms lived more modestly.⁹⁸

In an early biographical sketch of Brahms from 1870, in which Brahms was said to have "led a wanderer's life," the young Viennese critic Theodor Helm opened by quoting the entirety of Schumann's "Neue Bahnen."⁹⁹ As if that were not indication enough of how important he deemed the article, Helm explicitly argued that "in these words of Schumann lies the key to the entire artistic livelihood of Johannes Brahms."¹⁰⁰ Helm's understanding of Brahms biography through Schumann's quasi-Biblical language also helps to explain his own. He argued that, after disappearing from the music world for a few years, Brahms had returned and fulfilled Schumann's prophecy with *Ein deutsches Requiem*. While Helm does not explicitly connect Brahms's disappearance with a study of his art, he speaks often of his "musical knowledge" (*Wissen*) and his avoidance of "sensual sound effects" (*sinnliche Klangreize*), which, as seen in Schubring's review earlier, were generally presented as a dichotomy with moral implications of good and bad.

Such comments continued a tradition already established by Schumann through his use of quasi-religious rhetoric. While Schumann may have written "Neue Bahnen" as a response to the overly enthusiastic promotion of Wagner in the *Neue Zeitschrift*, his

⁹⁸ Wagner's excesses in decoration and fashion were well known by the late 1860s, as much of the Munich press had complained bitterly at Ludwig II's financial support of them. Furthermore, Wagner's personal letters to his Viennese milliner were republished in the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse* and annotated as a comedy series by the parodist Daniel Spitzer in 1876.

⁹⁹ "Als Mensch hat Brahms bisher ein Wanderleben geführt." Theodor Helm, "Johannes Brahms," *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 1 (1870), 41.

¹⁰⁰ "In diesen Worten Schumann's liegt zugleich der Schlüssel der ganzen künstlerischen Laufbahn Johannes Brahms." Ibid.

article did not explicitly position Brahms as a moral antidote to Wagner or Liszt (insofar as it did not mention either composer). Through the years, though, Wagner's detractors would often incorporate the religious rhetoric in discussions of Brahms contra Wagner, creating a structural battle of pure and impure, healthy and unhealthy.

Thus, critics could speak of a "priesthood of art" that included Brahms as well as others from the circle surrounding Robert Schumann. The priesthood extended beyond composition to include the performance styles and repertoire choices as well. In this way, Joseph Joachim's or Clara Schumann's conscious decision to include Bach on their programs could be interpreted as a deliberate statement about the purity of the past in relation to empty virtuosity of the present. This attitude toward past music and its performance finds voice in an *AmZ* article from 1874:

In Clara Schumann the serious Priesthood of Art is so coalesced in her entire being, that a greater awe-inspiring harmony is inconceivable, and thereby she preserves her pure, noble mission in true womanly manner...¹⁰¹

It also represented one way of understanding Clara Schumann's career after the death of Robert: mourning, serious, and by implication virginal, as Jan Swafford has noted.¹⁰² The projection of quasi-religious qualities onto a woman performer might coincide with contemporary notions of nurturing motherhood and the feminization of religion, but in this instance, the critic does not limit his praise to Clara Schumann:

If that is the highest, moral side of art, to promote happiness of the listener, if one has become a better person through it, then I have never felt more conscious of

¹⁰¹ "In Clara Schumann ist das ernste Priesterthum der Kunst so mit ihrem ganzen Wesen verschmolzen, dass eine grössere, Ehrfurcht gebietende Harmonie nicht gedacht werden könnte, und dabei wahrt sie ihre reine, hohe Aufgabe in echt weiblicher Weise." Gustav von Putlitz, "Theater Erinnerungen," *AmZ* 9 (1874), 238.

¹⁰² Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 472.

this than through the playing of Clara Schumann and through the playing of Joachim, who is no less noble, no less free from all fake virtuosity. His art is brighter, sunnier, but just as uplifted, bettered, and ennobled as the priesthood.¹⁰³

So Joachim appears brighter in contrast to the more soberly tinged Clara Schumann, yet both belong to the serious priesthood of art. And before them, Robert Schumann had become one of the “martyrs of the beautiful” with his early death.¹⁰⁴ The rhetoric extended to singers in the circle as well; Joachim’s wife Amalie, a contralto, was also considered to possess a “rare holy earnestness.”¹⁰⁵ That Amalie had left the operatic stage after marriage and limited her performances to art song and oratorio only helped to support the continuing divide between the seriousness of pure music and the lasciviousness of opera. The group of priests, then, is comprised of Schumann’s close personal circle again, and discussions of Clara Schumann and the Joachims could easily be extended to Brahms as they were known to perform together and support each other artistically. The implication of including Clara Schumann is not that she was “one of the boys,” but rather, that the priesthood transcended such bodily distinctions as male and female; that is, in a spiritual context, this simply did not matter.

For Brahms, who preferred to avoid performing, his contribution to this priesthood came largely through the success of *Ein deutsches Requiem*, op. 45. For many critics, it turned out to be an important milestone that proved what they had already

¹⁰³ “Wenn es die höchste, die moralische Seite der Kunst ist, die Gemüther der Zuhörer zu läutern, wenn man fühlt, besser zu werden durch sie, so habe ich dieses Bewusstsein nie entschiedener gehabt, als bei dem Spiel von Clara Schumann und bei dem nicht minder edlen, nicht weniger von allem falschen Virtuositentum freien, Joachims, dessen Künstlerschaft heiterer, sonniger ist, aber ebenso wie eine Priesterschaft erhebt, bessert und veredelt.” Gustav von Putlitz, “Theater Erinnerung,” 238.

¹⁰⁴ “—Wahrlich, es giebt Martyrer des Schönen!” Dr. Richarz, “Robert Schumann,” *AmZ* 8 (1873), 598.

¹⁰⁵ “Möchte es vielen vergönnet sein, die Totalität ihres Gesanges zu genießen, und fähig zu sein, jene tiefen Eindruck zu empfangen, den nur der seltene heilige Ernst gewähren kann, mit dem eine Amalie Joachim die Kunst betreibt.” “Amalie Joachim,” *AmZ* 1 (1866), 371.

suspected about Brahms's function in the music world: his works offered a moral antidote to the impurities presented by Wagner and others. While Brahms had been considered mainly as a composer of pure chamber music through the 1860s, with the success of the *Requiem* his reception developed even more along the quasi-religious lines established by Schumann. The first performance, though incomplete, took place in December 1867 in Vienna, and although it was not a complete success, news of the *Requiem* spread through the German-speaking world with a hushed anticipation. The next two years saw many more performances throughout Germany, mostly with more success than the piece had seen in Vienna. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* seemed content to report every performance of the *Requiem*, its 1869 volume reading like a Brahms-funded political ad. It made sense for the *AmZ* to support Brahms, of course: both the journal and Brahms's music were published by the company J. Rieter-Biedermann at that time. Perhaps Hermann Deiter's opening remarks in this review of Brahms's songs opp. 46–49 best captures the spirit with which the journal lauded its hero:

As the *German Requiem* by J. Brahms has begun its course through Germany and everywhere it is performed, and warms and inspires the hearts of those who can and want to hear it; already we are endowed with a wealth of smaller blooms of his genius, which are new witnesses to the never-flagging power, to the security of his artistic craftsmanship, to the versatility of his erudition.¹⁰⁶

The *Requiem* launched Brahms into fame—fame, critics agreed, that he had earned by his own merits, not on the recommendation of Robert Schumann. Paradoxically, though, reviews of the *Requiem* most often cited Schumann's article, now depicting the work as

¹⁰⁶ “Während das Deutsche Requiem von J. Brahms seinen Lauf durch Deutschland begonnen hat und überall, wo es zur Darstellung kommt, die Herzen derer, welche hören wollen und können, erwärmt und entzückt, werden wir schon wieder durch eine Fülle kleinerer Blüten seines Genies beschenkt, die für die nie versiegende Kraft desselben, für die Sicherheit seines künstlerischen Gestaltens, für die Vielseitigkeit seiner Bildung neue Zeugnisse sind.” Hermann Deiters, *AmZ* 4 (1869), 106.

the fulfillment of Schumann's prophecy, and the messianic implications of Schumann's "Neue Bahnen" now seemed more apparent.

The *Requiem* was the first large-scale religious piece Brahms produced, and it relates to both the trend towards aestheticized religious music as well as to what Daniel Beller-McKenna calls the "German apocalyptic moment." Beller-McKenna argues that the piece spoke to the tension of German nationalist expectations on the eve of the Franco-Prussian War, and that this accounts for much of its widespread popularity.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, some critics painted the history of religious music with wide-sweeping brush strokes as one long tradition with no difference between Protestant and Catholic styles and without regard to performance venue and function. The Viennese Count Ferdinand Peter Laurencin ("-L."), reviewing the *Requiem* in 1868, created an unusual historical heritage for the piece:

He treads here a path, already long—prefigured through Luca Marenzio—, consciously developed through Seb. Bach's, Beethoven's, Vogler's, Cherubini's masterworks of the sacred style, finally achieved and paved through deeds equal to the "Liebesmahl der Apostel," the "Graner Messe," the "[St.] Elisabeth" and so forth, as indispensable postulate of all contemplative musical creations.¹⁰⁸

Laurencin's review suggested a line of music that was independent from the party battle that continued raging through the 1860s; positioning Brahms in a lineage that began with Marenzio and continued through Wagner and Liszt represented at least an attempt to cut across these boundaries.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit*, 65–70.

¹⁰⁸ "Er betritt hier einen schon lange—etwa durch Luca Marenzio—vorgebildeten, durch Seb. Bach's, Beethoven's, Vogler's, Cherubini's Meisterwerke geistlichen Styls zusehends reicher und bewusstvoller entfalteten, endlich durch Thaten gleich dem 'Liebesmahl der Apostel' der 'Graner Messe' und der 'Elisabeth' u. s. w. als unumgängliches Postulat allen beschaulichen Tonschaffens festgestellten und geebneten Weg." – .L., "Orchester- und Vocalconcerte: Wien," *NZfM* 64 (1868), 101.

But not all critics saw religious music as created equal. Certainly, as seen in Laurencin's review, some critics considered stylistic differences between Catholic and Protestant religious music to be irrelevant, but others interpreted works by Liszt and Brahms as victories for their respective sides in the debate. An argument in favor of Liszt's "church music of the future" might praise him for uniting the sensual and spiritual realms. For example, another Viennese critic, Leopold Alexander Zellner, published a lengthy analysis of Liszt's *Gran Mass* (1855–58), concluding that the difference between "music of the new direction" and the "obstinate opposition" was precisely one of sensuality and spirituality. Liszt excelled in combining both realms: the "power of invention," "sensual beauty," a "wealth of fantasy," and "rigorous logic."¹⁰⁹ In this way, Liszt's religious music, with its valuation of the sensual as well as spiritual realms, could be positioned as more complete, more human, and thus might qualify as "Church Music of the Future."

Within this framework of sensualists and purists, it is not difficult to see how purists praised the *Requiem* in contrast to its admittedly more sensual counterparts from Liszt. The musical characteristics encompassed by the "sensual" were varied and usually left vague or unstated in reviews. One critic of the *Requiem* claimed that operatic

¹⁰⁹ "Im ähnlichen Verhältnisse erscheinen uns die Fortschrittsbestrebungen der neuen musikalischen Richtung einerseits, die hartnäckigen Gegenkämpfe andererseits. Der Unterschied zwischen dem Gleichnisse und dem Verglichenen liegt nur im Terrain, welches dort ein rein sinnliches, hier ein absolut geistiges ist. An jenem dem realpraktischen Leben angehörigen Gebiete liegen die Vortheile greifbar, wägbar, messbar, zählbar vor, auf diesem der Uebersinnlichkeit zugewandten hingegen bestehen sie in imponderablen Eigenschaften, deren Erkennen einen hohen Grad psychischer Ausbildungen, wie: Geschmack, Empfindung, Phantasie erheischt...Dies ist der Kern eines in so durchgreifender Anwendung erst den neuesten Fortschrittsbestrebungen entsprossenen Principes, welches wir mit eben so viel Genie als Bewusstsein, Erfindungskraft wie sinnlicher Schönheit, Phantasiefülle wie strenger Logik durchgeführt, in der Listz'schen Messe kennen gelernt haben." L.A. Zellner, *Franz Liszt's Graner Festmesse und ihre Stellung zur geschichtlichen Entwicklung der Kirchenmusik. Ein Beitrag zum wesenhaften Verständnisse dieses Werkes* (Vienna, F. Manz und Comp., 1858), 80–81.

elements of instrumentation marred the purity of the sacred genre to which the piece belonged, a sentiment that echoed Hoffmann's critique of Mozart and Haydn; in the course of the review, the writer perfectly reinforces the generic and moral divide that provided the framework for reception of Brahms and other composers during this period:

This direction, originating in operatic music, which has also become more and more naturalized in pure instrumental music, is entirely unsuitable for the sacred genre of composition; the seriousness, dignity, and majesty of it demand a respective simplicity and purity, we might say chastity of sound-effect [*Klang-Effecte*], whereby the sensual-material impact of the sound [*Klangwirkung*] has retreated to the background.¹¹⁰

The critic's choice of words, the distinction between *Klangeffect* and *Klangwirkung*, suggests a further distinction between the sound object that is chaste, and the active process of the sensual and material sound working upon the listener. It reinforces the dichotomy between the supposed purity of the sacred genres and the impurity of opera, between the immaterial and sensual that Wagner had railed against in his Zürich writings, and between the calm listener actively contemplating music and the listener who passively lets the material effect of the sound distract them from the "seriousness" of the matter. Such was the subtle rhetorical climate of the musical discourse, in which certain words might inspire associated meanings in the minds of readers, thereby reinforcing the party lines that had formed so long ago.

Such complaints from the non-Wagnerian side of the spectrum were few, but usually included either the modulations or the difficult contrapuntal writing, especially in

¹¹⁰ "Diese von der operistischen Musik zunächst ausgehende Richtung, welche sich auch in der reinen Instrumental Musik schon mehr und mehr eingebürgert hat, passt jedenfalls nicht für kirchliche CompositionsGattung; der Ernst, die Würde und Hoheit derselben fordern eine entsprechende Einfachheit und Reinheit, wir möchten sagen Keuschheit der Klang-Effecte, wobei die sinnlich-materielle Klangwirkung in den Hintergrund zutreten hat." A. Maczewski, "Ein deutsches Requiem," *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 1 (1870), 21.

the third movement. One critic went so far as to deem the third-movement fugue “music for the eye” on account of its complexity: “I demand from music that it be understandable.”¹¹¹ This represents one rare point of intersection among Brahms’s critics, and a problem that would continually face him through his career: how to incorporate his love of contrapuntal intricacies while appealing to the widest audience? But while some listeners threw up their hands in frustration and deemed Brahms’s fugal writing to be incomprehensible, others took their criticism in a different, more personal direction.

Those critics who prized the new and sensual in music often criticized Brahms and other “Schumannian” composers for their lack of humanity. Certainly, Brahms’s attempt to divorce the personal from the professional may have flummoxed those critics who believed in a deep connection between the creation and the creator. The opinion that proper creativity required the fully human element (the *Reinmenschliche*) combining body, reason, and feeling, was especially prominent on the Wagnerian side of the debate, following his championing of Feuerbachian philosophy in his revolutionary writings. If music was Eros, or represented feelings, passion, and human drama, it followed that one had to be capable of feeling, experienced in life and fully invested in the sensual realm. In short, to be an incomplete human being was to be an unconvincing composer.¹¹² The dramatist and revolutionary Ludwig Eckhardt argued in an 1864 work on *Die Zukunft der Musik* that those who believed in the naiveté of Haydn amounted to “Castratos of the

¹¹¹ “Ich verlange von der Musik, dass sie verständlich sei.... Dieser Brahms’sche Satz wird nach meiner Ueberzeugung dem Ohr nie klar werden. Er ist und bleibt Musik für’s Auge.” *AmZ* 11 (1876), 252. The context of this comment strongly suggests that the speaker found it too complicated on the basis of the contrapuntal complexity, rather than the acoustic and/or instrumental problems that had marred the early performances of this fugue in the late 1860s.

¹¹² Rudolf Benfey, “Die Mittel des Tonreiches nach Inhalt und Form,” *NZfM* 63 (1867), 241.

spirit.”¹¹³ He lamented further that in contrast to the “red-blooded” (*von lebendiger Sinnlichkeit*) musicians of the past, so many modern musicians seemed too cerebral, spiritualized—in short, “disembodied” (*vergeistigte*).¹¹⁴ Ludwig Nohl expressed this criticism in particular reference to Brahms in a report from Vienna in April 1867. He offered that while Brahms’s keyboard playing showed command of the harmonic and polyphonic elements of the best music, it lacked a certain depth of other Schumannian performers such as Albert Dietrich or Theodor Kirchner. For Brahms’s own music, however, Nohl went further, concluding, “In short, it is as if Brahms has more to say as a musician than he basically has to share as a human being.”¹¹⁵

In the summer following the Viennese premiere of the *Requiem*, a particularly vitriolic article was reprinted in the *Neue Zeitschrift*. It took aim at the Schumann School, ironically dubbed “The League of Virtue” (*Tugendbund*). The author, a one *musicus pugnans*, complained about the followers of Schumann who supposedly had accomplished nothing new since the man’s death in 1856—almost nothing new:

Some characteristics of Schumann were taken to new heights by his followers. Already reflected in Schumann’s works—especially of the last period—[we find] a great uncertainty of thought, a blurring of external contours—at times these are advanced by most of his followers to complete unintelligibility.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ “Sollen die Tonkünstler etwa Castraten des Geistes werden, damit sich eine raffinierte Zeit an einer exotisch gewordenen Naivität erfreue?” Ludwig Eckhardt, *Die Zukunft der Musik* (Leipzig: C.F. Kahnt, 1864), 11.

¹¹⁴ “Lebte Lavater heute, er müsste seine Physiognomik des Musikers allmählich ganz umschreiben. Blicken Sie in dem Kreise umher! Überrascht es Sie nicht selbst, wie an die Stelle des alten, vollen, von lebendiger Sinnlichkeit sprechenden Musikergesichtes ein vergeistigtes Antlitz tritt?” Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Es ist, um es mit einem Worte zu sagen, als wenn Brahms als Musiker mehr zu sagen verstünde, als er als Mensch im Grunde mitzutheilen hat.” Ludwig Nohl, *Neues Skizzenbuch* (Munich: Carl Merhoff’s Verlag, 1869), 195.

¹¹⁶ “Manche Eigenthümlichkeiten Schumann's wurden von seinen Nachfolgern auf die Spitze getrieben. Zeigt sich schon in Schumann's Werken—besonders letzterer Periode—eine gewisse Unbestimmtheit des

He went so far as to call them the “Schumann cult,” and although he only mentioned Brahms by name, it was most likely that readers knew at least a few of the other “cult” members. In a series of articles entitled “Schumanniana” published in the *NZfM* in the early 1860s, Adolf Schubring had described the young composers he felt to be in the Schumann School. His list included Carl Ritter, Theodor Kirchner, Woldemar Bargiel, and Johannes Brahms, to whom he dedicated the most analysis. By the time the “Tugendbund” article appeared, though, Schubring had moved the final two articles of “Schumanniana” to the more sympathetic *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.¹¹⁷

The author of the “Tugendbund” article railed exactly against Schubring’s style of praise, criticizing the group of critics who had rallied around Schumann and his followers. He offered that the “Tugendbund” included critics who were still fighting against Wagner, who lacked common sense, who displayed an unhealthy enthusiasm for Schumann that bordered on idolatry. The name “Tugendbund” itself was a play on Schumann’s “Davidsbund,” and, given the attack on critics in this article, the “Tugendbund” could also refer to the group of Schumann-sympathizers who formed in Prague in the early 1840s. These music critics included Wilhelm August Ambros and Eduard Hanslick, who had their own Schumannian nicknames and had formed a “Prague Davisbund.”¹¹⁸ After they split up and went their separate ways, these critics continued

Gedankens, ein Verschwimmen der äusseren Umrisse, so steigert sich dies bei den meisten seiner Nachfolger zuweilen zu völliger Unklarheit.” *NZfM* 16 (1868), 135.

¹¹⁷ For more on the history and politics of this series, see Walter Frisch, “Brahms and Schubring: Musical Politics at Mid-Century,” *19th-Century Music* 7 (1984), 271–81.

¹¹⁸ Bonnie and Erling Lomnes, Dieter Strauss, eds., *Auf der Suche nach der poetischen Zeit: Der Prager Davidsbündler: Ambros, Bach, Bayer, Hampel, Hanslick, Helfert, Heller, Hock, Ulm*. vol. 1 *Erläuterungen, Nachlassregesten, Konzertdokumente* (Saarbrücken: Pfau, 1999).

to support Schumann in their writings. The “Tugendbund” author made the connection clearer still by noting that even a member of the “Davidsbund” could become a “Philistine” by not advancing with the times. It was a clever rhetorical trick to offer that Schumann’s original “Davidsbund” had indeed been progressive, but that his followers had now become exactly what he had once tried to avoid in music.

The attack continued as the author lumped critics and composers together, calling them “Schumann-Enthusiasts,” “Tugendbündler,” “the Schumann Cult,” and “the fakes” (*Schwindel*), but Brahms received special attention as the only composer mentioned by name. The author offered that Brahms, while talented and the best of the group, was a “near-ascetic Christian-Germanic composer” to whom he could not warm.¹¹⁹ Michael Musgrave sees this as a reference to the *Requiem* in particular, although in March 1868 only the three-movement Vienna premiere had taken place, and the more general terms of the comment suggest it was aimed towards Brahms the composer and all of his music, rather than one piece in particular.¹²⁰ It is possible, however, that the news of the *Requiem* helped bring about this criticism. While an “ascetic” lifestyle may have befitted a messiah figure, here it did not necessarily reflect the ideal for a bourgeois composer, and it certainly did not square with Wagnerian aesthetics of the sensual artform that could immediately speak to its audience.

The “League of Virtue” article seemed to cast Brahms in the stereotype of the cold northerner, incapable of warming listeners with the melodious cheerfulness

¹¹⁹ “... wir vermögen uns wol hoch für den jungen Tondichter zu interessiren, jedoch liegt etwas in der Richtung und dem Wesen diese beinahe ascetischem, christlich-germanischen Componisten, was die Erwärmung und Begeisterung für seine Muse in uns verhindert.—Er vermag es nicht, uns vollends zu überzeugen.” “Tugendbund,” *NZfM* 16 (1868), 136.

¹²⁰ Michael Musgrave, *Brahms: A German Requiem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63.

associated with the music of sunnier climes. Moreover, Brahms appeared as only one among many composers caught in the same musical style as the out-of-date Robert Schumann, many of whom could never escape the critical shadow of the “Schumann Cult.” Brahms, so often compared to Beethoven, was merely, in Richard Wagner’s words, “the composer of the last thought of Robert Schumann.”¹²¹ In another article from the same source as the “Tugendbund” article, a critic from Dresden attempted to explain “what has suspended Johannes Brahms’s development,” namely, “the deification by friends, the self-coddling, and the prophetic expectations that the Romantics heaped upon him....”¹²²

Beyond Brahms, the “Tugendbund” reflected a growing cynicism towards the ideals of musical purity. In the first part of the century Zelter had, in all seriousness, been able to characterize his *Singakademie* as a temple of virtue, but now purity, omnipresent as it had become in the criticism, was garnering more skepticism. Here the “virtue” in the “League of Virtue” alludes to the perceived deification of Schumann by implying that some of his supporters considered it a holy duty to preserve his musical style and ideals—not unlike apostles—a sentiment which taps into the messianic rhetoric already established by Schumann’s own writing and that of other critics.

¹²¹ “Wir fürchten, dass der Komponist des letzten Gedankens Robert Schumann’s über ähnliches Missgeschick sich zu beklagen haben dürfte.” Richard Wagner, “Über das Dichten und Komponieren,” in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen von Richard Wagner*, vol. 10 (Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 150.

¹²² “In der Erscheinung und staunenswerthen Misskennung seiner compositorischen öffentlichen Qualitäten liegt aber ganz offenbart, was Johannes Brahms Entwicklung sistirt hat: die Vergötterung der Freunde, die Selbstverzärtelung und die prophetischen Erwartungen, die die Romantiker auf ihn gehäuft; jetzt, da der begabte Mann im 34ten Jahre steht (geb 1833), ist es zweifellos, dass, wie er als Componist zwischen dem GeistvollCombinirten das marklos Weichlichste schafft, seiner öffentlichen Laufbahn die bestimmte und im Widerstand gestählte Fondirung ermangelt.” *Monatshefte für Theater und Musik* 1 (1868), 89.

The author of the “Tugendbund” article left no signature other than *musicus pugnans*, but Franz Brendel republished the article in April 1868 in his *Neue Zeitschrift* by way of introducing a new journal. The journal, entitled *Monatshefte für Musik und Theater*, was co-edited by two professors from the University of Graz, historian Franz von Zwiedeneck-Südenhorst and novelist Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Though short-lived, the journal enjoyed the contributions of established critics such as Friedrich Hausegger and the women’s rights supporter Louise Otto. Zwiedenek-Südenhorst dealt mainly with the musical half of the journal and penned many of the articles himself, including a series he would publish independently as “Die Mittel und Aufgabe der Musik” in 1868.¹²³ In that series he argued against Hanslick’s pure music and on behalf of program music; it seems likely that he wrote the “Tugendbund” article, given the similarity of content and its attack on critics such as Hanslick. While Sacher-Masoch handled the literary and theatrical articles, it is clear from his own 1873 work *Über den Werth der Kritik* that he aligned himself artistically with Richard Wagner at this time.¹²⁴

Wagner himself took the implications of the “Tugendbund” article, especially as concerned Brahms, much further in his series “Über das Dirigieren” (*On Conducting*) published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* between November 1869 and January 1870. The year 1868 had proved to be a watershed in music, with the German premieres of Brahms’s *Requiem*, Wagner’s *Meistersinger*, Bruch’s first symphony, and Bruckner’s first mass, their critical reverberations carrying into the following year. Wagner felt that the time had come to republish, in his own name, “Das Judenthum in der Musik” in

¹²³ Hans von Zwiedenek-Südenhorst, *Die Mittel und Aufgabe der Musik. Aesthetisch-kritische Studie* (Graz: Kienreich, 1868).

¹²⁴ For more discussion of Sacher-Masoch’s association with Wagner, see Chapter Three.

February of 1869, which, along with his “Beethoven” article from 1870, occupies most scholarly attention for Wagner’s music criticism at this time. However, what begins as a simple article on conducting digresses into the wider issues of performance practice, nationalism, secular and theater music: themes, as evidenced in the two better-known works, that occupied Wagner’s mind at the time.

While Theodor Adorno was later to consider Wagner’s article “On Conducting” to be “the most significant contribution that any composer has made to the theory of reproduction,” Wagner’s other cultural analyses help provide insight into contemporary conditions of the music world and the modes of thinking about it.¹²⁵ In short, Wagner deplores the current state of conducting mainly because unfeeling, dry, and error-ridden performances have become widespread. To risk a reduction, Wagner seems to believe in a web of interconnected oppositions: between sacred and theater music, Mendelssohn’s Leipzig conservatory composers and the New Germans, elegant cosmopolitans and Germans of the old stock, even a line between the classical Goethe and the “more violent” Schiller.¹²⁶ The underlying distinction, however, which constitutes the fundamental problem in German art, is one of temperament, between restraint and passion, coldness and warmth, purity and sensuality.

The perpetrators in Wagner’s article are the conducting descendants of Mendelssohn, who grew up in the new conservatories “composing oratorios and psalms,”

¹²⁵ Adorno, *Towards a Theory of Musical Reproduction*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 164.

¹²⁶ Wagner would later praise the “dionysische Element” in Goethe (*Faust*). See entry for Jan 4, 1871 in Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, vol. 1, 1869–1877, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (Munich: R. Piper und Co. Verlag, 1976).

rather than on the stage of the theater or concert hall.¹²⁷ He blames their lack of expression on conservatory training, which encourages young musicians to repress any passion and to avoid exaggeration, as the teachers “preach restraint in all matters,” and he traces this back to Goethe and the classicist ideals of Greek serenity and moderation.¹²⁸ Wagner laments the current Mendelssohnian tendency to conduct classical music (Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven) too quickly as a way to cover inconsistencies. Wagner’s sentiments on conducting are not new; in a letter from 5 November 1853, Franz Liszt had already complained that the rough literal maintenance of time killed the spirit of music.¹²⁹ Wagner, however, makes wider cultural connections that he claims are responsible for the contemporary performance scene.

More irksome for Wagner is the performance of opera, particularly his own. He appeals to the old distinction between sacred and secular as one reason for bland opera performance, and throughout the article he links bad musicianship and composing to the chapel or the village church. Wagner believes the heavy-handedness of the modern conducting style is more suited to the solemnity of sacred music performed in those venues: “How these quadrupeds stumbled from the village church into our opera theaters, God only knows.”¹³⁰ Since the beginning of the century, critics such as Hoffmann and

¹²⁷ “...sondern in den neu gegründeten Conservatorien wohlänständig aufgezogen, Oratorien und Psalmen komponierend....” Richard Wagner, “Über das Dirigiren,” in *Richard Wagner’s Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: C.F. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 266.

¹²⁸ Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” 314–15.

¹²⁹ Liszt letter, 5 November, 1853. Walker, *Franz Liszt* vol. 2, 282.

¹³⁰ “Wie diese Vierfüßler aus der Dorfkirche sich namentlich auch in unsere Operntheater verlaufen haben, mag Gott wissen.” Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” 276.

Thibaut had proclaimed in the starkest terms the need to preserve such solemnity through the composition of pure church music—for some, this was grounded in the Palestrina style, for others, it was effected through a return to the Lutheran/Bachian chorale model. For Wagner, the problem is three-fold: both the Mendelssohnian School and the South German church school have joined hands to create a triple threat of weak composition, unfeeling performance, and sanctimonious attitudes supporting both.

In addition to the conservatory training and the churchly temperament, the other symptom of failed modern performance is the influence of cosmopolitan “pseudo-culture,” a point that connects this article with the main thesis of “Das Judentum in der Musik.” Wagner compares and contrasts “Gebildetheit” with “Bildung.” Edward Dannreuther has translated the word “Gebildetheit” as “pseudo-culture,” which captures the sense of putting on an appearance of culture in contrast to true culture and the life-long process of acquiring and developing it, “Bildung.”¹³¹ These believers in “pseudo-culture” are refined and they put on airs, the key being that their actions are mere motions, superficial learnedness, not motivated by any deep set of beliefs and values. The contrast between a specifically *cosmopolitan* “pseudo-culture” and the better, by implication, deeper German culture, contains an obvious aspect of nationalism, especially given its context of a French war and a country on the brink of unification. Likewise for Wagner, Mendelssohn should exert a bad influence as a matter of fact: as a Jew, his borrowed culture and cosmopolitanism is shallow compared to good German stock because he has no home culture and never fully integrates another. Wagner does not articulate this argument exactly in “Über das Dirigieren,” most likely because there was

¹³¹ Wagner, *On Conducting*, trans. Edward Dannreuther (New York: Dover Publications, 1989), 35.

no need: “Das Judenthum” had already been published and created a critical storm earlier in the year. On the other hand, he does make an analogy between the Jew who “remained foreign to the nature of our trade,” and the new conductors who “did not grow up among the state of musical handicraft.”¹³²

Wagner offers a bit of psychoanalysis in his discussion of the restrained conductors. While he argues that they have been trained in conservatories to “suppress any indications of passion,” the real cause of such behavior is an underlying fear.¹³³ As he explains, they are careful about their conducting, just as “one who naturally lisps and stammers, is careful to keep quiet, lest he should be overcome by a fit of hissing and stuttering.”¹³⁴ Later he decries a fear of exaggeration, but the fear in the above quote is of losing control, not unlike the loss of control Hanslick had decried in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*.

What Wagner implies in the earlier part of this discussion finally becomes more explicit in the closing section of the treatise where he discusses hypocrisy in music. He dubs his foes the “abstinence school” (*Enthaltsamkeitsschule*) who seek temptation merely to exercise their resistance to it.¹³⁵ This same idea had appeared in Wagner’s *Oper und Drama* (1851), but there he applied it in a metaphor describing German opera, a

¹³² “Wie nun aber z. B. den Juden unser Gewerwesen fremd geblieben ist, so wuchsen auch unsere neueren Musikdirigenten nicht aus dem musikalischen Handwerkerstande auf....” Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” 313.

¹³³ Wagner, *On Conducting*, 77.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ “Was ich dagegen von dem Wesen der Muckerei in Erfahrung gebracht habe, bezeichnet die sonderbare Tendenz dieser widerlichen Sekte damit, dass hier dem Anreizenden und Verführerischen auf das Angelegentlichste nachgetrachtet wird, um an der schliesslichen Abwehr desselben seine Widerstandskraft gegen den Reiz und die Verführung zu üben.” Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” 321.

woman who presents herself as virtuous and pure but who feels no love and in whose “hidden flesh stirs a vulgar lust.”¹³⁶ Wagner’s blatant sexual rhetoric situates the hypocrisy of composers between the realms the physical and the incorporeal; Wagner not only retains his Feuerbachian appreciation for the sensual realm, specifically for sexuality, he also suggests once again that those who do not are incomplete human beings.

In a similar manner, Wagner decries the pretentious piety of musicians who claim to interpret music in the correct way and to preserve it from other, inferior methods. The interpretive problem is not the only aspect of this phenomenon; the pretentious piety also refers to the “pseudo-Beethovenian classicism” now in the ascendant. After noting that Brahms had once performed a set of “very serious” variations for him (the op. 24 Variations on a Theme of Handel), which, Wagner offers, was excellent, he then expresses his surprise that anyone could elevate the “brittleness and woodenness” (*Sprödigkeit und Hölzernheit*) of Brahms’s piano playing above Liszt’s.

To all appearances, however, this was a very respectable phenomenon; only it remains doubtful how such a phenomenon could be set up in a natural way as the Messiah [*Heilandes*], or, at least, the Messiahs’s most beloved disciple; unless, indeed, an affected enthusiasm for medieval wood-carvings should have induced us to accept those stiff wooden figures for the ideals of ecclesiastical sanctity.¹³⁷

Here, whether intentionally or not, Wagner manages to capture the ironic muddling of messianic rhetoric that had been applied to Brahms, who was cast variously

¹³⁶ “In ihrem bigotten Herzen regt sich nie die Liebe in ihrem sorgsam versteckten Fleische wohl aber gemeine Sinnenlust.” Richard Wagner, “Oper und Drama,” in *Richard Wagner’s Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 3 (Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 319. Note that the belief in the hypocrisy of pious individuals who reject sensuality remains steady through Wagner’s turn to Schopenhauer; this is analyzed more extensively in Chapter Three.

¹³⁷ Wagner, *On Conducting*, 84.

as a messiah, a disciple, a prophet, an equal member in the priesthood of art. While any individual critic would probably have been able to explain the precise meaning of whichever term he or she chose, the overall discursive effect was a cloud of quasi-religious rhetoric that could in various turns be taken as bright and uplifting or foggy and grey. Similarly, Wagner's quip about "medieval wood-carvings" unites the threads of musical purity with the historicist and antiquarian interest in the distant past.

Wagner later refers to Brahms as "holy Johannes," and Brahms scholars have recognized this particular barb as a reference to the *German Requiem*.¹³⁸ Given Wagner's comment in the article that some composers can only handle "ewig, selig," and "lord sabaoth," three words which are generic enough in spiritual music, but figure largely in the *Requiem*, it seems safe to assume that Wagner still had Brahms in mind for this jab as well.¹³⁹ The popularity of the piece most likely prompted Wagner to publish his first negative comments about Brahms; his writing and the enthusiastic coverage of all things Brahms-related in the *AmZ* also coincided.

Wagner biographer Robert Gutman explains these attack on Brahms as products of Wagner's jealousy: "the essay not very subtly attempted to equate such classical virtuosity with the 'primness' 'woodenness' and, by innuendo, with the impotence of the castrated."¹⁴⁰ Indeed, elsewhere in the piece, Wagner lost the innuendo and wrote more explicitly, but here, the important word is classical moreso than virtuosity, as Wagner had

¹³⁸ Musgrave, *Brahms: A German Requiem*, 63.

¹³⁹ "Soll es an das Musizieren gehen, so werfen sie Kraut und Rüben durch einander, und fühlen nicht sicher, als etwa in "Ewig, selig," oder, wenn es hoch kommt: "Gott Zebaoth!" Wagner, "Über das Dirigieren," 335.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1974), 381n.

appreciated Liszt's abilities when it suited the cause of "Music of the Future" in the early 1850s. Brahms, on the other hand, presented the threat of a young, talented composer-performer who seemed capable of rivaling Wagner's popularity at the time.

Moreover, the Viennese premiere of Brahms's cantata *Rinaldo*, op. 50, in February 1869 may also have been a motivating factor in Wagner's vitriolic attack, as the secular cantata represented a step beyond the aestheticized religious genre. Brahms's friend Theodor Billroth wrote for the *AmZ*:

It may surprise the modern public to find that *Rinaldo* does not go around in a state of wanton lust [*geiler Brunst*], à la Tannhäuser, Tristan, Faust, Romeo, etc, but rather he sings melodies out of deeper, truer emotion.¹⁴¹

Such a review explicitly compared the hero *Rinaldo* to opera characters, despite the generic difference between the staged opera and the cantata. Billroth did not see this distinction as precluding a comparison that favored Brahms heavily. Three years earlier, another critic in the *AmZ* had argued that Brahms presented a healthy alternative to the "degenerate" operas of Wagner; indeed, Brahms appeared as a savior in contrast.¹⁴²

Coming as it did on the heels of the *Requiem*, *Rinaldo* might be taken as a step towards Wagner's own domain—that of opera. At this time Brahms was considering topics for an opera, and while nothing would come of his plans, it is possible that the rumor mill had

¹⁴¹ "Was an "Rinaldo" das moderne Publikum am meistern verblüffen muss, ist, dass der Held sich offenbar nicht a la Tannhäuser, Tristan, Faust, Romeo, etc fortwährend in geiler Brunst befindet, sondern Weisen von tiefster, wahrer Empfindung singt." "Report aus Wien," *AmZ*, 4 (1869), 77. For more on the concept of depth and subjectivity in this period, see Holly Watkins, "The Concept of Depth in German Musical Thought 1800–1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2004).

¹⁴² "Die moderne 'grosse' Oper und die Musik im Concert. Meyerbeer, Wagner und—Brahms," E.R., *AmZ* 1 (1866), 62.

allowed some of this news to reach Wagner.¹⁴³ Perhaps not incidentally, Wagner's discussion in "Über das Dirigieren" of those "Schumannian composers who attempt to write opera" involves one of his more extreme metaphors, invoking the familiar themes of chastity, repression, and hypocrisy.

As established in *Oper und Drama*, Wagner genders opera as a feminine artform, and in that treatise he categorized French, Italian, and German operas according to their relationships to men (coquette, wanton, and prude). Here, he treats the unsuccessful composers of operas as hypocritical holy men who are tempted by the opera but fail to embrace it. Their failures to write good operas are greeted as successes in themselves, with whichever composer in question becoming a type of saint. These composers, Wagner concludes, can not write operas with their "chaste and innocent" hands.

The "Liebeslieder Waltzes" of the holy Johannes, despite the silly title, can still be placed in the category of exercises of the lower grade: the fervent longing for "Opera" however, in which all religious devotion to chastity is finally lost, indicates unmistakably the higher and highest grade. Could one of them come to a happy embrace of "Opera" even once, it is likely that the entire school would explode. Only that this will never be accomplished is what keeps the school together; for every failed attempt can always be given the appearance of a willing abstention, in the sense of ritualistic exercises of the lower grade, and the opera, never successfully courted, can always figure as a mere symbol of temptation to be avoided, so that the authors of failed operas can pass for especially holy.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ For more on Brahms's opera plans, see Helmut Wirth, "Oper und Drama im Leben von Johannes Brahms" in *Brahms-Studien*, vol. 5, ed. Constantin Floros (1983), 117–139; and Joachim Reiber, "Suche, Versuche, Versuchungen: Brahms und die Oper," in *Internationaler Brahms-Kongress Gmunden 1997: Kongreßbericht*, ed. Ingrid Fuchs (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 2001), 13–30.

¹⁴⁴ "Die Liebeslieder Walzer" des heiligen Johannes, so albern sich schon der Titel ausnimmt, könnten noch in die Kategorie der Übungen der unteren Grade gesetzt werde: die inbrünstige Sehnsucht nach der "Oper" jedoch, in welche schliesslich alle religiöse Andacht der Enthaltamen sich verliert, zeichnet unverkennbar die höheren und höchsten Frade aus. Könnte es hier ein einziges Mal zu einer glücklichen Umarmung der 'Oper' kommen, so stünde zu vermuten, dass die ganze Schule gesprengt wäre. Nur das dies nie gelingen will, hält die Schule noch zusammen; denn jedem missglückten Versuche kann immer wieder der Anschein eines freiwilligen Abstehens, im Sinne der ritualistischen Übungen der unteren Grade, gegeben werden, und die nie glücklich gefreite Oper kann immer von neuem wieder als blosses Symbol des

While chastity may have been a socially preferred characteristic for women, for men it had negative connotations. The bourgeois ideal of the period was still one of the married couple, not the celibate monk. Perhaps Wagner meant to imply an older connotation of the word “keusch;” the 1872 Grimms dictionary entry included a definition, as evidenced in Luther’s Bible, of the physical meaning of “keusch”—that it pertained to eunuchs.¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere in “Über das Dirigieren” Wagner explicitly compares these composers and critics to “eunuchs in the Grand Turk’s harem” who defend musical chastity.¹⁴⁶ In this light, chastity is no ideal state of existence, but a state worthy of denigration, demeaning to those lesser men. For Wagner, the grand irony is that precisely these “chaste” composers find praise in music journals and concert halls as heroes of German music when they are antithetical to its true spirit.

Wagner’s comments about sexuality and creativity tap into an older trope linking creativity and fertility. In his earlier treatise, *Oper und Drama*, Wagner had dealt with the metaphor of artistic creativity as birth, as had others before him. Wagner’s explicit sexual metaphor included both masculine and feminine aspects, leading one contemporary critic

schliesslich abzuwehrenden Reizes figurieren, so dass die Autoren durchgefallenener Opern für besonders heilig gelten können.” Richard Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” 322.

¹⁴⁵ “früher auch bloß leiblich, von eunuchen: der keusch, dem do ausgeschnitten sein sein gezeugen und sein manschaft. der gee nit in die kirchen gots. deutsche bibel von 1483, Nürn. Koburger, 94a. Grimms *Deutsche Wörterbuch*, (1872) available at <http://germazope.unitrier.de/Projects/WBB/woerterbuecher/dwb/wbgui>, accessed 19 March, 2008.

¹⁴⁶ “Hiermit gerathen diese sonderbaren Wächter der musikalischen Keuschheit zu unserer grossen klassischen Musik in die Stellung von Eunuchen im grossherrlichen Harem...” Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” 320.

to dub it a “hermaphroditic creation process” (*hermaphroditische Zeugungsprozess*).¹⁴⁷ More recently, Jean-Jacques Nattiez has relied on this aspect of Wagner’s theories to propose and carry out an “androgynous” analysis of his aesthetics.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Wagner’s treatises demonstrate his fundamental belief in the physical aspects of music making and listening, and of the importance of sexuality in creativity for both men and women.

Despite Nattiez’s argument in favor of androgynous aesthetics, more traditional gender studies approach this kind of Wagnerian rhetoric in terms of the masculine-feminine dichotomy. According to this framework, the Wagnerians are emasculating and, by extension, feminizing Brahms by making him “chaste”—a feminine quality as opposed to the virile manliness of the creative genius.¹⁴⁹ He is missing his essential male characteristic: phallic creativity. In another way, this would seem to coincide with what some historians have dubbed the “feminization of religion” in the nineteenth century, which argues for a nineteenth-century discourse emphasizing the caring feminine qualities of religion and emotion and locating it more firmly within the feminine domestic realm rather than the public masculine realm.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, supporters

¹⁴⁷ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 6 January (1869).

¹⁴⁸ See Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Frank Glass, *The Fertilizing Seed: Wagner’s Concept of the Poetic Intent* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983).

¹⁴⁹ Marcia Citron, “Gendered Reception of Brahms: Masculinity, Nationalism, and Musical Politics,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Washington, DC., Oct. 2005. For more on gender and creativity see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Liebestod und Femme Fatale: der Austausch sozialer Energien zwischen Oper, Literatur und Film* (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkampf, 2004), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁰ For discussion of this theory see Irmtraud Götz von Olenhusen, “Die Feminisierung von Religion und Kirche im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven,” in *Frauen unter dem Patriarchat der Kirchen. Katholikinnen und Protestantinnen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Irmtraud Götz von Olenhusen et al, *Konfession und Gesellschaft* 7 (1995), 9–21.

praise Brahms for his essential masculine qualities of restraint, his logically developed music, and his resistance to feminine wiles. The degenerate Wagner is thus feminized due to the perceived overtly sexual nature of his music dramas, and Brahms remains the masculine ideal, sublime in his distant austerity.

In both scenarios, the negative qualities are feminine and the positive masculine, a reduction that fails to take into account the competing valuations of sexuality, and particularly of masculinity in this debate. As in most historical periods the gender roles were prescriptive rather than entirely reflective, and ideologies of proper masculine and feminine behaviors and characteristics sometimes clashed with people's lived experiences. In addition to the political upheaval associated with the revolutions of 1848/9, the women's movement for equal educational and professional opportunities presented what seemed like another threat to the middle class status quo.¹⁵¹ Historian Katrin Schmersahl has argued that it was in response to this work movement that members of the medical (and burgeoning psychological) establishment sought to define men and women through binaries in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and that conditions of health and pathology became signifiers of normative maleness or femaleness.¹⁵² Of course, the medical discourse reflects only one effort in a larger, ongoing struggle to define and redefine these contested concepts. While scholars studying this period have established multiple competing dichotomies within a general category of "femininity" (virgin or whore; devoted mother or destructive seductress), masculinity

¹⁵¹ For more see Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894–1933* (London: Sage Publications, 1976).

¹⁵² Katrin Schmersahl, *Medizin und Geschlecht. Zur Konstruktion der Kategorie Geschlecht im medizinischen Diskurs des. 19. Jahrhunderts* (Opladen Leske & Budrich, 1998).

seems to be defined precisely through the presence or lack of feminine qualities; i.e., “chaste” composer Brahms is emasculated by being denied his creativity and thus becomes effeminate.¹⁵³

Music, its performance and reception by the listener, works as a complicating force in this aesthetic gendered discourse. Because music is generally considered to be “feminine” in some way, mostly on account of its expressive qualities, it presents a challenge to the hypothetical composer who may wish to disavow such apparently feminine traits. Critics recognized this to some extent, and many accepted that the ideal composer or performer is in this sense hermaphroditic, as Wagner’s theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* suggested. Many reviews of performers such as Joseph Joachim offer praise for feminine traits of expression, passion, and tenderness; for Clara Schumann, her masculine traits of power, depth, and understanding. As we have seen, both were part of the “priesthood of art.” Imposing an absolute dichotomy of masculine and feminine qualities on the musical aesthetics in this period does not quite reflect the nuance of the discourse because it does not take into consideration the competing values between the different camps. For some Wagnerians a priesthood in music was unattractive in both males and females. Likewise for the Brahmsians sensuality in music, with its grand effects and sexuality portrayed on stage, was equally unattractive—as opposed to music of a purer expression.

This musical culture with its oppositions of sensuality and purity produced a unique context for the reception of Brahms, who was introduced to the music world as

¹⁵³ For masculinity in this period, see Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Ellen Brinks, *Gothic Masculinity: Effeminacy and the Supernatural in English and German Romanticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

the messiah of art and gradually assumed a role in the “priesthood of art” in his own lifetime. His study and performance of early music, his assimilation of the tropes of pastness, and his style of motivic development that Hanslick had purified in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, all contributed to his reception as a priest of pure music. Because of his careful attention to self image as well as his personal association with the Schumanns, Brahms proves to be a unique case in the application of polemical rhetoric. However, the basic cultural issues at play in his reception prove relevant for other composers of this period such as Max Bruch, Anton Bruckner, Anton Rubinstein, etc. Close examination of the discourse involving pure music, religious genres, opera, and their gendered implications should reveal further nuances and developments of German musical thought as the *fin de siècle* approached.

Chapter Three: Sensuality in Wagner

In the previous chapter we saw how the rhetoric of pure music developed in response to the Wagnerian reforms. Some Wagnerian critics, and especially Wagner himself, reversed a long-standing tradition of rhetoric about musical purity with claims that pure music was too chaste, impotent, and ultimately ineffectual as a dramatic medium of social change. While it might be tempting to dismiss extreme polemical rhetoric as mere name-calling, it is precisely such moments when the discourse offers the most revealing clues to the cultural context that shaped the music world. The question remains: if the Wagnerian critique of pure music depicted it as too chaste, what was the proposed alternative for a bourgeois society that valued such qualities as moderation, restraint, and propriety—one in which the ideal of musical purity might hold great appeal?

One alternative to pure music, and, as some critics implied, to impotence, was evinced in the sensuality of music united with staged drama. More broadly stated, critics often cited the dichotomy between concert hall (which now included secularized religious genres such as the cantata and requiem: Brahms's op. 45 was performed in and outside of churches) and stage. While Wagnerian critics condemned the moral righteousness of Schumann's supporters, historians, and conservatory-trained composers, Wagner in turn suffered attacks that focused on his theatrical effects, his appeal to the senses, and his morally-suspect plots. Such a dichotomy was nothing new, and some Wagnerians defended the Master's works as exhibiting a depth of expression and German disposition,

that is, by denying the charges. Of greater interest is the fact that a smaller portion of them embraced Wagner for his honest portrayals of the “purely human” (*das Reinmenschliche*), a Feuerbachian concept that included the so-called Dionysian elements, and for the ability of his works to speak to people with the immediacy of sensuous reaction. This rhetoric helped pave the way for later composers to be more explicit on stage, even as the older generation balked at the extreme degree to which it was taken.

To understand the extent to which ideas of sensuality, broadly construed, had entered the reception of Wagner, it is important to examine Wagner’s own ideas of sensuality. They were most developed during his revolutionary period, in particular through his study of Feuerbach, and they appear in his writings from the Zürich years; despite his discovery of Schopenhauer in 1854, he did not fully adopt this philosopher’s views towards sensuality, and I aim to demonstrate the often-overlooked Feuerbachian influences. After mid-century, these writings and Wagner’s stage works caused specific critical reactions in the wider musical sphere, his supporters finding various ways to defend and justify them. The critical responses to Wagner took a variety of positions, as some opponents attacked him for his apparent unhealthiness, for his portrayal of sexuality in music and on stage, for the seductive and dangerous qualities of his artwork. Each of these thematic threads could fill a book itself, but together they can be understood as variations on a theme: the dangers of sensuality. The threat of sensuality took many forms, which explains the various critical reactions and what they have in common. Why was Wagner dangerous and why did he cause such a cultural storm? It is not because he advocated a different form of music from “absolute instrumental” music, it is because he

advocated a fully sensual art that could effect immediate physical reactions in his audiences, because it brought the fundamental question of sexual love into the question.

Scholars have analyzed Wagner's theories from a number of viewpoints, including his political agenda, his emphasis on myth, and his anthropological view of humankind, but it is also important to explore the many facets of sensuality that underpinned Wagner's worldview. The rhetoric in his theories of music drama as well as his underlying argument provided evidence for some critics of the rising threats of immorality and sexuality—threats that were culturally associated with the body. Thus, when a major musician like Wagner advocated and produced an art that was grounded in a theory of the sensual, in both its performance and in its effect on audiences, he presented a fundamental challenge to a culture in which abstract reason and technological progress were prized.

The definition of sensuality will become clearer as I analyze Wagner's theories in depth, but in general, sensuality refers to the senses, the physical realm, and the body. As we will see in more detail, Ludwig Feuerbach had taken the sensual world as the prime determinate in his philosophy, rather than the abstract ideal. For Feuerbach, the moment of consciousness comes in the physical meeting of I and Thou. Furthermore, Wolfgang Wahl has shown how in both Feuerbach and Nietzsche, the sensual and the body were fundamentally connected, and that the philosophies of both men represent a "rehabilitation" of the sensual in the nineteenth century.¹ Wahl's work leaves out Richard Wagner as an important bridge between the two philosophers, and while it is not my goal to insert Wagner into a revised philosophical history, I would like to build upon Wahl's

¹ See Wolfgang Wahl, *Feuerbach und Nietzsche; Rehabilitation der Sinnlichkeit und des Leibes in den deutschen Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998).

argument that a revival of sensuality necessarily draws the body, and by extension, sexuality, into the intellectual climate. It is this subtle connection between the sensual, the body, and sex that contemporaries of Wagner perceived and rejected as dangerous, immoral, and unhealthy.

For Wagner, the fundamental point of his early theories is to reinvigorate drama by returning to its lost sensuality. Sensuality includes all things physical, the body, the voice, the gesture, the instinctual need of mankind to effuse creative impulses through actions and physical expression. These ideas run as a coherent thread throughout his writings, and manifest themselves in his analogies and metaphors of the creative process as sexualized, of feminine and masculine elements, to a far greater degree than any contemporary critics. Wagner imbues his discussion of opera (music drama) and the creative process in general with sexual rhetoric, which itself reflects the underlying sensualist worldview he inherited from Feuerbach.

Scholars generally recognize in Wagner, as listeners have for years, this sensual element. Just as the myriad of critics, amateur musicians, literary theorists, and others have perceived it in various degrees and manifestations, so too have scholars incorporated it into their analysis of Wagner's works and their impact on audiences. Indeed, Martin Gregor-Dellin quipped that Nietzsche was the source of all clichés, and it is true that such "clichés" also appear in the scholarship, though mediated by various methodological frameworks.

It seems that the sensual element in Wagner often informs hermeneutic interpretations. Indeed, this element is often taken for granted; it functions as a starting point for explorations of how the music dramas reflect and shape, for example,

“normality and abnormality as mechanisms of social regulation, especially in the arenas of sex roles, the vicissitudes of desire, and the classification of human types,” as Lawrence Kramer phrases it.² Often these studies that purport to illuminate “social regulation” fail to define what society, when, and how, turning into thinly veiled hermeneutic studies that quote Nietzsche as the sole representative of nineteenth-century society.

Other approaches present Wagner’s notions of love in terms of his philosophical heritage, which sometimes includes a discussion of sensuality and whether Wagner’s ideal love is sensual. Thomas Mann argued that Wagner traces all love back to the sexual; likewise, James McGlathery has used Wagner’s “positive attitude toward love in its sensual aspect” as the basis for analyzing this sexuality as expressed in the music dramas, although he does not mention the philosophical basis for this belief, he concludes that Wagner continually created a “poetic depiction of erotic desire and its effects as he found them revealed to him.”³ In his analysis of *Tristan und Isolde*, Roger Scruton offers many medieval sources for both the myth and the concept of courtly love.⁴ He does not conclude that Wagner’s view of love is derived solely from medieval thought; rather, he claims that Schopenhauer’s pessimistic view of renunciation exerted more influence than Feuerbach’s philosophy. These studies offer varied approaches to analyzing the stage works of Wagner, but they do not provide a consensus on the philosophical roots of Wagner’s ideas or the effects on his contemporary audiences. More often than not, they

² Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 20.

³ James M. McGlathery, *Wagner’s Operas and Desire* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), 8–10.

⁴ See Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

present one scholar's interpretation of the operas themselves, rather than historical analysis of the cultural milieu that encouraged Wagner and received his works.

Ultimately, the critical discourse of contemporary nineteenth-century music criticism contains a slippage that links *sinnlich*, the philosophically-tinged word used by Feuerbach to denote the sensuous realm, to more general societal notions of the senses, the body, and sex. Thus, *sinnlich* usually assumes a negative connotation in music scholarship, especially as many critics used in relation to Wagner. The debates over what constituted dangerous *Sinnlichkeit*, however, help to reveal a wide range of cultural and artistic associations that situate Wagner soundly in his historical context.

Wagner's Theories and the Revival of the Sensual in Music

That Wagner read Feuerbach and knew his philosophical ideas is well accepted. Scholars often point to *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (1830), *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841) and *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (1843) as major Feuerbachian treatises that may have influenced Wagner as part of his revolutionary formation. Wagner had recommended Feuerbach's *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* to friends, and he found an intellectual kinship with Feuerbach, one of whose basic contributions to philosophy was to shift focus from the ideal and back to the purely human (*das Reinmenschliche*). In Zürich, Wagner moved in intellectual circles where Feuerbach's ideas exerted a strong influence. Both the poet Georg Herwegh and writer Gottfried Keller were close to Wagner, and they knew Feuerbach personally and had attended his lectures. Perhaps when Wagner invited Feuerbach to Zürich in 1851, it

was at the recommendation of Herwegh or Keller.⁵ Feuerbach did not come to visit, but he remained on good terms and would eventually write a cordial response to Wagner's letter dedicating *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* to him.

To what extent Wagner absorbed Feuerbach's ideas, and to what extent they influenced his own musical-dramatic philosophy, however, remain points of contention in Wagner scholarship due to Wagner's apparent change of philosophical direction after reading Schopenhauer in the mid 1850s. Now is not the time to rehash every nuance of the debate over Feuerbachian influence versus Schopenhauerian influence post-1854. Scholars agree that Wagner's Zürich writings from 1849–1852 were influenced by Feuerbach and other Young Hegelian philosophers. As Eric Chafe and Kevin Karnes note in their work on Wagner, the composer never fully adopted Schopenhauer's views towards sensuality and sexual love.⁶ Rather, he modified Schopenhauerian ideas to suit his pre-existing conceptual framework developed from Feuerbach. Since this study focuses on reception of Wagner between the revolutions and his death, the Zürich writings receive more weight, because most critics reacted to them, just as certain catch phrases from Hanslick's 1854 version of *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* came to represent his theories in the critical discourse.⁷ Similarly in the case of Wagner, for many years the reigning perception of him was one of a hyper-sensual composer, whether or not *Parsifal*

⁵ See Peter Caldwell, *Love, Death, and Revolution in Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 98–99.

⁶ See Eric Chafe, *The Tragic and the Ecstatic: the Musical Revolution of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Kevin Karnes, "Wagner, Klimt, and the Metaphysics of Creativity in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62 (2009), 647–697.

⁷ Even though, as Kevin Karnes has pointed out, Hanslick doesn't necessarily recognize completely the implications of that 1854 work and performs another type of criticism entirely. See Kevin Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History, Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-century Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 50.

represented a step back from his original ideas.⁸ And by the time some metaphysical Wagnerians accepted “absolute” music in the 1880s, there still existed a large faction of Wagnerians who took his ideas in the other direction: Richard Strauss, for example.⁹

Even among scholars who deal solely with the Young Hegelian influences on Wagner’s ideas, different aspects emerge as fundamental to the narrative of a revolutionary Wagner. The oft-cited prime example of Wagner’s Feuerbachian worldview is the ending of the second draft of the *Ring*, where the flames of Brünnhilde’s and Siegfried’s funeral pyre overtake the gods and burn Valhalla.¹⁰ In discussions of Wagner’s philosophical influence this often functions as a foil to the rewritten “Schopenhauerian ending” where the Valkyrie dies in the fire. Through these two examples, the dual philosophical personalities of Wagner can be neatly summarized: Feuerbach the revolutionary points towards a fiery revolution where love triumphs over the existing social order, while Schopenhauer the Buddhist-inspired pessimist renounces the world and the will.¹¹ Of course there was more than one draft of the ending and the final version accommodates aspects of both viewpoints; however, Wagner never renounces love.

⁸ Indeed, many critics were skeptical of *Parsifal* before it premiered, and even then considered it hypocritical.

⁹ See Sanna Pederson, “Defining the Term ‘Absolute Music’ Historically,” *Music & Letters* 90 (2009), 240–60.

¹⁰ See discussion of this in Frank Glass, *The Fertilizing Seed. Wagner’s Concept of the Poetic Intent* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

¹¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung: vier Bücher, nebst einem Anhang, der die Kritik der Kantischen Philosophie enthält* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1819). For an overview of Schopenhauer’s theories see, Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Despite the prevailing notion of a pervasive Schopenhauerian influence on Wagner, many scholars argue that various aspects of Feuerbach's influence extended beyond Wagner's 1854 "discovery" of Schopenhauer. As Bryan Magee has noted in his discussion of Feuerbach and Wagner, the second *Ring* ending emphasizes the power of love as the main motivation of human action.¹² He sees the gods in the Ring cycle as examples of lesser-developed gods according to Feuerbach's classification system, all of which supports his argument that after Wagner's exposure to Feuerbach, he "never thereafter ceased to take a Feuerbachian attitude to the understanding of religion."¹³ This argument directly confronts the chorus of scholars who believe that Schopenhauer fundamentally changed Wagner's worldview. In a similar vein, Peter Caldwell has argued that Feuerbach's notions of myth suffered the most profound influence for Wagner, one that did not change over time. In his overview of intellectual influences on Wagner, Mark Berry also emphasizes the concept of myth for Wagner, and he cautions us not to ignore Feuerbach in Wagner's worldview after 1854.¹⁴ Still others have highlighted the "pantheistic mystical" nature of Feuerbach's thought, itself a link to Romantic characteristics that provided a bridge to Wagner's revolutionary thinking.¹⁵ In terms of sensuality, I argue that we also see Feuerbach as an important influence on Wagner that resonated well past his reading of Schopenhauer in 1854.

¹² Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 56–7.

¹³ Magee, 54.

¹⁴ See Mark Berry, *Treacherous Bonds and Laughing Fire: Politics and Religion in Wagner's Ring* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006).

¹⁵ Ulrike Kienzle, "...daß wissend würde die Welt!" *Religion und Philosophie in Richard Wagners Musikdramen* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005), 33.

The picture of a Feuerbachian Wagner in Zürich around 1851 might be summarized thus: Wagner felt resonance with Feuerbach's anthropological focus and his revolutionary view of religion as projection of the desires and ideals of humankind. In this way the notion of myth as expressing the purely human (*Reinmenschliche*) lay at the base of Wagner's move towards legend, myth, and grand historical drama. This structural view of myth (indeed, Levi-Strauss credited Wagner as the main inspiration for his interpretive method) is present throughout Wagner's career, in his treatises from the revolutionary period through *Tristan*, *Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal*.¹⁶

Few scholars have noted in passing that Feuerbach's uniquely sensualist *Weltanschauung* also likely appealed to and influenced Wagner. It seems strange that this aspect could be so easily overlooked in favor of political and revolutionary issues. Though Magee emphasizes the importance of Feuerbach's theory of myth for Wagner, he acknowledges that the sensuality was important as well, noting, "Wagner was abnormally highly sexed, the erotic so central to his life and character that it was central also to his art."¹⁷ In his article "Wagner amongst the Hegelians," Nicholas Walker makes an offhand parenthetical comment about Feuerbach's notion of "the centrality of sexuality for the 'higher' creative activities of art and culture in general," but does not explore the implications of this for Wagner.¹⁸ Likewise, George C. Windell has noted "another Feuerbachian concept which had extraordinary appeal to one with the strong sexuality of

¹⁶ The intellectual debt of Wagner to the anthropologist Johann Jacob Bachofen, whose work on myth Wagner knew, is also little explored.

¹⁷ Magee, 66.

¹⁸ Nicholas Walker, "Wagner amongst the Hegelians," in *Music, Theater, and Politics in Germany, 1848 to the Third Reich*, ed. Nikolaus Bacht (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2006), 36.

Wagner: the equivalence of reality and sensuality.”¹⁹ As the above quotes demonstrate, the appeal of Feuerbach’s sensualist philosophy can be (and often has been) explained by Wagner’s own sex drive, and perhaps this line of thinking dissuades scholars from exploring the deeper ramifications of Feuerbach’s influence or explaining the “centrality” of the philosophy; instead, they prefer to focus on the political analysis of Wagner’s ideas rather than what might seem like mere self-evident biographical resonances.

The shift from a mind-body dichotomy to a positive view of sensuality in Feuerbach constitutes a major structural change, no less important than his myth or religion, indeed, bound deeply to these concepts. This should not be dismissed as mere sexual drive in Wagner. The reason to emphasize the sensualist worldview that Wagner inherited from Feuerbach is that it is the fundamental aspect of his works that audiences respond to and the one that produced the most reaction in the critical realm. While there are passing references to political issues in the reception of Wagner, the overarching and pervasive, if sometimes subtle, theme from the 1850s to the end of the century is the sensuality: so many of the modes of Wagner reception (sickness, danger, etc.) can be understood as a reaction to it. Taking sensuality as the main aspect of his project is the way to understand culturally, why Wagner made the impact he did. It can be manifest and interpreted in various ways: the plot, the action, the music, the effect of these on people; it is no surprise that the reception of Wagner would take so many different forms.

Sensuality in Feuerbach and Wagner

As a young student and adherent of Hegel, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) studied theology in Heidelberg and philosophy in Berlin. His turn away from Hegelian

¹⁹ George C. Windell, “Hegel, Feuerbach, and Wagner’s Ring,” *Central European History* 9 (1976), 35.

philosophy began in the late 1820s and was manifested most clearly in *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* (1830), a radical work that prevented him from gaining a position in the university system. Through the 1830s he developed his critique of Christianity, which would reach its fullest articulation in his *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841) and *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (Principles of the Philosophy of the Future) in 1843.²⁰

At the heart of Feuerbach's critique is a fundamental reaction to Kantian and Hegelian idealism. He has been described by scholars as an inventor of anthropological philosophy and a reviver of sensuality—designations that emphasize his break with a philosophical tradition. His influence on young revolutionaries in the 1840s was immense. One of the most appealing tenets was the argument that philosophy should encompass all aspects of mankind: "Philosophy includes not only the pure act [*actus purus*] of thinking, but also the impure or mixed act [*actus impurus oder mixtus*] of passion, or sensual receptivity which alone creates us in the universal confluence of actual things."²¹ He wished to situate philosophical thinking in that which everyday people already understood intuitively, that is, in real experience as opposed to abstract thought divorced from the world. But Feuerbach did not believe in two separate realms of the abstract and the sensual; rather, the sensual world included everything, spirit as well.

²⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1841); Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* (Zürich: Verlag der literarischen Comptoirs, 1843).

²¹ "Zur Philosophen gehört daher nicht nur der *actus purus* des Denkens, sondern auch der *actus impurus* oder *mixtus* der Leidenschaft, der sinnlichen Receptivität, die uns allein in den universalen Konflux der wirklichen Dinge versetzt." Feuerbach, *Zur Beurteilung der Schrift "Das Wesen des Christenthums"* cited in Alfred Schmidt, *Emanzipatorische Sinnlichkeit: Ludwig Feuerbachs anthropologischer Materialismus* (Berlin: Ullstein Buch, 1973), 145.

He argued that only the philosophical tradition had attempted to abstract pure reason from this reality as if it could be separated.

While Feuerbach was indebted heavily to Hegelian phenomenology, a fundamental aspect of his philosophy relies on inverting the idea that the world is an objectivization of the infinite spirit; that is, in Feuerbach, the human spirit projects itself into the divine. For this study, the most relevant aspect of this philosophical break is Feuerbach's grounding of his worldview in the sensual realm. He had claimed that Hegel had ignored the sensual aspect of human existence and that he was "a realist in the abstraction from all reality."²² On the other hand, Feuerbach argued, "Only a sensuous being is a true, real being."²³

Feuerbach's human being projects intelligence (*Intelligenz, Verstand, Vernunft*) into God, whose division from the sensual is reflected in the nature of religion. "The pure, complete, perfect godly nature is the self consciousness of reason, the consciousness of reason of its own completeness. Reason knows nothing of the heart's passions; it has no desires, no passions, no needs..."²⁴ But while a philosophical dichotomy between pure reason and sensual passions has existed for centuries, Feuerbach

²² Ludwig Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company 1986), 49–52.

²³ "Nur ein sinnliches Wesen ist ein wahres, wirkliches Wesen." Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, 58.

²⁴ "Das reine, vollkommene, mangellose göttliche Wesen ist das Selbstbewusstsein des Verstandes, das Bewusstsein des Verstandes von seiner eignen Vollkommenheit. Der Verstand weiss nichts von den Leiden des Herzens; er hat keine Begierden, keine Leidenschaften, keine Bedürfnisse und ebendarum keine Mängel und Schwächen wie das Herz." Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in *Gesammelte Werke 5*, ed. Werner Schuffenhauer (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1984). 76.

sees it as theological folly to separate love from the divine; indeed, Love, he argues, is the redeemer of mankind.

Feuerbach sees a relationship between the sensual perception of truth by a group, and the concept of love. This “social epistemology” relies on the fundamental notion that the “I” recognizes itself only through its relation to a “Thou.”²⁵ “Two human beings are needed for the generation of man—of the spiritual as well as of the physical man; the community of man with man is the first principle and criterion of truth and generality.”²⁶ As he developed more fully in his *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, published in 1843, Feuerbach argued that part of the sensuous understanding of reality came from feeling [*Empfindung*], and being is “being of the senses, perception, feeling, and love.”²⁷

Love is passion, and only in passion is the hallmark of existence. Only that exists which is an object—be it real or possible—of passion. Abstract thought that is without feeling and without passion cancels the difference between being and nonbeing, but this difference—which for thought is an evanescent difference—is a reality for love. Love means nothing other than becoming aware of this difference.²⁸

Thus, the philosophy of the future, argued Feuerbach, derived from recognizing this reality in the body: “the new philosophy, on the other hand, begins by saying, ‘I am a real and sensuous being and, indeed, the body in its totality is my ego, my essence itself.’”²⁹

Thus, Feuerbach’s philosophy refocused on human reason and human feeling; this

²⁵ See Feuerbach, *Principles*, 50–55.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

anthropological shift might have seemed empowering to those hoping to effect revolutionary change towards a more democratic society.

Despite the radical bent of his writings, Feuerbach himself preferred a retiring life in the small village of Bruckberg and generally avoided confrontation. His influence on the generation that would take part in the revolutions of 1848/9, however, was as varied as the individuals themselves. From other philosophers to women's rights activists to musicians and critics, many young revolutionaries could find something in his writings that spoke to their particular goals. As historian Peter Caldwell has stated, ". . . the story of the Feuerbachian radicals is one of the birth of politics neither from pure reason nor from theology, but from the contradictory, scattered pieces of an anti-liberal, antiformal counterculture."³⁰

The influence of Feuerbach on Wagner developed over the course of the 1840s. While the composer's revolutionary days in Dresden may have been more fired by the talk of the revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin, his living circumstances in Switzerland may have led to a broadening of his earlier knowledge of Feuerbach. Certainly, Wagner was in the right frame of mind to accept such ideas; he had spent time enough toiling as conductor and composer in the world of theatrical productions, and after the failed revolutions of 1848/9 he turned to theoretical writing during his exile in Switzerland. These treatises, *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1850), *Das Judentum in der Musik* (1850), *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (1851) and *Oper und Drama* (1851) represent Wagner's attempt to create a coherent theory out of his artistic and political views, with the end goal of reforming art and its place in society.

³⁰Peter C. Caldwell, *Love, Death, and Revolution in Central Europe*, 7.

They also came at a time in his life when he was attempting to maintain some order amid a chaotic tailspin of failed hopes.

One of the main threads throughout these writings is the sensualist worldview—how it influences Wagner’s understanding of the total artwork, as derived from the Greeks, the way music and drama are fused, the way this new art works upon the audience. We come to realize Wagner’s views towards music, including opera, counterpoint, instrumental music are informed by this notion; indeed, it takes all forms for Wagner. He speaks of the necessity of the body for expression and the human voice as the original form of bodily expression, the importance of gesture, and the necessity of the body for musical communication.

Wagner’s theories derive from his belief in the fundamental sensuality of art and the need to restore that sensuality, the loss of which he blames in turn on science and Christianity. He argues throughout *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* and *Oper und Drama* that music has become divorced from its sensuous roots in dance and Greek drama and has overtaken opera as the main attraction, rather than fulfilled its role supporting the drama. More generally, though, he feels that the art has lost its ability to communicate.

But the only true and living being is sentient, and belongs to the conditions of sensuality. The greatest mistake is the arrogance of science in renouncing and damning sensuality; whereas the greatest victory of science is her self-accomplished crushing of this arrogance, in the acknowledgment of the teaching of the senses.³¹

³¹ “Wahr und lebendig ist aber nur, was sinnlich ist und den Bedingungen der Sinnlichkeit gehorcht. Die höchste Steigerung des Irrthumes ist der Hochmuth der Wissenschaft in der Verläugnung und Verachtung der Sinnlichkeit; ihr höchster Sieg dagegen der, von ihr selbst herbeigeführte, Untergang dieses Hochmuthes in der Anerkennung der Sinnlichkeit.” Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, 45.

Wagner concludes that the artwork of the future must therefore be grounded in the senses. Moreover, its effect on its creator is redemptive:

The genuine artwork, i.e., directly represented in the moment of its corporeal manifestation, is also the redemption of the artist, the obliteration of the last trace of the creative force, the liberation of thought through sensuality, the satisfaction of life's requirements through life.³²

Wagner expresses his own worldview succinctly in *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* through his analyses of a Greek myth. He argues that the Flying Dutchman myth is structurally similar to the Greek story of Zeus and Semele, in which the god falls in love with a mortal woman and gives himself a human form for the sake of loving her. “No god could have penned the encounter of Zeus and Semele, only mankind in fully human desire.”³³ Wagner argues that only humans could have created this story, and would have based it on their own experiences. Thus, Wagner takes a fully Feuerbachian approach to the understanding of myth and early religions: humans imbue their gods with their own desires. Wagner also points out the irony of this arrangement, that a god “in the highest spheres” ultimately desires only the purely human (*das Reinmenschliche*). As the myth demonstrates, the most important characteristic of human nature is the “necessity of love, and the nature of this love, in its truest manifestation, is the desire for complete sensual substantiality....”³⁴ Wagner then queries rhetorically,

³² “Das wirkliche Kunstwerk, d.h. das unmittelbar sinnlich dargestellte, in dem Momente seiner leiblichsten Erscheinung, ist daher auch erst die Erlösung des Künstlers, die Vertilgung der letzten Spuren der schaffenden Willkür, die unzweifelhafte Bestimmtheit des bis dahin nur Vorgestellten, die Befreiung des Gedankens in der Sinnlichkeit, die Befriedigung des Lebensbedürfnisses im Leben.” Wagner, *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, 46.

³³ Richard Wagner, “Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde,” in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 290.

³⁴ “Was ist nun das eigenthümlichste Wesen dieser menschlichen Natur, zu der die Sehnsucht nach weitesten Fernen sich, zu ihrer einzig möglichen Befriedigung, zurückwendet? Es ist die Nothwendigkeit der Liebe, und das Wesen dieser Liebe ist in seiner wahrensten Aeusserung Verlangen nach voller sinnlich

Must not the god expire and disappear in this final, sensually certain embrace? Is not the man who yearns for the god denied, destroyed? But is love, in its truest and highest nature, not also made manifest?³⁵

He claims that the myths of the folk reveal such truths, and that the “very shy” critics should be amazed to realize this. “Things are in them [myths] that you can never grasp with your reason...” rather, they appeal to feeling.³⁶ This neatly demonstrates not only how Wagner conceived of these notions as interconnected, but also how he valued them. His structural analysis of myth allows him to construct a common thread between the flying Dutchman story and the tale of Zeus and Semele: the importance of love, specifically sensual, human love, to mankind. The fiery, revolutionary love equalizes gods and humans, and we see that the *Reinmenschliche* has none of the same connotations as *reine Musik*; it is Feuerbach’s term expressing a view of humanity that encompasses the physical world including sensual love. This love is expressed in various old folk tales and mythologies as well as in Greek drama, but it cannot be fathomed with abstract reason, only through feeling. Thus, a return to the folkish is a return to the sensual and with the new artwork he can appeal to the audience he has in mind.

Wagner notes elsewhere that Christianity is responsible for the de-sensualization of the arts through its emphasis on the soul and the implied devaluing of the body:

Wirklichkeit, nach dem Genusse eines mit allen Sinnen zu fassenden, mit aller Kraft des wirklichen Seins fest und innig zu umschliessenden Gegenstandes.” Wagner, *Eine Mittheilung*, 290.

³⁵ “Muss in dieser endlichen, sinnlich gewissen Umarmung der Gott nicht vergehen und entschwinden? Ist der Mensch, der nach dem Gotte sich sehnte, nicht verneint, vernichtet? Ist die Liebe in ihrem wahren und höchsten Wesen somit nicht aber offenbar geworden?” Ibid.

³⁶ “Bewundert, Ihr hochgescheuten Kritiker, das Allvermögen der menschlichen Dichtungskraft, wie es sich im Mythos des Volkes offenbart! Dinge, die Ihr mit Eurem Verstande nie begreifen könntet, sind in ihm, mit einzig so zu ermöglichender, für das Gefühl deutlich greifbarer, sinnlich vollendeter Gewissheit dargethan.” Ibid.

Greek art still understood this human through his outer form alone, and attempted to reproduce it most realistically and faithfully in stone and ore. Christianity, on the other hand, proceeded anatomically: it wanted to discover the soul of mankind, opened and dissected the body and uncovered all the formless innards that repulsed our gaze, because that is not and should not be for the eye. But in searching for the soul we had killed the body; in the quest for the life source we had destroyed the manifestation of this life, and we reached only dead entrails, which could only be conditions for life in completely undamaged capability of expression. The soul we seek is, however, in truth, nothing other than the life itself. What Christian anatomy leaves for us to observe is only—death.³⁷

Greek art, with its celebration of the sensual, especially through the medium of sculpture, appears as the natural contrast to Christianity and its dissection of the human. Wagner's celebration of Greek art is more thorough in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, which he opens with a vivid and enthusiastic description of a Greek drama, a myth embodied and performed for the Greek spectator who experiences it fully, "he in the universe, the universe in him."³⁸ While Wagner maintains an idealistic standpoint towards them and considers them naive, their art offers a model for the sensual *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Within German nineteenth-century reception of Greek art, largely inspired by Winckelmann's conception of the noble simplicity, quiet greatness (*edle Einfalt, stille Grösse*), the Hellenists considered it to be a naive origin of art, a model of classical proportion and

³⁷ "...Wo das Volk Melodien erfand, verfuhr es, wie der leiblich natürliche Mensch, der durch den unwillkürlichen Akt geschlechtlicher Begattung den Menschen erzeugt und gebiert, und zwar den Menschen, der, wenn er an das Licht des Tages gelangt, fertig ist, sogleich durch seine äußere Gestalt, nicht aber etwa erst durch seinen aufgedeckten inneren Organismus sich kundgibt. Die griechische Kunst faßte diesen Menschen noch vollkommen nur nach seiner äußeren Gestalt auf, und bemühte sich, sie auf das getreueste und lebendigste – endlich in Stein und Erz – nachzubilden. Das Christentum dagegen verfuhr anatomisch: es wollte die Seele des Menschen auffinden, öffnete und zerschnitt den Leib und deckte all den formlosen inneren Organismus auf, der unsern Blick anwiderte, eben weil er nicht für das Auge da ist oder da sein soll. Im Aufsuchen der Seele hatten wir aber den Leib getötet; als wir auf den Quell des Lebens treffen wollten, vernichteten wir die Äußerung dieses Lebens, und gelangten so nur auf tote Innerlichkeiten, die eben nur bei vollkommen ununterbrochener Äußerungsmöglichkeit Bedingungen des Lebens sein konnten. Die aufgesuchte Seele ist aber in Wahrheit nichts anderes als das Leben: was der christlichen Anatomie zu betrachten übrig blieb, war daher nur—der Tod." Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 309–10.

³⁸ M. Owen Lee, *Athena Sings: Wagner and the Greeks* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003), 9.

moderation. Wagner and others recognized and acknowledged the sensuality celebrated by the Greeks, the response to which current might be offhandedly thrown off by E.T.A. Hoffmann as an example of what pure church music was not.³⁹

In the most basic terms, Wagner argues that music has been elevated as the main goal of opera, rather than it serving a dramatic function; poets (librettists) have been forced to create texts that can serve music, rather than the other way around. There is even something of a Feuerbachian reversal in Wagner's famous dictum that "a means of expression (music) has been made the end, while the End of expression (drama) has been made a means."⁴⁰ Just as Feuerbach had turned the concept of religion on its head by arguing that religion was a projection of man, that is, an abstraction of an objective world, here Wagner raises an argument at the structural level against the way opera has been conceived. Music and text should work together to create gripping drama.

Wagner discusses this in an extended metaphor of loving procreation, which Peter Caldwell has called "a mildly pornographic version of music theory," where music is the feminine element and the poetic intent (*dichterische Absicht*) is the masculine fertilizing element.⁴¹ One imbues the other with meaning and gives it purpose; the final product is an art work that can speak to the folk. Wagner's metaphor occurs throughout the treatise

³⁹ "Keine Kunst geht so rein aus der innern Vergeistigung des Menschen hervor, keine Kunst bedarf so nur einzig reingeistiger, ätherischer Mittel, als die Musik... diese ihres eigentümlichen Wesens halber konnte die Musik nicht das Eigentum der antiken Welt, wo alles auf sinnliche Verleiblichung ausging, sein, sondern musste dem modernen Zeitalter angehören." E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Alte und Neue Kirchenmusik," in *Schriften zur Musik Aufsätze und Rezensionen* (Munich: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, Winkler Verlag, 1979), 212.

⁴⁰ "...dass ein Mittel des Ausdruckes (die Musik) zum Zwecke, der Zweck des Ausdruckes (das Drama) aber zum Mittel gemacht war...." Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 231.

⁴¹ Caldwell, *Love and Death in Central Europe*, 104.

Oper und Drama, and demonstrates how he conceived of musical creation as a procreative act involving two complementary but different elements. In his book, *The Fertilizing Seed*, Frank Glass explores the relation of text to music in Wagner's theories and stage works. He offers that "the frankly sexual image [of the poetic intent fertilizing the music]...recurs throughout *Oper und Drama*,"⁴² but his goal is to prove the fundamental consistency of Wagner's compositional philosophy, rather than to analyze the social context and effects of Wagner's rhetorical strategies. So while Glass borrows Wagner's own sexual metaphor, he does not interrogate it in any way. Like many scholars, he acknowledges the sexual rhetoric in Wagner's writings, but leaves it at that, focusing on other issues while largely avoiding that one—i.e., creating a conceptual division that did not seem to exist for Wagner and thereby relegating this rhetoric to a supporting role in some grander structural reading of Wagner that revolves around text and music.

For Wagner, the concept of the poetic intent is based in love. Barry Emslie argues that Wagner sought to reconcile both the sexual and spiritual aspects of love over the course of his life, through both his interpretation of Feuerbach and Schopenhauer, as well as through his portrayals of female characters.⁴³ Ultimately, Emslie constructs a progression of this sexual-spiritual dichotomy based on the relation of male and female characters in Wagner's stage works; he argues that in *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* the female characters function as redemptive entities external to men, in the *Ring* and *Tristan*

⁴² Frank Glass, *The Fertilizing Seed. Wagner's Concept of the Poetic Intent* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 3.

⁴³ Barry Emslie, *Wagner and the Centrality of Love* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010).

und *Isolde*, Wagner attempts a fusion of male/female, and in *Parsifal* the woman is stripped of her redemptive power and all is subsumed in a perfect man.⁴⁴

Important for Wagner is the element of love that inspires this union in the first place; when this natural process goes astray, the artwork loses its meaning.⁴⁵ “Music is the bearing woman, the Poet the begetter; and Music had therefore reached the pinnacle of madness, when she wanted not only to bear, but also to beget.”⁴⁶ Wagner implies that this creative process is a natural act and that it is as old as mankind itself. Here creativity is linked to sexuality in a straight-forward simile:

When the people created melodies it proceeded, as in the corporeal natural human who creates man through the spontaneous act of sexual procreation, and this man, upon reaching the light of day is complete is revealed in his outer form, not, however, through his uncovered inner organism.⁴⁷

Wagner’s metaphor offers yet another example of his conceptual link between sexual fecundity and the creation of music. Wagner goes on to imply that the outer form and one’s sensual appreciation of it constitute important aspects of the modern artwork; he advocates a return to this more natural, folkish understanding of art.

⁴⁴ Emslie, 36.

⁴⁵ “Der notwendige Drange des dichtenden Verstandes in diesem Dichten ist daher die Liebe – und zwar die Liebes des Mannes zum Weibe: nicht aber jene frivole, unzüchtige Liebe, in der der Mann nur sich durch einen Genuss befriedigen will, sondern die tiefe Sehnsucht, in der mitempfundenen Wonne des liebenden Weibes sich aus seinem Egoismus erlöst zu wissen; und diese Sehnsucht ist das dichtende Moment des Verstandes.” Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 103.

⁴⁶ “Die Musik ist die Gebärerin, der Dichter der Erzeuger; und auf dem Gipfel des Wahnsinnes war die Musik daher angelangt, als sie nicht nur gebären, sonder auch zeugen wollte.” *Ibid.*, 316.

⁴⁷ “Wo das Volk Melodien erfand, verfuhr es, wie der leiblich natürliche Mensch, der durch den unwillkürlichen Akt geschlechtlicher Begattung den Menschen erzeugt und gebiert, und zwar den Menschen, der, wenn er an das Licht des Tages gelangt, fertig ist, sogleich durch seine äußere Gestalt, nicht aber etwa erst durch seinen aufgedeckten inneren Organismus sich kundgibt.” *Ibid.*, 309.

It is understandable given his appreciation of folk melodies that Wagner considers the most beautiful and most natural organ of expression to be the human voice. He argues that we might view the development of musical instruments up to the piano as a progressive lessening of this power of expression heard in the voice.⁴⁸ The piano offers merely a mechanical reproduction of tone, and in it Wagner sees a metaphor for all of modern art:

Verily, our entire modern art resembles the piano: through it the work achieves a unity in its details, but unfortunately only in the abstract and with complete tonelessness! Hammers—but no people!⁴⁹

Not only does Wagner extrapolate from the piano to all of modern art, but he implicates modern industrial society as well.⁵⁰ Again and again, Wagner returns to the problem that music has become too abstract, that it has become “elevated” beyond its original function as a physical form of human expression. On the contrary, the act of listening itself takes on a physical and sexual dimension for Wagner.⁵¹ “The ear is no child; it is a strong, loving woman, who in her love will make that man the blessedest who brings in himself the fullest matter for her bliss.”⁵²

⁴⁸ “Wir bemerken hierbei zunächst, daß das ursprüngliche Organ der Musik von der menschlichen Stimme bis zum Klavier zu immer größerer Ausdruckslosigkeit herabsank.” Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 4.

⁴⁹ “Wahrlich, unsere ganze moderne Kunst gleicht dem Klaviere: in ihr verrichtet jeder Einzelne das Werk einer Gemeinsamkeit, aber leider eben nur in abstracto und mit vollster Tonlosigkeit! Hämmer—aber keine Menschen!” *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ For more on this aspect see, Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 8–9.

⁵¹ Ironically, this is how New Musicologists of the United States were discussing music in the 1980s: arguing that we had followed too abstractly in the steps of formalists and denied music its physical aspects.

⁵² “Das Gehör ist kein Kind; es ist ein starkes, liebevolles Weib, das in seiner Liebe Den am höchsten zu beseligen vermag, der in sich ihm den vollsten Stoff zur Beseligen verführt.” Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 133.

Wagner thus theorizes music and drama as a physical communication from voice and orchestration to the listener's ears. No wonder, then, that early theorists of ear-music-physiognomy relied on Wagner. His theories also had implications for the nascent field of music physiology. It is possible that Wagner's own emphasis on the sensual and physical aspect of hearing music—the tales of his music's effect on audiences—helped inspire a generation of researchers to seek out answers in understanding how the ear and brain processed music. As a more immediate effect in the world of music criticism, Wagner's emphasis on feeling and emotion functioned as a contrast to Hanslick's and others' reliance upon older mechanical scientific models and the abstraction of listening.

Over and over again, the theme of idealization and abstraction as negative developments in music returns in Wagner's theoretical treatises from this period. Just as the piano had become an abstract and mechanical instrument, so too did Wagner see counterpoint as a compositional technique that had lost relevance for expressing emotion. As seen in the last chapter, the charge of "asceticism" in Brahms's music demonstrates that certain styles of contrapuntal writing garnered negative critiques as being too pious, too impotent, too lacking in sensuality. No wonder that the term *Augenmusik*, which referred to densely contrapuntal compositions such as fugues, carried a negative connotation; even August Wilhelm Ambros, who had argued against Hanslick's most radical ideas, tried to salvage the concept of *Augenmusik* by employing analogies to sculpture, i.e., to physical, three-dimensional bodies as his representatives of the organic whole.⁵³ Music for the eyes only engaged one sense and, apparently, the wrong one.

⁵³ See August Wilhelm Ambros, "Augenmusik," in *Culturhistorische Bilder aus dem Musikleben der Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Matthes, 1860).

This particular line of criticism fit neatly with Wager's sensualist worldview, and he himself complained in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* that counterpoint was the complete antithesis of music's true nature. "Counterpoint, in its various births and miscarriages, is the artificial masturbation of art, the mathematics of feeling, the mechanical rhythm of the egoistic harmony."⁵⁴ He had argued earlier, "We are much too spiritual and too learned to create warm human figures . . . We should . . . throw out a good deal of affected counterpoint and finally become human beings."⁵⁵ But in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* he took this critique in a different direction and stated more explicitly the relation of "too learned" to German art:

Thus, in its pride music had become its exact antithesis: from a matter of the heart to a thing of reason, from the expression of unbound desire of the Christian soul to the ledger of modern Jewish market speculation.⁵⁶

It is important to note that William Ashton Ellis leaves out the word "Jewish" in his translation, but the word did not serve merely a polemic function; it came with many negative connotations for Wagner, as he would develop further in his treatise "Das Judenthum in der Musik." In this example, its purpose is clear: just as the Christian religion had denied the body in art, just as modern science ignores the senses, here music itself has become abstract and divorced from its purpose of expressing emotion. In the

⁵⁴ "Der Kontrapunkt, in seinen mannigfaltigen Geburten und Ausgeburten, ist das künstliche Mitsichselbstspielen der Kunst, die Mathematik des Gefühles, der mechanisches Rhythmus der egoistischen Harmonie." Wagner, *Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, 88.

⁵⁵ "Wir sind viel zu geistig und viel zu gelehrt, um warme menschliche Gestalten zu schaffen. . . . Wir sollen aufathmet aus dem Wust, der uns zu erdrücken droht, ein gutes Theil affectirten Contrapunkt vom Halse werfen und endlich Menschen werden." Wagner, "Die deutsche Oper," cited in Wilhelm Langhans, *Geschichte der Musik des 17. 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: F.E.C. Leuckart, 1887), 467.

⁵⁶ "In ihrem Stolze war daher die Musik zu ihrem geraden Gegentheile geworde: aus einer Herzensangelegenheit zur Verstandessache, aus dem Ausdrücke unbegrenzter christlicher Gemüthssehnsucht zum Rechnenbuche modernjüdischer Börsenspeculation." Wagner, *Kunstwerk der Zukunft*, 88.

following year, Wagner published “Das Judenthum in der Musik,” and while he did not equate counterpoint with Jewishness directly in that treatise, here the relation is clear enough. The Jewish element in culture, according to Wagner, is rootless and can never be fully assimilated. The Jewish composer must borrow and imitate German art but can never authentically create it from his own intrinsic understanding of the culture. He can produce art according to the rules he learned, but he cannot articulate the purely human (*Reinmenschliche*) that should be expressed in German music. The music may sound very learned, very cosmopolitan, but lacks depth. In a similar way Wagner’s jab at counterpoint explicitly associates the empty reasoning of counterpoint with the marketplace; neither is inspired by the love Wagner sees as fundamental to expression and creation. If, as Margaret Notley and Daniel Beller-McKenna have shown, Brahms was later dubbed a Jew by some overzealous critics during Vienna’s turn towards radical socialism in the 1880s, this critique only had its roots in Wagner’s own writings from the Zürich period.⁵⁷

Just as the art of counterpoint was devoid of expression and love, Wagner considered its antithesis, the genre of opera, in gendered terms. This becomes apparent through his metaphors in *Oper und Drama* describing various national styles of opera as women, and it offers more insight into how music and sex/love/sensuality are connected for Wagner. He anthropomorphizes, literally, gives the formless genre of opera a human body. The fact that it is a feminine body emphasizes the sensual aspect, and not simply because it is feminized; while a dominant patriarchal German culture might recognize

⁵⁷ See Margaret Notley, “Brahms as Liberal: Genre, Style, and Politics in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna,” *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 107–23; Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit*, 178–82.

anything feminized as being sensualized by default, there did exist a subculture tracing back to the work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann that recognized the masculine as sensualized and the feminine as austere and idealized.⁵⁸ In the case of Wagner's writing, however, the sensualization is clear through his explicit discussion of opera in terms of feminine sexuality.

Wagner begins part I, section VI of *Oper und Drama* with the simple declaration that "Die Musik ist ein Weib." He goes on to argue that women by nature must love a man unconditionally or else they are not women at all. Defining women by their capacity to love men is not new in itself, but Wagner's protracted and systematic use of this as a metaphor to explain the nature of music represents the most explicit sensualization of music in history. I argue that it could only come in conjunction with the Young Hegelian philosophy of Feuerbach. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Wagner's emphasis on drama, and his quip that oratorio was the sexless embryo of opera, his designation of different types of "women" are all operas: Italian, French, and German, and he does not offer any analysis of "pure" instrumental music or church music in this discussion. Furthermore, he defines these "women" through their sexual promiscuity, or lack thereof—thereby sensualizing them even more by emphasizing the body and sexuality. Wagner's definition of love is not all spiritual (what we misleadingly call "Platonic" these days), but rather includes entire physical, spiritual surrender to the other person. Of course, he distinguishes between mere sex and love, but the love includes the physical aspect as well.

⁵⁸ See Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, 110–13. This theme is explored similarly in Ilja Dürhammer, *Geheime Botschaften: Homoerotische Subkulturen im Schubert-Kreis, bei Hugo von Hofmannsthal und Thomas Bernhard* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2006).

He not only genders music, a process that had already occurred since the beginning of language, but sexualizes it explicitly. According to Wagner, Italian opera is a “wanton,” French opera a “coquette,” and German opera a “prude.” Each of these types is categorized according to the relationship between sex and love. Italian opera might “fulfill the functions of the female sex,” but, without love, is a “wasted woman.” The French coquette plays games with love for vanity’s sake, but never loves anyone but herself. The German prude, however, refuses to love on principle. Wagner’s distinction between the prudish German opera and the more sexually available French and Italian operas would seem to reflect a general, nationally motivated perception of foreign music, especially opera, as morally suspect. For example, the author, political progressive, and sometime music critic Ludwig Eckhardt argued in 1864 that the composer Gluck had once played Rinaldo to the Armida of Italian opera. Wagner, too, he added, had once “lain in the arms of Italian opera, like Rinaldo, until the diamond shield of German art flashed at him.”⁵⁹ While Wagner seems to agree that Italian and French opera styles represent sensualized and sexualized women, he diverges from this more typical nationalist critique in his equally harsh judgment of contemporary German opera.

While German social mores prescribed that women even more so than men ought to exhibit virtue and prudence, especially in sexual matters, Wagner censures the German prude because her supposed “virtue” is hypocritical. “In her bigoted heart there stirs no

⁵⁹ “Gluck war selbst ein Rinaldo gewesen und hatte in den Armen der italiensichen Oper gelegen, bis er sich aus den Zaubergärten dieser Armida losriss und für ein ächtes musikalisches Drama zu wirken begann...Auch er [Wagner] lag in Armidas Armen bis ihm der Demantschild deutscher Kunst entgegenblitzte.” Ludwig Eckhardt, *Die Zukunft der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: C.F. Kahnt, 1864), 22–25.

love, but in her ambushed flesh a vulgar lust.”⁶⁰ This is the same complaint Wagner would lodge against composers of the Leipzig School, attacking them for their musical prudery in his pamphlet *Über das Dirigieren*, written nearly twenty years later. In an extended metaphor of sexual desire, resistance, abstinence, and holiness, Wagner decries composers who attempted to write operas but failed:

Could one of them come to a happy embrace of “Opera” even once, it is likely that the entire school would explode. Only that this will never be accomplished is what keeps the school together; for every failed attempt can always be given the appearance of a willing abstention, in the sense of ritualistic exercises of the lower grade, and the opera, never successfully courted, can always figure as a mere symbol of temptation to be avoided, so that the authors of failed operas can pass for especially holy.⁶¹

In this second instance, the criticism is lodged against males, whereas in *Oper und Drama*, it referred to hypothetical females. This is not to suggest that Wagner is producing or arguing for equality of the sexes. He held rather traditional views of women in terms of gender roles; however, he was open about celebrating the human ability to love through sex, and indeed, he saw it as a necessary aspect of the human condition. Fundamentally, the criticism of the prude functioned as an analogy that revealed the

⁶⁰ “In ihrem bigotten Herzen regt sich nie die Liebe, in ihrem sorgsam versteckten Fleische wohl aber gemeine Sinnenlust.” Wagner, *Oper und Drama*, 319.

⁶¹ “Die Liebeslieder Walzer” des heiligen Johannes, so albern sich schon der Title ausnimmt, könnten noch in die Kategorie der Übungen der unteren Grade gesetzt werde: die inbrünstige Sehnsucht nach der “Oper” jedoch, in welche schliesslich alle religiöse Andacht der Enthaltamen sich verliert, zeichnet unverkennbar die höheren und höchsten Frade aus. Könnte es hier ein einziges Mal zu einer glücklichen Umarmung der “Oper” kommen, so stünde zu vermuten, dass die ganze Schule gesprengt wäre. Nur das dies nie gelingen will, hält die Schule noch zusammen; denn jedem missglückten Versuche kann immer wieder der Anschein eines freiwilligen Abstehens, im Sinne der ritualistischen Übungen der unteren Grade, gegeben werden, und die nie glücklich gefreite Oper kann immer von neuem wieder als blosses Symbol des schliesslich abzuwehrenden Reizes figurieren, so dass die Autoren durchgefallener Opern für besonders heilig gelten können.” Richard Wagner, “Über das Dirigieren,” in *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 322.

weaknesses of German opera precisely because it lacked the love-inspired creation he had theorized.

Wagner's analogies of women and opera and his metaphor of the fertilizing poetic intent help point toward what Jean Jacques Nattiez's has argued is an androgynous aesthetic.⁶² One might criticize Nattiez for making Wagner into more of a progressive (in terms of women's rights) than he was, because Nattiez's model presumably ignores Wagner's reinforcing of gender roles in that the active part is masculine and the receptive part is feminine. Ultimately, though, Nattiez's work is a step towards integrating Wagner's own recurrent language into a more complete system. To understand Wagner's analogies and metaphors in terms of the gendered dichotomy of masculine and feminine is one approach to the topic; however, such an investigation soon proves, as Nattiez's work suggests, that any simple binary reduction of the complex web of references and social contexts is problematic at best.

Wagner's proclamation that "die Musik ist ein Weib" was not new in 1851, nor had the notion of music's femininity escaped the consciousness of other composers. But even accepting that music is feminine and the poetic intent masculine, the completed music drama is neither one nor the other as a human child would be, but a heterogeneous combination of the two (and, presumably, other arts, if the work is a true *Gesamtkunstwerk*); in this way, Wagner's metaphor breaks down, or may be understood either as "androgynous" after Nattiez, or as an on-going process of mating. As a composer, Wagner would have had to realize that his own theory placed music (and, by extension, composers) in the receptive role in this process, taking from the librettist and

⁶² Jean Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne: A Study in Interpretation*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

creating from that initiative. Wagner, who had already begun the prose draft to the *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the time of writing *Oper und Drama*, certainly planned on submitting to no one, and his words might be read as an extreme rhetorical strategy, not only to chastise past composers for losing sight of the dramatic properties of opera, but also as a way of elevating himself above both poet and composer: Wagner makes himself into a self-sufficient entity, like Beethoven before him, with both masculine and feminine creative powers, capable of producing a truly complete work of art.

This is not to suggest that Wagner argued for equality of the sexes. He still held rather traditional views of women compared to more radical feminist ideas in Europe; however, he was open about celebrating the human ability to love through sex, and expressed this view through his metaphor on the creation of art. In short, Wagner's philosophy here is fundamentally bound up with the implication that sexuality is necessary for creativity, that the physically sensual is necessary for music and of course music drama. In Wagner's depiction of prudish German opera, natural sexual urges are being denied, and he maintains that opera is a field that involves understanding of and dealing with sexuality. More fundamentally, sexuality is necessary for creativity in general. It brings to mind the distinction to be drawn between *reine Musik* and the oft-mentioned *Reinmenschliche*. For Wagner, *Reinmenschliche*, the Feuerbachian formulation that emphasizes the human element, is the purely human, which includes love (which includes sex), while *reine Musik* is divorced from it.

The Feuerbachian influences on Wagner's theories manifest themselves in a variety of ways, but the theme of sensuality constitutes one of the most important unifying threads throughout his works. On one level, reading Feuerbach may simply have

given Wagner a philosophical justification for the ideas he already intuitively felt towards sex; on another, it situated the positive valuation of sensuality, of the need of sexuality for creative potency, within a philosophical framework that cast doubt on the long-held tenets of philosophical idealism, Christianity, and the primacy of modern science. This framework shaped Wagner's attitudes towards musical cultural issues such as the formal idealism of Hanslick, the quasi-religious rhetoric towards music that he considered artificial, the objectivist aesthetics that valued intellectual listening over emotional connection to music.

Music Theater and Immorality Before Wagner

Before continuing to the critical reaction to these ideas in Wagner's prose and stage works, we might situate Wagner's ideas on music drama within the sexualized genre of opera. As it turned out, one of the most critical divisional lines in the debate fell between the genres of opera and non-opera. From the previous chapter we know that the term "rein" applied—was applied—to instrumental music much more often than the word "absolute," but "rein" also could refer to genres that involved the voice, such as religious music, both in church and in concert hall. In this way, "reine Musik" did not necessarily mean "purely instrumental music," but rather a type of general musical quality associated with the healthy—in looking for generic boundaries between the Wagnerian camp and the purists, then, religious vocal music still functioned with instrumental music as a duo against program music and opera, specifically music drama. Moreover, for many music lovers, "rein" held connotations of musical intimacy and spiritual quality that distinguished some types of music from on-stage spectacles such as opera. Wagnerian

critics sometimes caricatured those music lovers as a type of self-appointed and self-important priesthood; they attacked *Kunstreligion* for pretensions of spiritual fulfillment that only the initiated could attain. Likewise, Wagner's own comments on chaste composers being unable to write opera suggest that he considered it a sexed genre.

But how exactly did critics view opera in relation to foreign opera and within German tradition itself? To better understand Wagner's reevaluation, it helps to know the concepts of opera—both German and foreign opera—that portrayed the sensual and therefore sometimes the immoral. Moreover, this provides a basis for choosing to focus on German opera rather than comparing it to foreign operas: while foreign operas were generally considered morally inferior, even within German operatic circles a battle raged over immorality and sensuality.

Since its inception opera often involved sex and death, and usually social dictates demanded that creators of opera provide a moral context in which to couch these more dangerous elements. Ellen Rosand has shown that despite the sometimes licentious and immoral action in seventeenth-century opera, its composers and librettists often maintained that these scenes were cautionary and should ultimately encourage ethical behavior.⁶³ Critics of opera considered any display of sexuality to be immoral and often dismissed the entire genre of opera. For Germans this had long been a point of national pride that foreign operas, both in terms of music and plot, focused on frivolous immoral subjects and appealed only to superficial pleasure, whereas German stage works were usually imbued with more moralistic tones. Martin Nedbal has argued that the moralism of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German musical theater was bound closely to

⁶³ Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 56–59.

a sense of nationalism, and that even Wagner's valuation of his own works assumed a tone of moralistic superiority in contrast to foreign opera.⁶⁴

Indeed, much of the criticism against Italian or French opera contributed to a longer-standing attempt to separate German music from foreign music. One example is Schumann's 1835 analysis of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, in which he attempts to marginalize "feminine (that which is French)" elements while emphasizing the "masculine (i.e., 'German') heart of the work."⁶⁵ Sanna Pederson has argued that the concept of "absolute" music in the first part of the century was "shaped by a new, exclusionary ideology directed at other nations," in particular the foreign, sensual operas of Rossini.⁶⁶ She points out that A.B. Marx's reception of Rossini as sensual and dangerous might be considered an ascetic rather than aesthetic stance.⁶⁷

To some conservatives, however, Wagner represented the path to immorality *within* German art, and they sought to create a moral-immoral dichotomy on Wagner's own terms, within the genre of German opera. It was easy to look back on earlier German operas as exemplars of moral uprightness; Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, for example, often functioned in such a role. But plenty of composers in Wagner's day also wrote operas that entirely eschewed Wagner's theories and musical style, although few of these have stood the test of time. In a review of the now-forgotten opera *Die Haideschacht* by Franz

⁶⁴ See Martin Nedbal, "Morals Across the Footlights: Viennese *Singspiel*, National Identity, and the Aesthetics of Morality, c. 1770–1820" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 2009).

⁶⁵ See Ian Biddle's discussion, "Policing Masculinity: Schumann, Berlioz and the Gendering of the Musical-Critical Idiom," *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 124 (1999), 196–220.

⁶⁶ Sanna Pederson, "Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 110.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

von Holstein (1826–1878), the music critic Selmar Bagge offered these words, as much an attack on Wagnerian opera as a commendation of Holstein’s work:

A genuine German opera! Namely one that does not rely upon a merely superficial or lascivious text, designed only to arouse the senses, but rather upon plot and scenes that are really gripping and moving; not on froufrou [*klingsklang*] trills and roulades, but on artless, healthy music that speaks to the heart, yet is mature and spiritually cultivated; not on noise and decorative exhibitions, but on expression of voices and true musical figures.⁶⁸

This comparison might read like any distinction between German and foreign opera; as suggested earlier, foreign opera was often associated with things lascivious, but so was Wagner too. In this sense it might be interpreted as an attempt to make Wagner into a foreign entity, to question in his place among healthier German composers of opera—certainly part of the *AmZ* platform in 1870. While Wagner could not easily be accused of trills and roulades (he had raged against this as well), he was often accused of lasciviousness, especially in his appeal to the senses.

Thus, drawing a connection between Wagner and foreign, immoral opera flew directly in the face of Wagner’s own national project. In a none-too-surprising turn, the composer whom Bagge singles out for contrast is, indeed, Wagner. He has lead German opera to a dead end, which can only be escaped through backtracking; that is, by returning to older structures in music.⁶⁹ Lest any readers think Bagge might be advocating foreign opera, Bagge limits his discussion to Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber

⁶⁸ “Eine ächt deutsche Oper! Nämlich eine solche, die nicht auf einem bloß äusserlichen, nur die Sinne reizenden oder gar lasciven Text berührt, sondern auf einer Handlung und auf Scenen, die wirklich ergreifend und rührend sind; nicht auf Klingklang, Trillern und Rouladen, sondern auf schlichter, gesunder, daher zum Herzen sprechender, aber durch reife geistige Bildung durchsäuerter Tonsprache; nicht auf Lärm und decorativen Ausstellungen, sondern auf Ausdruck von Stimmungen und wirklich musikalischer Gestaltung.” S. Bagge, “Franz von Holstein’s Oper ‘Die Haideschacht,’” *AmZ* 5 (1870), 65.

⁶⁹ “Während eine Partei der Gegenwart behauptet, die Oper sei jetzt durch R. Wagner aus ihrem Culminationspunkte angelangt, bleiben Andere trotz aller Demonstrationen bei ihrer Ueberzeugung, sie sei endlich durch ihn in eine Sackgasse gerathen, aus welcher nur durch Umkehr herauszukommen.” *Ibid.*

as models for good German operas. The implication in this and many similar criticisms of Wagner is clear, though: despite his attempts to create a national artform, Wagner merely introduces the same lascivious elements (textually and musically) that can be found beyond German opera.⁷⁰ In 1870 amid the fomenting nationalist climate of war with France, these were harsh words indeed.

Bagge's critique demonstrates how much Wagner's theories had thrown the entire genre of opera off its foundations, and other theorists, historians, and critics argued as to the development and present day situation of the artform. Ludwig Eckhardt had once criticized Wagner himself for lying in the arms of Italian opera (*Armida*). It may seem that Eckhardt wished to feminize foreign opera, but his contrast lay in the immorality of Italian music, because he too considered opera to be a feminine genre in particular: "Wagner, the poet of opera, prizes the feminine, love, [and] devotion: the job of exalting the manly, deed, [and] freedom remains to us poets of the drama."⁷¹ The desire to implicate other national musical styles as "immoral" because of their easy melody often meant that "easy" could refer to sexual matters as well. France suffered this criticism especially during the heightened anti-French sentiment of the Franco-Prussian War, its role as the "Whore of Babylon" helping in many cases to create a morally-suspect counterpart which all German composers could agree to dislike.⁷²

⁷⁰ Similarly, the music historian Friedrich Chrysander argued that there were only two strands of modern opera: the Wagnerian and the Offenbachian, both of which he found to be problematic.

⁷¹ "Der Operndichter Wagner preist das Weibliche, die Liebe, die Hingebung: es wird die Aufgabe von uns Schauspielern bleiben,—das Männliche zu verherrlichen, die That, die Freiheit." Eckhardt, *Die Zukunft der Tonkunst*, 28.

⁷² See discussion of Brahms's *Triumphlied*, op. 55 in Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit*, 102–3.

French and Italian opera thus provided a good foil to healthy German opera, and if one were to construct a continuum of immorality, they would be on the far end of the spectrum, with German music on the better end. Most critics could agree that German art at least occupied a more virtuous space than French or Italian; Nietzsche's famous championing of Bizet over both Brahms and Wagner represented a desperate attempt to find an alternative in a long-standing battle within German music.⁷³ Of course, there had always been those exceptions who praised French music for its fresh entertainment value, but generally, critics agreed that German music was superior to foreign; it equaled English literature (Shakespeare).⁷⁴ This very mode of thinking powered much of the favorable reception of Wagner's *Meistersinger*, despite its homeland critics.

Leaving out the German criticism of French and Italian opera helps focus on the struggle that occurred entirely within German music. What German music was healthy or moral, sick or dangerous, and so forth? Unfortunately, as Wagner's criticism indicated, the Young Hegelian-inspired revolutionaries had posed challenges to the normative concepts of morality itself, and the nature of what constituted morally sound music came under fire. This is most evident in the attacks on Wagner's music and philosophy, and especially in the defense of them. At heart of the debate over opera lay the problem of sensuality, the function of music, and audiences' reactions to it. The sensuality of Wagner's operas, in particular, brought home a host of critical problems that had long been associated with foreign operas.

⁷³ And even in his praise of Bizet, Nietzsche exoticizes *Carmen* as "African," more so than French: "This music is gay; but it is not a French or German gaiety. Its gaiety is African." See "The Case of Wagner," 7–8.

⁷⁴ Perhaps the most famous articulation of this sentiment is literary historian Georg Gottfried Gervinus's comparison of *Händel und Shakespeare: Zur Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1868).

Wagner as Beacon of Immorality

Wagner's Feuerbachian understanding of sensuality influenced his entire musical-theoretical worldview in a profound manner. His belief in the connection of sexual fecundity and artistic creativity, in a return to more natural modes of musical-dramatic expression, in the necessity of physical communication of music from the producer to the listener were all manifestations of this worldview. Likewise, his seemingly unnecessary analogies and metaphors relating music to sex and love (or lack thereof) offered obvious values to his beliefs, even if he did not always state them explicitly. Music critics who were unfamiliar with the writings of Feuerbach thus may not have recognized the philosophical background and implications of this sexual rhetoric in Wagner, and for others, it took on other related cultural meanings and presented a danger on its own terms. Wagner's art came to represent a vague threat that took on a more political edge for some critics, while for others it seemed to relate more obviously to homologous social threats such as the women's movement for work and education. For others still, Wagner's music effected dangerous physical reactions (which he himself seemed to advocate) and thereby represented a loss of control akin to physical sickness.

The transition period between the failed revolutions and the creation of the German nation in 1871 witnessed a general trend in the health sciences towards a pathologization of sexuality that deviated from the prescribed norm of bourgeois respectability. In addition to the women's movement and the social wars over religion that erupted in the early 1870s, this provided a cultural backdrop in which Wagner's critics could easily slip from sex to illness in their rhetoric. Wagner's portrayals of

sexuality, along with his grand enchanting narratives, epic-dramatic style, and seductive music presented a threat to some members of society. Thus, despite Wagner's own attempts to bring about a new German art, many critics and music lovers saw his morally unsound plots and scenes as an parallel sign of decay along with his unstructured music. Underlying these critiques was a reaction to the sensuality he advocated in his treatises and attempted to implement in his stage works.

As soon as the infamous Venusberg scene of *Tannhäuser* became widely known, Wagner gained somewhat of a reputation for being morally unsound. Critics generally cite Venusberg and *Tristan und Isolde* as the works most responsible for ushering moral decay into the music world—at least until the complete presentation of the *Ring* in 1876, at which point Wagner's masterwork became his most notorious work. As will be seen in this chapter and the following, the objectionable parts of Wagner were not merely the music, the stage presentation, or the plots, but the more general cultural associations that appeared in critical reviews. The bulk of reviews analyzed in the present study come from the 1860s and 1870s, following the reception of his post-reform works and demonstrating the early development of associations that are typically understood as characterizing the *fin de siècle*.

While anti-Wagnerian critics often constructed him, his works, and their effects as various societal threats, the danger of sensuality constituted a unifying thread that underlay the different critiques. Related themes in the criticism include the supposed magnetic-seductive allure of Wagner's music, the illness associated with listening, and the notion that Wagner's popularity indicated a society in decline. Many of the metaphors and analogies used to criticize these aspects of Wagner also suggest that critics were

responding to sensuality in Wagner, inadvertently employing the same gendered and sexualized rhetoric that appeared in his writings. Exploring the rhetoric in the reception of the painter Hans Makart and novelist Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, both of whom were explicitly connected to Wagner in the critical discourse, demonstrates further how color and sensuality in literature helped contribute to a broad notion of sensuality in a wider cultural context.

As the German nation achieved unification and saw its musical arts reach new heights, many critics and social commentators continued to express uncertainty about the direction of society. Wagner's continual and unavoidable presence in the music world, through both his controversial opinions, printed in long-winded treatises, and his stage works, made him a prime example for critics who interpreted modern culture as existing in a state of decline. The ceremonial laying of the first stone in Bayreuth on May 22, 1872, (not incidentally Wagner's birthday) caused a ruckus among critics and others who followed musical events. One of the most vehement commentators was Wilhelm Mohr, who scoffed at its ritualistic commemorative nature and launched numerous attacks on Wagner. He drew an explicit line between Wagner's prose style and his musical style, and concluded that only certain conditions could allow this to happen.⁷⁵

It is not the association of spiritual and material powers themselves that makes us recognize in the nature of this foundation the poisonous exhalation of a period lying in an economic nerve-fever.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Ich habe mir immer sagen lassen, der Stil sei der Mensch. Könnte man eine schlagendere Bestätigung diese Satzes finden als in der frappanten Uebereinstimmung, welches zweischen der Prosa Ihrer theoretischen Schriften und Ihrem musicalischen Stile herrscht?" Wilhelm Mohr, *Das Gründerthum in der Musik: Ein Epilog zur Bayreuther Grundsteinlegung* (Cologne: M. DuMont-Schauberg'schen Buchhandlung, 1872), 9.

⁷⁶ "...nicht die Association der geistigen und materiellen Kräfte an sich ist es, was uns in dem Gründerwesen die giftige Exhalation einer in wirtschaftlichem Nervenfieber liegenden Zeit erkennen lässt." Ibid., 11.

Mohr pulls no punches in his pamphlet, attacking Wagner from a number of angles. The entire ceremony has become a “messianic parody;” Wagner’s ulterior motive is “self-deification,” the artwork of the future merely “primordial slime” (*Urschleim*), emphasizing its lack of progress. Just as socialism contains a “spirit of negation,” so too does Wagner’s “musical radicalism” function as a manifestation of this “destructive force” in yet another sphere of human activity.⁷⁷ In general, Mohr maintains a rhetorical attack accusing Wagner of impurity in contrast to such intangible notions as “pure heights of Parnassus.”⁷⁸ Mohr claims that Wagner is about to “disperse an unhealthy vapor into the pure aether of art,”⁷⁹ a typical sentiment playing upon the dichotomy of purity and the threat of defilement, in this case through sickness. The notion of vapors contaminating healthy, pure air maintains an implication of sexual impurity as well; the triple threat of sickness, dense humid air, and sexual deviance would be further developed through the *fin-de-siècle* discourse on art and best articulated in Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* in 1912.

Mohr, whose tactic is to devalue Wagner as symptomatic of a more general societal sickness, also implicates Wagner’s audiences: “It proves that we belong to a nervous, overstimulated, indifferent race, desirous of strong spices and artistic

⁷⁷ “Das Genie äussert sich in solchen Momenten in ersten Linie als zerstörende Kraft, einerlei ob auf künstlerlichem religiösem, oder auf sozialem und politischem Gebiete, und es liegt in der Natur der Sache, dass dieser Geist der Negation gleichzeitig in verschiedenen Sphären der menschlichen Thätigkeit aufzutreten pflegt.” Mohr, 19.

⁷⁸ “die reinen Höhen des Parnasses,” Ibid, 9.

⁷⁹ “Wenn wir zeigen wollen, dass Wagner diese ungesunden Dünste in den reinen Aether der Kunst hinüberzuleiten im Begriffe steht, bedarf es nicht einmal....” Ibid., 12.

excitements.”⁸⁰ Possibly building on the theories of Hanslick, who had argued that it was pathological to let music act upon the listener without actively contemplating it, Mohr and others saw the extreme devotion to Wagner as an illness and an indication of moral weakness. As will be seen later, they considered women to be especially susceptible to Wagner’s magic.

The year 1872 then might be seen as a watershed for music criticism of this extreme variety: in addition to the furor caused by the laying of the first stone at Bayreuth, it also witnessed the publications of Nietzsche’s *Der Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* and Theodor Puschmann’s *Richard Wagner: eine psychiatrische Studie*. Tempting as it may be to understand this as a kind of turning point in Wagner reception, as a parallel ground-stone-laying to later rhetorical trends, we should avoid the trap of reading this constellation of publications and events merely as the beginnings of a more explicit discourse that emerged around the *fin-de-siècle*. This type of reading casts such authors as Nietzsche and Puschmann in the role of pioneer, whereas a close study of music criticism in the preceding years reveals that their writings were articulations of sentiments and ideas that had pervaded the discourse already.

Many critics who attacked Wagner seemed to throw up their hands in despair and dismiss his popularity as signs of a sick society. As seen in Mohr’s critique, typical discussions of this sort involved a few examples of immorality in Wagner’s works, then the token mention of the audiences who allow themselves to fall prey the seductive charms of it. Finally, such a review would conclude with the thought that this phenomenon could only happen in a society in decline, while still implying that Wagner’s

⁸⁰ “Es beweist, dass wir einem nervös, überreizten, blasirten und nach starken Würzen und künstlichen Auffregungen verlangenden Geschlechte angehören.” Mohr, 28.

works contributed to that general decline. Reporting in 1876, the *AmZ* reprinted select quotes from an article in the *Starkenburger Provinzial Zeitung*, which took an especially vehement stance against Wagner:

That this Wagner confusion [*Verwirrung*] could only occur in a time when the foundations of religion, the state, and all legal contracts have been shaken, and in which time all other ridiculous establishments were possible, finds its natural psychological explanation in the meshing of spiritual life and the spiritual movement.”⁸¹

Yet another critic reported on Wagner’s *Kaisermarsch* in Hamburg in 1873, this time implicating the audience members who enjoyed the music:

That many of Mr. Wagner’s admirers wallow in great joy at his most banal melodic turns, the most sensual effects and other outpourings of an impure fantasy, is much worse—a sad sign of the corruption of taste.⁸²

It is often unclear whether critics saw Wagner’s works as contributing to this corruption of societal taste, or whether his popularity was merely a byproduct of it. Most of the outspoken critics would probably agree that the Wagner phenomenon could only flourish in a declining society, while at the same time contributing to that decline. The review of the *Kaisermarsch* is particularly illuminating; it confirmed that Wagner’s “sensual effects” could be translated into instrumental music beyond stage antics, and presumably in music ostensibly suited for a good national cause.

⁸¹ “Dass diese Wagner’sche Verwirrung nur in einer Zeit zur Verwirklichung gelangen konnte, wo bereits die grundfesten der Religion, der Staaten und aller Rechtsverhältnisse erschüttert sind und in welcher Zeit alle anderen schwindelhaften Grüdereien möglich waren, findet in dem Ineinandergreifen des geistigen Lebens und der geistigen Bewegung ihre natürliche psychologische Erklärung.” *AmZ* 11 (1876), 452.

⁸² “Dass viele von Herrn Wagners Bewunderern gerade in seinen banalsten Melodiewendungen, sinnlichsten Effecten, und anderen Ausflüssen einer offenbar unreinen Phantasie und Empfindung, mit wahrhafter Wonnen schwelgen, ist als trauriges Zeichen von Geschmacksverderbnis freilich noch viel schlimmer.” Arrey von Dommer, “Report aus Hamburg,” *AmZ* 8 (1873), 108.

The running thread that linked many complaints about society often equated Wagner's musical style with that of prostitutes or immoral women. This style of critique appeared over and over in reviews from the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which after 1870 grew more conservative and tended towards historical articles, and continued functioning as a forum for anti-Wagnerian sentiment. In 1875, the year he assumed editorship of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, critic and music historian Friedrich Chrysander expressed a general criticism of Wagner that echoed Mohr's:

Through the use of only alluring material, Wagner seeks to imbue the poetic idea of his works with the most sensual expression possible. For finer and gentler natures, this conflict between an ideal content and its embodied material becomes distressingly palpable. To them his works appear like pretty women, who lack the charm of virginity, the breath of soul's purity. The fanatical supporters and thoughtless masses surrender themselves willingly to the captivating magic.⁸³

Chrysander's rhetoric likens Wagner's music to immoral women—he did not go so far as the one listener cited in Wilhelm Tappert's *Wagner Lexicon* (1877), who dubbed the setting of the opening scene in *Das Rheingold* a “whore-aquarium.”⁸⁴ Other critics complained in a similar vein that Wagner's muses were impure and contrary to the spirit of German art. Ironically, the notion of a chaste German opera is precisely what Wagner had railed against in *Oper und Drama*, but here, Hieronymus Lorm (pseudonym of the

⁸³ “Durch Anwendung aller nur herbeizuziehenden Mittel sucht Wagner der poetischen Idee seiner Werke den sinnlich möglichst packenden Ausdruck zu verliehen. Für feiner und weicher organisirte Naturen macht sich dieser Widerspruch zwischen einem ideellen Inhalt und den ihn verkörpernden Mitteln in peinlicher Weise fühlbar. Ihnen erscheinen seine Werke wie schöne Weiber, denen der Reiz der Unberührtheit, der Hauch der Seelenreinheit fehlt. Die fanatischen Anhänger und die gedanklose Menge geben sich willig dem bestrickenden Zauber hin.” Friedrich Chrysander, “Oper,” *AmZ* 10 (1875), 677.

⁸⁴ “Huren-Aquarium als solches bezeichnet ein Ungenannter im Wiener “Vaterland” den Grund des Rheines...” Wilhelm Tappert, *Wagner Lexicon* (Leipzig: E.W. Fritsch, 1877), 18.

Austrian poet Heinrich Landesmann), expressed his anger at Wagner's "coquettish" muse:

The true muses are chaste; chaste, pristine, proud. They despise cosmetic artifice; each one offers only herself, none hides before the others. What do you say to a painter who likes to enhance the impression of his paintings with Bengalese light; to one—Phidias, who draws his figures in music? And here? The music bound with decorative painting, ballet, pyrotechnics! And with all conceivable trappings this coquette calls herself the true German muse!"⁸⁵

The recurring theme in such reviews, that German society could be understood in terms of moral or immoral female sexuality, supports the connection between declining society, sensuality as portrayed by Wagner in music and on stage, and the growing need for the new country to define its borders, politically, as well as in terms of art and gender roles.

Many critics complained of Wagner's seductive power over audiences, arguing implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, that Wagner could lead down immoral paths. They likened him to a magician, a magnetiseur, a siren, or some other powerful, quasi-magical being.

One could speak of a magic that lies buried in the nature of this man. One can see that it is not good magic from the befuddlement that arises in every place where the Master has his hands.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ "Die echten Musen sind keusch; keusch, ursprünglich, stolz. Sie verschmähen Toilettenkünste; jede giebt nur sich selbst, keine birgt von der andern. Was sagen Sie zu einem Maler, der den Eindruck seiner Bilder durch bengalisches Licht erhöhen möchte, zu einem – Phidias, der seinen Figuren bei Musik zeigte? Und hier? Die Musik im Bunde mit Dekorationsmalerei, Ballet, Pyrotechnik! Und diese mit allem denkbaren trödel behangenden Kokette nennt sich die deutsche, die echt deutsch Muse! Sehen Sie, das empört mich!" Hieronymus Lorm, *Wiener Freie Presse* August 1876; cited in Wilhelm Tappert, *Wagner Lexicon*, 39.

⁸⁶ "Man könnte von einem Zauber sprechen, der in dem Wesen dieses Mannes begraben liege, und dass dies kein guter Zauber ist, dafür giebt die Verwirrung Zeugnis, die überall zu Tage tritt, wo der Meister auch nur vorübergehend seine Hand im Spiele hat." *AmZ* 10 (1875), 822.

For some critics, the Wagner “cults” in various cities often proved as troublesome as the works from Wagner himself. The members of these “cults” were also implicated through their engagement with Wagner, especially in Vienna, where a strong anti-Wagnerian presence caused many critical skirmishes. As one critic reported, matter-of-factly, “On Monday evening the Wagner supporters of our city got together . . . to celebrate a four-handed Wagner-orgy.”⁸⁷ Again the rhetoric suggests the Dionysian frenzy—a lack of control and sexual immorality combined.

An early representative of anti-Wagnerian opinion found voice in the *AmZ* in 1866, illustrating the connection between Wagner and all types of unholiness associated with the theater: “Devil-spooks, murder and death, gaudiness, lewd ballet dances, riots and bacchanals, skating at the theater, animals, wild people, pretty regions, poison trees and the like...”⁸⁸ The author concludes that these must bring about the “degeneration of art,” an opinion on which many would later agree as Wagner became more and more popular in the 1870s.

The author, most likely Ernst Rudorff, probably had personal reasons for this diatribe, unusual for its extreme tone. At this point he was a young composer and admirer of Brahms; in 1869 he would be invited by Joachim to work at the newly-founded

⁸⁷ “Montag Abends hatten sich die Wagnerverehrer unserer Stadt zusammengethan, um in engsten traulichsten Kreise in contrapunktistischen Hochgenüssen zu schwelgen und eine vierhändige Wagnerorgie zu feiern.” “Ein Wagnerabend,” *Deutsche-musikalische Zeitung* 7 (1874), 5.

⁸⁸ “Von den an den Haaren und aus allen Welttheilen herbeigezogenen, dazu läppischen oder die wahre Natur des Menschen in Frage stellenden Stoffen der ‘Dinorah’ und der ‘Afrikanerin’ wollen wir nicht einmal sprechen, die übrigens die vollständige Entartung des Kunst [sic?] – und besonders dramatischen Urtheils im grossen Publicum herbeiführen müssen, das schliesslich nur mehr in’s Theater geht um zu schauen: Teufelsspuk, Mord und Todtschlag, Prunk, lüsterne Ballettänzem Aufruhr und Bachanalien, Schlittschuhlaufen auf dem Teather, Thiere, wilde Menschen, schöne Gegenden, Giftbäume u. dgl.—nicht um zu hören und dem musikalische-künstlerischen Ausdruck wirklich psychologischer Entwicklungen zu lauschen, der ebenso sehr das Ohr entzückt, als den Menschen im Ganze befriedigt..” E.R., “Die moderne ‘grosse’ Oper und die Musik im Concert. Meyerbeer, Wagner und – Brahms,” *AmZ* 1 (1866), 62.

Berliner Hochschule für Musik. By hailing Brahms in a Wagner-bashing article in the *AmZ*, Rudorff at once helped align himself with the Leipzig School and helped to solidify battle lines in the debate.

Although many authors complained about the lawlessness of Wagner's music and the theatrical spectacles it accompanied, Rudorff goes much further in his denunciation. He attacked Wagner's representation of women: "In *Lohengrin* and *Fliegender Holländer*, the basic premise is the infallibility of man and the complete subjugation of woman, through which he becomes a god, and she a slave."⁸⁹ Perhaps this comment was targeted at female readers as a warning not to become enmeshed in the worlds created by Wagner. Rudorff adds

This basic premise is taken to such heights in the drama that before one can doubt it, as he is becoming convinced, but in such a way that he becomes most unsettled, so that the result cannot be an effect on the side of truth and naturalness of expression, on the side of health and harmony of the people, but rather a novel overexcitement occurs, thus sickness.⁹⁰

Rudorff's review includes no mention of *Tristan und Isolde*, which had premiered only in the previous year, but he writes with the same vehemence that later critics would direct towards both *Tristan* and the *Ring*, concluding that Wagner's staged works amount to sickness (*Krankheit*). Much of Rudorff's rhetoric, from "degeneration of art" to "sickness" represents a wave of criticism that would become more pronounced as the century continued. Indeed, the review could easily have originated in the 1880s or 1890s,

⁸⁹ "In *Lohengrin* und *Fliegender Holländer* ist der Grundgedank die Unfehlbarkeit des Mannes und die unbedingte Unterwerfung des Weibes, wodurch er zum Gott, sie zur Sclavin wird." Ibid, 64.

⁹⁰ "Dieser Grundgedanke wird im Drama so auf die Spitze gestellt, dass man eher zum Zweifel an der Richtigkeit desselben, als zur Ueberzeugung gedrängt, dadurch aber auf das Aeusserste beunruhigt wird, so zwar, dass eine Einwirkung nach Seite der Wahrheit und Natürlichkeit der Empfindung, nach Seite der Gesundheit und Harmonie des Volks nicht die Folge sein kann, sondern nur eine romanhafte Ueberspannung eintritt, also Krankheit." Ibid.

when such criticism of Wagner contributed to a general *fin-de-siècle* conception of decadence. Rudorff's review, however, suggests that the rhetoric of sickness and degeneracy began to infiltrate the German-speaking press decades earlier than is usually held.

Many critics and music lovers saw Wagner's musical developments after his reforms as a step backwards. One critic writing for the Viennese journal *Blätter für Theater, Musik, und Kunst* in 1870 warned audiences that if they expected the same Wagner of *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and even *Meistersinger*, in *Rheingold* and *Walküre*, that is, if they "sought the Beautiful," they often find "slag."⁹¹ But he also warned readers not "to throw out the baby with the bathwater."⁹² Many critics were ready to dismiss Wagner out of hand after they heard *Rheingold*, etc. Likewise, Hanslick noted at the Bayreuth premiere that when the music contained moments of strength and charm, "it's as though the new Wagner recalls the old one."⁹³

Through the 1850s and 1860s, Wagner attempted to create a sensual and directly expressive artwork. In the *Ring* and *Tristan* especially, critics and audience members alike reacted to this style. Following a performance of *Tristan und Isolde*, one critic overheard some ladies remarking, "Such unfettered passion finds no resonance with their hearts," a point that he could not understand: "that such passion could not remain entirely

⁹¹ "Wir suchen das 'Schöne', wo wir es zu finden hoffen, und freuen uns über einen glücklichen Fund in dieser Richtung selbst dann, wenn wir auch manche Schlacke mit in den Kauf nehmen müssen." "Wagner's 'Rheingold' und die 'Walküre,'" *Blätter für Theater, Musik und Kunst* 16 (1870), 203.

⁹² "Hat ja doch selbst 'die Sonne ihre Flecken,' und es hiesse wahrhaftig 'das Kind mit dem Bade ausschütten...." Ibid.

⁹³ "An vielen Stellen tauchen allerdings musikalische Schönheiten von hinreissender Wirkung auf, Starkes wie Zartes – es ist, als ob sich da der neue Wagner an den alten erinnerte." Hanslick, "Das Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth," printed in *Deutsche-musikalische Zeitung* 9 (1876), 8.

foreign on the first hearing! And this moral viewpoint about the content of the drama was possible after that excellent production of the second act of *Tristan*! Yea, this opinion is no isolated case, no shy, lady-like Sophia-Winkel viewpoint; it's entirely common among the people."⁹⁴ This critic's point that such an opinion found much currency among "the people" helps highlight the difference between the literary class of critics who supported Wagner and the audience members who found his style incomprehensible and unattractive. As we shall see in the following section, those critics who paid attention to the growing body of scientific research on sexual pathology could find more justification for their repulsion than simply asserting, "it doesn't resonate with my heart."

Wagner as Pathological

In conjunction with the rise of psychological/sexual science starting around mid century, the critical reception of Wagner became inflected with the rhetoric of health and sickness. Just as the rhetoric of sexuality in music criticism had been imbued with moral values, so too did critics imply that sickness could be of a sexual nature. As already established, Wagner himself was quite explicit in his use of sexual metaphors and analogies, which in a way opened himself to attacks of indecency and impropriety. As the discourse of sickness (both psychological and physical) became intertwined with that of the budding science of sexuality, it was only a matter of time before critics who considered

⁹⁴ "...Nachbarinnen im herrlichsten Thüringischen Dialekte bekennen: 'solche ungebändigte Leidenschafte finde keinen Wiederhall in ihrem Herzen,' - dass doch dem ersten Hall, der - wenn gleich gebildeten - Leidenschaft nicht mehr ganz fremd geblieben sein konnte! Und diese moralische Ansicht von dem Inhalte des Dramas war möglich nach der dortigen trefflichen Darstellung des zweiten Tristan-Aktes! Ja, diese Auffassung ist gar keine vereinzelt, keine damenhaft schüchterene Sophia-Winkel-Anschauung; gang und gebe ist sie unter den Leuten." *Deutsche-musikalische Zeitung* 7 (1874), 4.

themselves morally superior began to associate Wagner with the pathological and the degenerate.

James Kennaway has argued that the discourse of pathology is determined by a (mostly male) anxiety over sexuality, including homosexuality, and he dates the beginning of this rhetoric in Wagner reception to the 1872 publication of Theodor Puschmann's *Richard Wagner: eine psychiatrische Studie*.⁹⁵ In this work Puschmann attempted, as one contemporary reviewer noted, to "explain Wagner's artificial and human behaviors as products of mental illness (megalomania, persecution complex, and moral insanity)," an argument, the critic thought, that would only enrage Wagner's supporters and please his detractors.⁹⁶ Puschmann's book employed the seemingly legitimate and objective science of psychology to confirm what so many critics had implied or argued outright in many music reviews.

Kennaway rightly sees this discourse of pathology as intertwined with that of degeneracy and languid sexuality—all of which were applied to Wagner at various times, but Puschmann's 1872 work articulates an association that had already been in place for decades. Kennaway has argued that a discourse of music pathology and nervous stimulation came into being during the late eighteenth century.⁹⁷ Critics of Wagner often discussed his music and the popularity of his works in terms of illness; for example, a

⁹⁵ See James Gordon Kennaway, "Music Pathology in the Nineteenth Century: Richard Wagner and Degeneration" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 2004).

⁹⁶ "...neueste künstlerische und menschliche Handlungen aus einem Zustande von Geistestörung (Grössenwahn, Verfolgungswahn und moralischer Irrsinn) zu erklären." *Blätter für Theater, Musik und Kunst* 14 (1872), 294.

⁹⁷ James Kennaway, "From Sensibility to Pathology: The Origins of the Idea of Nervous Music around 1800," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 65/3 (2010), 396–426.

critic from Berlin might describe a “fiercely raging Wagnerian epidemic” characterized predominantly by dilettantism.⁹⁸ At the same time, the discussion of pathological listening also came to the foreground, largely in part because Wagner had so much emphasized the immediate and physical responses to music in his own treatises. As he had argued, the best work of art appealed to all of the senses and was grounded in physical reality, not an abstract realm of intellect alone.

Thus, one of the earliest critical response to Wagner’s theories came from Eduard Hanslick himself, whose 1854 *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* engaged in dialogue with Wagner’s ideas on listening in *Oper und Drama*. Hanslick’s chapter on the pathological in music laid out a bold thesis that contradicted not only Wagner’s ideas, but a long history of understanding musical perception. If, according to Wagner, the ear is “a staunch and loving woman” who receives the music, Hanslick turns this concept on its head by associating such listening with the animalistic. He argues that animals respond physically, at the most basic level, to music, and that we might consider similar reactions in humans to be “pathological.” Here Hanslick reinforces the physical-spiritual divide that Wagner had disavowed in his theories. Whereas Wagner had grounded music in the body, Hanslick argues that passive, bodily reactions to music are pathological. “In that they passively allow the elementary elements of music to work upon them, they are lost

⁹⁸ “Wir stossen hier auf eine sonderbar gemischte Gesellschaft, deren hervorragendste und unzweifelhaftestest Seite ihr durchaus dilettantischer Charakter ist, wie ja überhaupt der oberflächliche und des Ueberblicks über das Ganze der Kunst entberenden Dilettantismus sich dieser stark grassirenden Epidemia Wagneriana am schutzlosesten Preise gegeben zeigt.” “Musikalische Briefe aus Berlin,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, 24 February (1873).

in a vague, supersensual-sensual arousal [*übersinnlich-sinnlich*], determined only by the character of the piece.⁹⁹

Hanslick's comments about listening harken back to a long-standing fear of losing control, especially prominent in discussions of music. If earlier in the century German critics had directed their censure at Italian opera composers, especially Rossini, now Hanslick generalized the problem of listening to include all types of music.¹⁰⁰ The responsibility to avoid being overcome by the music lay with the listener. Hanslick implied that listening to the same piece could result in dramatically differing results depending on active or passive listening. If Wagner had feminized the art of listening, Hanslick in turn attempts to remove the bodily entirely. Thus, the act of listening itself moved into the foreground of debate, and Hanslick's extreme rhetorical ploy of deeming passive listening "pathological" did not go unnoticed.

Rudolf Benfey, a philosopher and supporter of Wagner, criticized Hanslick for using the term "pathological," precisely because he thought the word implied too much. Benfey finds Hanslick's use of the word "pathological" particularly offensive, although he is glad that Hanslick does not mean the word in the sense of "something sick":

Mr. H. thus means that each feeling that even animals have to a certain extent, as he himself points out, is only something aroused through an artificial excitement of the external nature. Each excitement is not even the beauty that we actually should desire from music, only the Pathos of our nature compels us to become aroused in such a way, while we actually only would have sought the beautiful form. Now the effect of music would really be something sick and Hanslick

⁹⁹ "Indem sie das Elementarische der Musik in passiver Empfänglichkeit auf sich wirken lassen, gerathen sie in eine vage, nur durch den Charakter des Tonstücks bestimmte übersinnlich-sinnliche Erregung." Eduard Hanslick, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Leipzig: Rudolph Weigel, 1854), 70.

¹⁰⁰ See Sanna Pederson, "Enlightened Music Criticism in the Age of Romanticism" (Ph.D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1995); and Stephen Downes, "Musical Pleasures and Amorous Passions: Stendhal, the Crystallization Process, and Listening to Rossini and Beethoven," *19th-Century Music* 26 (2003), 235–57.

would have not found it necessary as he does to warn against using the word “pathological” as in sickness. But to his credit let it be said that at least a feeling of shame crept over him as he thought of the double meaning of the word he had chosen.¹⁰¹

The general interest in the theories of Charles Darwin that flourished in the 1870s and the rise of physiological studies also encouraged discussions of physical reactions to music as well as the listening process in general. As Carl van Bruyck wrote for the *Blätter für*

Theater, Musik und Kunst in 1870:

One has often attempted to explain certain effects that music has in certain conditions upon many human systems, such as a shuddering or movement of disposition, etc, which is based on a purely physiological (respectively pathological) process.¹⁰²

Bruyck considers Hanslick one of the forerunners in this regard. But while Hanslick focused on the act of listening, Bruyck goes on to distinguish between the different conceptions of a piece that people could develop based on hearing it in performance versus studying it in score. He wondered, however, how it might be explained if he felt similar physiological effects from studying a score and having never heard it.

It may be that some of the effects [*Wirkungen*] that I and others of similar musical development experience when we hear, say, Beethoven’s C Minor Symphony performed by a talented orchestra result from purely physiological processes;

¹⁰¹ “Hr. H. meint also, jenes Empfinden, das selbst Thiere bis zum gewissen Grade haben, wie er es selbst hervorhebt, sei nur etwas durch eine künstliche erregung der äusseren Natur Herbeigeführtes. Jene Erregung sei eben nicht das Schöne, was wir von der Musik eigentlich verlangen sollten, nur das Pathos unserer Natur dränge uns dazu, gleichzeitig in solcher Weise erregt zu werden, während wir eigentlich nur nach der schönen Form zu streben hätten. – Nun, dann wäre ja wirklich die Regung bei der Musik etwas Kranhaftes und H. hätte nicht nöthig, sich gegen Uebersetzung des Wortes pathologisch in Krankhaft so zu verwarhen wie er sie thut. Doch zu seiner Ehre sei es gesagt, es überschlich ihn doch ein Schamgefühl, als er an den Doppelsinn des Wortes dachte, das er gewählt hatte.” Rudolf Benfey, “Die Mittel des Tonreiches nach Inhalt und Form,” *NZfM* 67 (1867), 243.

¹⁰² “Man hat öfter schon versucht gewisse Wirkungen, welche die Musik unter gewissen Bedingungen auf manche, ja viele menschliche Organisationen, wie thatsächliche feststeht, ausübt, wie wenn man von Erschütterung, Rührung des Gemüthes, u. dergl. m. sprechen hör, als Wirkungen zu erklären, welche auf einem rein physiologischen (respective pathologischen) Prozesse beruhten.” Carl van Bruyck, *Blätter für Theater, Musik und Kunst* 16 (1870), 35.

indeed, it is doubtless that this must actually be the case. However, how is it explicable if I experience the same effects of a certain shuddering, a deep emotion, and great ecstasy if I get to know the work through the score before hearing it with my physical ear before an orchestra?¹⁰³

These questions were relevant for music critics as well as audiences, and the apparent omnipresent threat of Wagner helped spawn discussions on the importance of critical listening and the problem of losing control.

One of Wagner's greatest critics was a man whose own worldview he had heavily influenced in the late 1860s. Friedrich Nietzsche made famous his debt to Wagner in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, 1872), which invoked many of Wagner's ideas of unification of the arts.¹⁰⁴ Over the years, though, Wagner fell out of favor with Nietzsche, who penned some of the most concentrated vitriol against him during the 1880s. Wagner's apparent turn to Christianity struck Nietzsche as an abandonment of Wagner's earlier belief in the sensual world:

Feuerbach's phrase of a "healthy sensuality," echoed in the third and fourth decades of this century to Wagner as to many other Germans—they called themselves the *young* Germans—like the word of salvation. Did the older Wagner *unlearn* his former creed? Very likely he did! judging from the disposition he evinced toward the end of his life to *unteach* his first belief . . . Has the *hatred of life* got the upper hand in him, as in Flaubert? . . . For *Parsifal* is a work of cunning, of revengefulness, of secret poison-brewing, hostile to the pre-requisite

¹⁰³ "So weit ich mich entsinne, hat man bei Untersuchung dieser Frage noch niemals den grossen, wie mir scheint, schwer in's Gewicht fallenden Unterschied erwogen, welcher zwischen der Conception von Tonwerken durch das Medium der physischen Gehörsorgane und real erregter Schallwellen und derjenigen Statt findet, deren musikalische höher Gebildete durch das Studium der Partituren fähig sind, ohne dass sie der Vermittlung von tönenden Instrumenten und Stimmen bedürften. Er mag sein, dass ein Theil der Wirkungen, welche ich und solche, die mir in Organisation und musikalischer Bildung gleich oder ähnlich sind, z. B. von Beethoven's C-moll-Symphonie, von einem tüchtigen Orchester vorgetragen, empfangen, oder jemals empfangen haben, auf Rechnung rein physiologischer Vorgänge zu setzen sein wird, ja es kann gar nicht bezweifelt werden, dass diess factisch der Fall ist und sein muss; aber wie verhält es sich dann, wenn ich dasselbe Werk, ehe ich es von einem Orchester mit leiblichem Ohre vernahm, aus der Partitur kennen lernte und auch da schon die gleichen Wirkungen einer gewissen Erschütterung, einer tiefen Rührung und hohen Entzückens empfing?" Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993).

of life; a bad work.—The preaching of chastity is an incitement to antinaturalness: I despise everyone who does not regard *Parsifal* as an outrage on morals.¹⁰⁵

Although Nietzsche maintains the praise of sensuality from his earlier work and decries Wagner for his “unteaching” of it, many of the clichés he invokes come from contemporary music criticism that cited Wagner as dangerous. In *The Case of Wagner* (1888), he likened his turn from Wagner to a convalescence from a disease.

My most important experience was a convalescence; Wagner belongs only to my maladies . . . He is the master of hypnotic passages; he upsets, like the bulls, the very strongest. The success of Wagner—his success on the nerves, and consequently on women—has made all the ambitious musical world disciples of his magical art.¹⁰⁶

Martin Gregor-Dellin has quipped that Nietzsche “is the origin of all clichés,” but I hope to suggest that Nietzsche managed to articulate many pre-existing Wagner clichés from the 1860s and 1870s: as Nietzsche himself would admit, both he and Wagner were products of their own time.¹⁰⁷ His points about Wagner, however cutting, however eloquently stated, were expressions of widespread cultural views. Some of his rhetoric may appear extreme, but many of his attitudes towards Wagner had been in the discourse already since the 1860s. Indeed, as the critical rhetoric concerning Wagner proves, the healthy/unhealthy dichotomy we associate with *fin-de-siècle* arts became relevant some

¹⁰⁵ “Nietzsche contra Wagner,” *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. XI, trans Thomas Common, ed. Alexander Tille (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1896), 80.

¹⁰⁶ “Mein grösstes Erlebniss war eine Genesung. Wagner gehört bloss zu meinen Krankheiten . . . Er ist der Meister hypnotischer Griffe, er wirft die Stärksten noch wie Stiere um. Der Erfolg Wagner’s—sein Erfolg bei den Nerven und folglich bei den Frauen—hat die ganze ehrgeizige Musiker-Welt zu Jüngern seiner Geheimkunst gemacht.” Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Case of Wagner,” in *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. XI, ed. Alexander Tille, trans. Thomas Common (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1896), 2, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner: Die Revolution als Oper* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973), 13.

forty years earlier and took hold in conjunction with the musical-political rhetoric of the mid-century revolutions.

Hans Makart and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch in Wagner Reception

To better understand the cultural associations with Wagner's sensuality, it is important to examine how critics and other artists aligned Wagner with the threatening sensuality as it appeared in literature and visual art. A trio of Austrians, the artist Hans Makart, the novelist Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, and the poet Robert Hamerling, proved especially influential in the Viennese press around 1870. Though their names were linked to Wagner through the common charge of "sensuality" in their works, the subtle shades of political and aesthetic coloring in their reception help illuminate the more general cultural associations that filtered into the perception of Wagner's own works. In practical terms, there were personal connections linking them to one another, and in the case of Makart, to Wagner himself.

Hans Makart (1840–1884) came to prominence around 1870 with his paintings *Die Pest in Florenz* (*The Plague in Florence*) and *Moderne Amoretten*. His preference for dark and robust colors and historical subject matter inspired some critics to compare him to Richard Wagner. As Thomas Grey has argued, the sense of luxurious, oversaturated color and presentation has itself disappeared from modern day productions of Wagner's operas.¹⁰⁸ Though Thomas Mann later took up the comparison of Wagner and Makart, contemporary critics began discussing parallels in their style as soon as Makart rose to fame.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Grey, "Wagner and the Style Makart," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, Quebec City, November 2, 2007.

In 1871 the art historian Wilhelm Lübke penned a lengthy article comparing Hans Makart and Richard Wagner, concluding that their analogous uses of color, either in paint or in orchestral writing, had debased German art. Makart had created a sensation in 1868 with his paintings, *Die Todsünder* (The Deadly Sins), which Lübke believed to be “the unclear and wasted visions of human forms, which appear from the mind of a nervous, overstimulated [überreizten] dreamer.”¹⁰⁹ A dreamer, Lübke added, who had formed his conceptions of women from dives. Tapping into a common trope in the criticism of both Makart and Wagner, Lübke sees the use of coloristic effects as symptomatic of a sick society. Yet Lübke marvels at the virtuosity needed to create such effects; the charm of the color “is something wondrous from which the eye cannot tear itself away.”¹¹⁰ Lübke’s description attests to the magnetic attraction often attributed to both Wagner and Makart’s work, and to the unspoken dangers of being unable to control one’s reaction to art.

Makart’s reputation for sensuality and “the flesh” also helped link his works with Wagner’s. A critic in the *Breslauer Zeitung* 1880 pointed out that Makart often painted the female form, but, as evidenced in his painting *Die Fünf Sinne* (The Five Senses), he “gives little or no emphasis to the face,” which produced generic female figures that failed to charm.¹¹¹ In the following year, the satirical Viennese newspaper *Kikeriki*

¹⁰⁹ “die unklaren und wüsten Traumbilder menschlicher Gestalten, welche aus dem Gehirn eines nervös überreizten Träumers auftauchen. Und zwar eines Träumers, der seine Anschauungen weiblicher Schönheit in Localen wie Mabile, Closerie des Lilas, in Spielhöllen wie Baden-Baden und Homburg [sic?], oder vielmehr in den entsprechenden Instituten Wiens ausschliesslich gewonnen hat.” Lübke, “Hans Makart und Richard Wagner,” *Im neuen Reich* 1 (1871), 18.

¹¹⁰ “Aber dieser Farbenreiz an sich ist etwas Wundersames, dem kein Auge sich wird entziehen können, dessen Netzhaut irgend empfänglich ist für coloristische Gesamtstimmung.” Ibid.

produced a cartoon comparing Makart and the Hungarian painter Mihály Zichy, caricaturing Makart as an artist who “loves the flesh.”¹¹² Likewise, Wagner’s association with the sensual and feminine, established before Makart’s arrival on the arts scene, helped spur comparisons through the 1870s and 1880s.

W. Otto responded to Lübke’s feuilleton that equated Wagner and Makart in an article published for the *Neue Zeitschrift* in 1871. He complained that Wagner was suddenly considered one of those artists “who have only roughly sensual intentions and want no more than to work upon the external senses with all the means of glamorous virtuosity,” simply because he had occasion in his works to depict the love of Tannhäuser and Venus, or Siegmund and Sieglinde. Lübke, he claims, wishes to destroy the respect for Wagner and deny the ideality of his works by calling him “nothing more than a musical Makart.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ “Dem berühmten Maler des Einzugs Karls V. und der Catharina Cornaro kommt es lediglich auf die Schönheit der Formen an, auf den Ausdruck und den Charakter des Gesichts legt er wenig oder gar kein Gewicht. Darum sind es immer dieselben Frauen, denene wir bei ihm begegnen, dieselben schönen Körper und die nämlichen gleichgiltigen, ausdrucks- und charakterlosen Gesichter.” “Makart, Die Fünf Sinne,” *Breslauer Zeitung*, 9 July (1880).

¹¹² *Kikeriki*, January 2, 1881.

¹¹³ “Weil E. Wagner im “Tannhäuser” einer aufregendern Schilderung des Venusberges ec (als Contrast der reinen erlösenden Liebe des Weibes gegenüber nothwendig bedarf), weil er in der “Walküre”, streng an die Nieblungensage sich haltend, zwischen zwei von Göttern abstammenden Wesen ein Liebesverhältniss schildert, welches bei gewöhnlichen Sterblichen dagegen in Blutschande ausarten würde etc., weil er die ganze Farbenpracht moderner Mittle sich dienstbar macht, um seine tief ethischen Grundgedanken mit überzeugendster Macht dem wie in eine neue Wunderwelt versetzten Hörer zu insinuiren, darum soll er zu jener Kategorie von Künstlern gehören, welche nur grob sinnliche Intentionen haben und Nichts beabsichtigen, als mit allen Mitteln glanzvollster Virtuosität lediglich auf die äussere Sinnlichkeit zu wirken, -- und flugs kommt ein schaftblickender Kunstphilosoph, der ihn mit einem wirklich hauptsächlich nur nach solchen Zielen strebenden Maler in eine Parallele zwingt, welche doch unleugebar den Zweck hat, die hoeh Verehrung und Achung, welche sich Wagner durch die Idealität seiner Schöpfungen errungen, mit einem Federstricke zu vernichten, und zwar durch die grosse Entdeckung: Richard Wagner sei ja weiter Nichts als ein musikalischer Makart!” W. Otto, “Hans Makart und Richard Wagner. Eine Entgegnung auf den gleichamigen Artikel von W. Lübke in ‘Im neuen Reich,’” *NZfM* 67 (1871), 337.

Otto defends Wagner by drawing stark contrasts between him and the painter. Makart's use of color is only superficial and his use of sensuality in painting is the main goal, intended merely to titillate the viewer. Wagner, on the other hand only depicts such sensual scenes as that of Venusberg in order to make a distinction with the true, ideal love of Elsa and Tannhäuser. Again and again he mentions Wagner's "ideal" and the "moral background" of his works.¹¹⁴ In short, he, like many of Wagner's supporters, simply denies the charges of immorality and undue sensuality in the composer's works.

Beyond straightforward comparisons, the rhetoric that critics applied to Makart resonates more generally with that appearing in music journals in discussions of Wagner. As the debate between Lübke and Otto demonstrates, common threads in the reception of both artists included sensuality, women, sickness, overstimulation of the senses, and the irresistible attraction of their art. Makart is important and relevant to cultural perceptions of Wagner because people who may not necessarily have witnessed a Wagner opera may have seen a Makart painting (or a reproduction or parody thereof) and thus formed an association visually, basing their opinions of Wagner with only what they knew of Makart.

Even if critics disagreed with the perception of Makart as morally suspect, their reviews inevitably turned to the subject of morality in art. Typical opinion about the mission of art found representation in the Viennese journal *Blätter für Theater, Musik und Kunst* in 1870. The critic Ferdinand Bender wrote, "The measure of common weal corresponds more and more to the high grade of spiritual and moral development of a

¹¹⁴ "...nämlich jener tiefen sittlichen Hintergrund, in Folge dessen wir das Ideal der Gegenwart in ihnen verkörpert weiderfinden. Oder ist Tannhäuser nicht der Träger einer hohen, herrlichen Idee?" Ibid.

people.”¹¹⁵ Makart did not appear in the group of artists whom Bender considered good, and indeed, the most eminent artists he thought were “so one-sidedly romantic, that they are far distanced from the spirit of the times and stay more or less in the middle ages.”¹¹⁶

One critic from Munich complained that Makart’s painting *Die Pest in Florenz* caused “the temple guardians of morals [to] raise their voices and cry sacrilege!”¹¹⁷ He continued,

I usually find it questionable to bring morality into art criticism because there would be no end to it—for example, Coreggio’s Danaë and Leda among others of this genre would risk a critical examination from the Puritans. Morality in art is entirely synonymous with beauty. Just as ugliness cannot be legitimized even through the most pious tendency, so true beauty needs no legitimization from the censure-bureau of morality.¹¹⁸

In the end, he concluded that Makart had committed crimes against beauty, thus implicating him as immoral despite his earlier rejection of moral criticism. Such formulations of beauty and morality were not uncommon in the music criticism of the

¹¹⁵ “Das Mass des allgemeinen Wohles entspricht stets dem jeweiligen Höhegrade der geistigen und sittlichen Entwicklung eines Volkes.” *Blätter für Theater, Musik und Kunst* 16 (1870), 387.

¹¹⁶ “Wohl aber stellt sich die überaus befruchtende Erscheinung heraus, dass die eminentesten Talente, wie Cornelius und Rethel, sowie jene respectablen Schnorr, Schwind und Kaulbach, etc, der Gegenwart und ihren grossen Zielen so fernestehen, so so einseitige Romantiker sind, dass sie weit entfernt der geistige Ausdruck ihrer Zeit zu sein, mehr oder minder fest im Mittelalter stecken.” Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “...dagegen erhoben, die Tempelwächter der Moral ihre Stimmen und riefen sacrilegium!” “Noch einmal Hans Makart,” *Münchener Propyläen beilag zur Bayerischen Landeszeitung* 1 (1869), 13.

¹¹⁸ “...nicht etwa aus moralischen, sondern aus rein ästhetischen Gründen...Die Moral in die Kunstkritik hineinzumischen, halte ich principiell stets für bedenklich, schon weil dann kein Ende abzusehen wäre und z. B. Correggios Danaë und Leda nebst anderen dieses Genres nicht weniger eine Nagelprobe der Puritaner riskieren müssten. Die Moral in der Kunst ist durchaus synonym mit der Schönheit. Wie Unschönheit auch durch die frommste Tendenz nicht legitimirt werden kann -- (wenigstens nicht legitimirt werden sollte), so bedarf die ächte und wahre Schönheit unter keinen Umständen ein Sittenzeugniss vom Censurbureau der Moral, oder es müsste sich in jedem einzelnen Fall das satyrische Schauspiel der Phryne vor den frommen Richtern wiederholen. Was Makart betrifft, so mag er die Sünden seines Bildes gegen die Moral immerhin bereuen und verantworten, falls er einmal alt und fromm geworden sein sollte, hier handelt es sich nur um die Sünden, die er gegen den ungeschriebenen Codex des Schönen begangen hat.” Ibid.

period, and many critics often found ways to implicate Wagner's music even if they found it to be attractive.

In an essay comparing Wagner, Makart, and the Austrian poet Robert Hamerling, Louis Ehlert explained his aesthetic conditions for employing sensuality in art:

Each art is justified in portraying the sensual, but only in so far as it remains conscious of an ideal aim, and only so long as it understands how to communicate this to the audience. When the visual artist depicts the naked human body to glorify its beauty, he is completely in the right. Should the presentation of this naked body also awaken desires and not only joy in glimpsing the beautiful humanity, then we no longer have the perception of pure art, but rather of art that has forfeited its ideal aim.¹¹⁹

Here Ehlert states explicitly what most likely crossed the minds of some audience members, that the sensual artwork might appeal to too many physical senses at once. Ideal beauty was thus pure and sublime, removed from the earthly and physically arousing.

One of the more respected music critics of his day, Ehlert had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory with Mendelssohn and Schumann, and in the early 1870s he worked in Berlin at the *Schule des höheren Klavierspielers*.¹²⁰ Eduard Hanslick considered Ehlert a brilliant and “eloquent advocate of Wagner,” which may speak more

¹¹⁹ “Jede Kunst ist berechtigt, das Sinnliche darzustellen, aber nur in so weit, als sie sich dabei einer idealen Absicht bewusst belibt, und nur so lange, als sie diese dem Empfangenden mitzuteilen versteht. Wenn der bildene Künstler den nackten menschlichen Leib darstellt, um seine Schönheit zu verherrlichen, so ist er in seinem vollen Recht. Erweckt dieser nackte Leib durch seine Behandlung aber Begierden, statt nur die Freude am Anblick des schön Menschlichen zu erregen, so haben wir nicht mehr die Empfindung reiner, sondern ihrer idealen Absicht verlustig gegangener Kunst.” Louis Ehlert, “Wagner, Makart, Hamerling, Eine Parallel,” in *Aus der Tonwelt* (Berlin: B. Behr's Buchhandlung, 1877), 116–7.

¹²⁰ Robert Eitner, “Ehlert,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 48 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1904), 283.

to Hanslick's anti-Wagnerism than to Ehlert's support.¹²¹ Hanslick had based his opinion on Ehlert's review of the Weimar premiere of *Tristan und Isolde*, and he had not seen Ehlert's review of the *Ring* or the essay comparing Wagner to Hamerling and Makart.¹²² Certainly Ehlert's analysis of Wagner demonstrated an impartiality, respect, and depth of engagement that often was lacking in reviews. On the other hand, his essay also helped perpetuate notions of Wagner as threatening with its numerous stereotypical rhetorical flourishes that could be interpreted as negative or positive judgments.

Ehlert argued that Makart's sensuality derived from the "wildest naturalism," while Wagner and Hamerling were "thinkers."¹²³ Makart's sensually raw paintings contrasted with the "transcendentally sensual realm in Wagner and Hamerling."¹²⁴ Ehlert felt that Wagner had more in common with Hamerling than Makart; however, much of his essay contained common themes in Wagner reception, whether in comparisons to Makart or other artists:

Wagner's talent, musically depicting the passion of love, leads through an extreme tendency for voluptuousness to an atmosphere in which the sensual resorts to exaggerated means in order for it to retain an artistic expression.¹²⁵

¹²¹ "Ein beredter Anwalt Wagner's, der geistvolle Louis Ehlert...." Eduard Hanslick, "Richard Wagner's Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth. III Die Musik," *Neue Freie Presse*, 20 August (1876).

¹²² Both of these essays appear in *Aus der Tonwelt* (1877).

¹²³ "Während Makart, von wildesten Naturalismus ausgehen, bis zur Grenze des Gedankens kaum vordringt, sind Wagner und Hamerling Denker." Ehlert, *Aus der Tonwelt*, 108.

¹²⁴ "In einer so materialistischen Zeit wird sie entweder sinnliche roh wie auf den ersten Bildern Makarts und in den Offenbachianen, oder sie überspannt sich zu übersinnlich sinnlichem Freierthum wie bei Wagner und Hamerling." Ibid.

¹²⁵ "Wagners Talent, die Leidenschaft der Liebe musikalische zu schildern, wird durch eine zu ausgesprochene Neigung für das Üppige leicht in eine Atmosphäre hinübergeleitet, in welcher das Sinnliche, um überhaupt noch einen künstlerischen Ausdruck zuzulassen, zu übertriebenen Mitteln greift." Ehlert, *Aus der Tonwelt*, 116–17.

Echoing Lübke, he writes of Wagner and Hamerling: “Their handling of passion always has an element of virtuosity, and the virtuosity involves an excess that benefits the artist, not the art.”¹²⁶ This betrays a paradox in the reception of these artists because it goes against the commonly cited power of the artwork itself to draw in the viewer/listener and produce reactions in them, by focusing their attention on the creator of the work. Indeed, earlier in his essay Ehlert points out that the character of Tannhäuser can be seen as a self portrait of Wagner. Many critics sensed Richard Wagner’s own magical spell, thinly veiled in his works; the showiness and effects intended to draw in the audience often made viewers more aware of the man behind the green curtain.

The word *sinnlich* thus came to represent two closely related concepts: the sensuous and the sensual. The sensual had become culturally associated with the body, flesh, sexuality, lurid color, oversaturation, overstimulation; indeed, it was almost synonymous with these terms by the 1870s. Makart’s association with Wagner stemmed from the allure of his colorful figures and the analogous use of coloristic orchestration in Wagner’s operas, the implication being that the sexual allure of Makart’s naked female figures translates aurally into seductive harmonies and instrumental effects. Wagner’s original claim that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a total artistic expression would appeal to the total human being continued to resonate in the critical realm. Ironically, the critics often created a dichotomy between the art of Makart and the music of Wagner, thereby ignoring the visual aspects of staging in Wagner’s operas themselves; it raises the

¹²⁶ “Ihre Behandlung der Leidenschaft hat immer etwas Virtuoses, und das Virtuose schliesst einen Ueberschuss ein, der nicht dem Dargestellten, sondern dem Darsteller zu Gute kommt.” Ehlert, *Aus der Tonwelt*, 114–15.

question of whether such art critics as Lübke had even attended Wagner operas, or whether they were basing their opinions on concert performances or simply rumors.

For a brief time Wagner and Makart were both living in Munich, where Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* and Makart's *Die Pest in Florenz* were first seen by the public. Later, Wagner moved in the same circles as Makart during his visits to Vienna, but, though he enjoyed Makart's art, he did not always appreciate the comparisons between himself and the artist. Beyond the articles and reviews that explicitly connected the two, reviews of Wagner also alluded to coloration and dangerous sensuality in the same way that critics discussed Makart.

With demonic magic the exotic splendor of colors in the *Nibelungen Ring* and the enchanting fragrance of the orchestra engulfs us. But like Tannhäuser in the Venusberg, we soon long from the depths of our heart for the familiar sounds of the Earth's bells and for the melodic blessing of our old music.¹²⁷

Hanslick here draws some interesting delineations: the exoticness of the sound and even the metaphorical smell of Wagner's world contrast with the familiar but pleasant sounds of the earth. He includes typical rhetoric depicting Wagner as some sort of immoral force: demonic magic, enchanting smells that surround and engulf the audience. The vocabulary also reinforces the notion of Wagner as exotic temptation, a new spin on an old trope in Western European history. As Linda Phyllis Austern and others have argued, the dichotomy between Western "Self" and exotic Eastern "Other" had already long been prefigured in the dichotomy of masculine and feminine; unsurprisingly, the feminine

¹²⁷ "Mit dämonischem Zauber umfängt uns die fremdartige Farbenpracht, der berückende Duft des Orchesters im "Nibelungenring." Aber wie Tannhäuser im Venusberge nach den liebgewohnten Glockenklängen der Erde, so sehnen wir uns bald aus teifstem Herzen nach dem melodischen Segen unserer alten Musik." Eduard Hanslick, "Das Bühnenfestspiel in Bayreuth," *Neue Freie Presse*, 20 August (1876).

often merged with the exotic to form a double threat to masculine normativity.¹²⁸ At the same time, the use of orchestral coloration in Wagner not only lent an exotic and seductive air, it also, according to Hanslick, hid a weakness in musical construction.

And thus, it is coloration [*Colorit*], in the broadest sense, that hides the weakness of design [*Zeichnung*] in Wagner's newest work and assumes an unprecedented level of independence. The analogy of Wagner the musician to the painter Makart or the poet Hamerling is manifest. The sensual enchantment of this music exerts a similarly direct and powerful stimulation on the nerves of its audience, above all, the feminine portion.¹²⁹

The idea that the enchanting power of the music worked more strongly on the feminine portion of the audience was not an opinion unique to Hanslick. As will be seen in Chapter Four, the feminization of Wagner's music also reinforced the perception that women themselves were more susceptible to it. Hanslick's comment here might be seen as further evidence that he believed submitting to the music's physiological effects was more characteristic of women, and thus doubly dangerous.

The allure of color and for luxuriousness could also be linked to Wagner based on his own tastes for silks, satins, and fineries in general. In Vienna in 1877 the parodist Daniel Spitzer published, with running commentary, a series of Wagner's letters to his milliner Bertha Goldwag, written mostly in 1867 and later auctioned in Vienna. Spitzer's straight-faced commentary gives context to the letters and offers reading cues; for example:

¹²⁸ See *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

¹²⁹ "So ist es das Colorit im weitesten Sinne, das in Wagner's neuestem Werke die dürftige Zeichnung verdeckt und eine unerhörte Selbstständigkeit usurpiert. Die Analogie des Musikers Wagner mit dem Maler Makart und dem Dichter Hamerling liegt auf der Hand. Durch ihren sinnlich berückenden Zauber wirkt diese Musik als director Nervenreiz so mächtig auf das grosse Publicum, das weibliche zumal." Eduard Hanslick, *Musikalische Stationen*, in *Die moderne Oper*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für deutsche Literatur, 1885), 249. Trans. Thomas Grey, cited in AMS paper, "Wagner and Makart."

If the Master's last letter demonstrated him to be a sketch artist, the following letter gives us the opportunity to wonder at his sense of colors. His letters constantly develop a greater realm of color. In this same letter we find all colors mentioned from pale pink to dark green, from innocent white to smoldering crimson. I have recommended the designation "dressing gown Rafael" to the Wagnerians; perhaps after reading through the next letter, they will dub him the "dressing gown Tintoretto."¹³⁰

Spitzer's comparison avoids the obvious artist to whom Wagner had already been compared numerous times. Therein lies the irony, for Spitzer elevates Wagner to the undisputed levels of a Rafael or Tintoretto, rather than the controversial contemporary Makart, whom some Wagner fans, such as Louise Otto-Peters, found crass.

But Spitzer concludes this article with a damning critique. After demonstrating Wagner's taste for color, he then concludes that such tastes are feminine. Indeed, he uses Wagner's own line from *Walküre* to make his point, thereby bringing to the foreground what Nattiez has identified as an androgynous aesthetic in Wagner.¹³¹ However, Spitzer finds no sympathy with such androgyny:

I think the reader, after having perused these letters, will find suitable the motto that I have given them: How he resembles the woman! ["Wie gleicht er dem Weibe!"] Hunding, Sieglinda's husband, cries this in *Walküre* after he has seen the features of his guest Siegmund, and he continues, "The glistening worm also glitters in his eye." When one reads these letters to a milliner, when one sees the passionate interest with which finery is discussed, and when one learns of the great sums that disappeared for the glistening Atlas, and yet does not read the signature, one must believe it is the letter of a woman.¹³²

¹³⁰ "Wenn wir dem letzten Briefe den Meisters als grossen Zeichner bewundert haben, so geben uns die folgenden Briefe Gelegenheit, über den Farbensinn desselben zu staunen. Seien Briefe entwickeln einen immer gröseren Farbenreichtum. Wir finden in denselben alle Farben vom blassen Rosa bis zum dunklen Grün, vom unschuldsvollen Weiss bis zu glühenden Carmoisin erwähnt. Ich habe den Wagnerianern die Bezeichnung Schlafrock-Rafael für ihn vorgeschlagen; vielleicht ziehen sie es nach Durchlesung dieser ferneren Briefe vor, ihn den Schlafrock-Tintoretto zu nennen." Daniel Spitzer, "Briefe Richard Wagner's an eine Putzmacherin," *Neue Freie Presse*, 17 June (1877).

¹³¹ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne*.

¹³² "Ich glaube, der Leser wird, nachdem er diese Briefe gelesen, das Motto gerechtfertigt finden, das ich denselben mitgegeben habe: "Wie gleicht er dem Weibe!" Hunding, der Mann Sieglindens, ruft dies in der

Spitzer then cites a poem Wagner has written for the German troops in 1871 entitled “To the German Army Before Paris.”¹³³ The cited verse concludes “Germany breeds only men for the world.” Spitzer, however, argues, “The German army of heroes would never have achieved its immortal victory if the men Germany “breeds” were as effeminate as he who sang their praises.”¹³⁴ This is one of the more explicit criticisms of Wagner-as-effeminate, and it foreshadows the association between Wagner and homosexuals that developed in the 1890s. It links Wagner’s taste for finery and color to women; because he was already associated with Makart and the sensuality of fleshly painting, now there was a link between Wagner’s sexuality and the color, and the implicit threat that in listening to Wagner one might become like him and his deviant and unhealthy effeminacy.

In the early 1870s, Wagner’s work had been defended by another author who was himself infamous for portraying deviant sexuality in his works. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836–1895) made his living as a history professor at the university in Graz while he published novellas and poems. His notoriety came in 1870 with the publication

“Walküre”, nachdem er die Züge seines Gastes Siegmund gemessen, und fährt fort: “Der gleissende Wurm glänzt auch ihm aus dem Auge.” Wenn man diese an eine Modistin gerichteten Briefe liest, wenn man sieht, wie in denselben ausschliesslich und mit dem lebhaftesten Interesse vom Putz gesprochen wird, und wen man von den grossen Summen erfährt, die für gleissenden Atlas verschwendet werden, man müsste glauben, läse man nicht die Unterschrift eines Mannes, es seien die Briefe eines Weibes. “ Ibid.

¹³³ See *Richard Wagner’s Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 9 (Leipzig, C.F.W. Siegel’s Musikalienhandlung, 1900), 1–2.

¹³⁴ Wagner leitet den IX. Band seiner “gesammelten Schriften und Dichtungen” mit einem Gedichte ein, dass er “An das deutsche Heer vor Paris” im Januar 1871 gerichtet hat. Es heisst darin:
 Es rafft im Krampf
 zu wildem Kampf
 sich auf des eitlen Wahns Bekenner:
 der Welt doch züchtet Deutschland nur noch Männer.
 Die deutsche Heldenarmee hätte ihre unsterblichen Siege nie errungen, wenn die Männer, die Deutschland “züchtet”, so verweichlicht gewesen wäre, wie Jener, der sie besungen.” Ibid.

of two novels *Die geschiedene Frau* (The Divorced Woman) and *Venus im Pelz* (Venus in Furs), and his place in history was cemented when sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing named masochism after him in 1890.¹³⁵ Sacher-Masoch counted himself along with Wagner and Makart as one of the leading artists who pushed art to its limits and challenged stereotypical notions of morality.

In his two books published in 1870, *The Divorced Woman* and the more famous *Venus in Furs*, Sacher-Masoch presented two stories that dealt explicitly with sex and which contained strong, even cruel (*grausam*) female main characters, usually widowed. The rather explicit scenes of sexual masochism appalled many critics and caused Sacher-Masoch to offer many justifications for his work. In the preface to *The Divorced Woman*, Sacher-Masoch explains a new type of art, seen in literary works from Germany, France, and Russia, which elevates the sensual and natural and “lays bare the wounds of humanity” so that social progress might be achieved from this.¹³⁶ Among the authors he mentions are Russians Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, and his colleague at the University of Graz, Robert Hamerling. “Never forget,” he reminds the reader, “that art is not created for boys and girls.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ See Richard v. Krafft-Ebing, *Neue Forschungen auf dem Gebiete der Psychopathia sexualis: Eine medicinisch-psychologische Studie* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1890).

¹³⁶ “Weisen Sie noch auf Grotzger’s *Thal der Thränen*, Hamerling’s *Ahasver* und *König von Sion*, Saar’s *Papst Hildebrand* und *Inozens* in Deutschland, auf Augier und Chartriant in Frankreich, auf Turgenjew, Tschernischewski und Tolstoi in Russland hin, und Sie haben die ersten Boten einer neuen Kunst genannt, einer Kunst, die nicht gleich der Antiken in Schönheit und Heiterkeit, in der Verklärung der Sinnlichkeit und der Natur, sondern in der Erhebung über dieselbe ihre Aufgabe sieht. Um zu heilen, muss man über vorerst die Wunde blosslegen, um dem Geiste den Sieg zu verschaffen, die sinnliche Natur in ihrer vollen Dämonie entfalten.” Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Die geschiedene Frau*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Paul Kormann, 1870), vii.

¹³⁷ “Vergessen Sie auch nie, dass die Kunst nicht für Knaben und Pensionsmädchen schafft...” Ibid.

Sacher-Masoch's reception of Wagner as a kindred artistic spirit most likely contributed to a sense that the art of the future presented a threat to traditional moral values. Already in 1870, the critic Karl von Thaler wrote a review of Masoch in the *Neue Freie Presse*, concluding, "He is not only sick, but also dangerous... He does not describe feelings, he dissects them."¹³⁸ Thaler hoped his review would offer readers a "warning" against Sacher-Masoch, not on moral grounds, for "I do not...demand that art be moral," but rather on political and literary grounds.¹³⁹ Thaler proceeds, however, to describe as "sick" the current tendency toward sensuality in the arts. "In all our newest literature and art there runs a deeply sensual, salacious trend, and the old natural gods awaken from a two-thousand-year slumber."¹⁴⁰ On that point, Thaler distinguishes the modern sensuality from the Hellenistic appreciation of nakedness, thus aligning himself with the conservative Hellenists who admired Greek sculpture for its perfection of proportion and ideal beauty.

His main complaint lies with the nihilism he sees in Masoch, and certainly Masoch had considered himself part of the same general artistic movement as Turgenev. Thaler complained that the nihilists, "Want to rejuvenate the world by destroying culture and throwing humanity back into the chaos of pre-historic times. For them the most

¹³⁸ "Er ist nicht nur krank, sondern auch gefährlich...Er schildert nicht Gefühle, er secirt sie." Karl von Thaler, Nihilismus in Deutschland, *Neue Freie Presse*, 28 June (1870), 1.

¹³⁹ "Moralisch sind Sacher's Erzählungen allerdings nicht, sondern das Gegenteil; aber ich gehöre nicht zu Jenen, die von einem Kunstwerke verlangen, dass es moralisch sei." Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ "Wol geht durch unsere ganze neueste Literatur und Kunst ein tief sinnlicher, wollüstiger Zug, und die alten Naturgötter erwachen aus zweitausendjährigem Schlafe." Ibid.

raging communists of the west are people who cling to the old and the conventional.”¹⁴¹ Thaler, a Viennese journalist who had studied philosophy in Heidelberg and Bonn, surely noted the trend among the young Austrian radicals who espoused a philosophy of emotional activism in response to abstract intellectualism.¹⁴² The artistic movement intertwined with the political, and likewise, political overtones resonated in the reception of many artists. Unsurprising, then, that some Viennese critics like Thaler could argue that Wagner supported socialists and nihilists.¹⁴³

The connection to Russian nihilism becomes clear when examining Masoch’s reception of Turgenev. Turgenev had become more popular in German-speaking lands by the early 1870s. In the preface to his 1872 book *Die Russische Literatur und Iwan Turgeniew (Russian Literature and Ivan Turgenev)*, Otto Glagau justified his work with the sudden rise in popularity of Turgenev; indeed, he considered the Germans to have welcomed Turgenev “with open arms.”¹⁴⁴ Glagau also counted Leopold von Sacher-Masoch among the followers of Turgenev, arguing, however, that Sacher-Masoch lacked

¹⁴¹ “Sie wollen die Welt verjüngen, indem sie die Cultur zu vernichten und die Menschheit in die Wildheit der Urzeiten zurückzuwerfen suchen. Für sie sind die wüthendsten Communisten des Westens Leute, die am Alten und Hergebrachten hängen.” Ibid.

¹⁴² “Karl von Thaler geb 1836 in Wien, kam früh nach Tirol, stud. seit 1854 in Innsbruck und Heidelberg klassische und orientalische Philosophie, besonders aber widmete er sich germanistischen Studien, die er in Bonn fortsetzte. Im Jahre 1860 gieng er nach Wien, wo er seitdem der journalistischen Thätigkeit hingeben hat.” *Unsere Zeit: Deutsche Revue der Gegenwart*, vol. 11 (Leipzig: F.G. Brockhaus, 1875), 933. For more, see William McGrath, *Dionysian Art and Populist Politics in Austria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

¹⁴³ “So haben wir im Socialismus die Gemeinschaft des Bodens, der Güter und die Auflösung der staatlichen, im “Kunstwek der Zukunft” die Urschleim. Das Genie äussert sich in solchen Momenten in ersten Linie als zerstörende Kraft, einerlie ob auf künstlerlichem religiösem, oder auf socialem und politischem Gebiete, und es liegt in der Natur der Sache, dass dieser Geist der Negation gleichzeitig in verschiedenen Sphären der menschlichen Thätigkiet aufzutreten pfllegt.” Mohr, *Das Gründerthum in der Musik* (1872), 19.

¹⁴⁴ See Otto Glagau, *Die Russische Literatur und Iwan Turgeniew* (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1872), 174.

the insight of his Russian model.¹⁴⁵ His summary of Sacher-Masoch echoes that of the general condemnation of the author:

Sacher-Masoch's 'productive sensuality' is fleshy lewdness, wanton lust, as in *Venus im Pelz*; or desire contrary to the sexes and to nature, as in "Liebe des Plato." His body color [*Leibfarbe*] is red, blood red and fire-red, in which he bathes heaven and earth, nature and mankind. Nature in his hands is intoxicated, and love leads him to celebrate orgies, to perform true bordello-scenes.¹⁴⁶

Glagau's words help to reinforce the connection between lurid color and unhealthy sensuality, seen in contemporary comparisons of Wagner and Makart.

In the furor caused by the republication of Wagner's "Das Judenthum in der Musik" in 1869, one critic, who identified himself as a "blonde-haired North German," argued that the so-called "Jew-controlled press" had helped prevent the nihilistic revolutionaries from gaining a strong foothold in German culture. On the other hand, in Russia "where they celebrate their sweetest triumph, unhindered by the Jewish press," the "musicians and politicians of the future enjoy their new Olympian games in the holy Kremlin amid the rousing excitement of drunken Moscovites."¹⁴⁷ Likewise, the elements found in the "music of the future," i.e., "the raw power, the raw sensuality are

¹⁴⁵ Glagau, 170.

¹⁴⁶ "Sacher-Masoch's 'produktive Sinnlichkeit' ist fleischliche Lüsternheit; geile ekle Wollust, wie in 'Venus im Pelz'; oder gar natur- und geschlechtswidrige Gellüste win in 'Liebe des Plato.' Seine Leibfarbe ist Roth, Blut- und Feuerroth, in die er die Erde und Himmel, Natur und Menschen taucht. Die Natur ist bei ihm wie betrunken; und die Liebe lässt er Orgien feiern, ja, wahre Bordello-Scenen aufführen." Glagau, 172–73.

¹⁴⁷ "Sie keine durchschlagenden Erfolge gehabt, schon lange mehr kein Volk in des Wortes edler Bedeutung haben. In Russland, wo Sie Ihre süssesten, von keiner Judenpresse begeisterten Triumphe gefeiert, liegt für uns verwarhloste Culturmenschen das Ferment, welches bei der nächsten Invasion aus dem von Ihnen mit so glänzendem Aufwande von Gerüchen und Würmern geschilderten verwesenden Culturleichnam den Geschmack für Ihre Musik als berauschesendes Währungsproduct zeitigen wird. So gestaltet denn Ihre hehre Prophetie vor meinen entzückten Augen ein erhabenes Bild. Zukunftsmusiker und Zukunftspolitiker feiern im heiligen Kreml ihre neuolympischen Spiele unter der erwärmenden Begeisterung trunkener Moskowiten." *Kölnische Zeitung*, 23 March (1869).

inspirational only for Moscovite imaginations.”¹⁴⁸ Once again, the sensuality and political instability of a foreign threat are united in this critique. Wagner the revolutionary becomes Wagner the Russian nihilist, an associated supported in part by Wagner’s own revolutionary interactions with Mikhail Bakunin in Dresden.¹⁴⁹

Sacher-Masoch saw himself as part of this artistic movement and Thaler would surely have seen his defense of Turgenev in the preface to *Die geschiedene Frau*; perhaps Thaler and others also noticed the reference to Richard Wagner in *Venus im Pelz*.¹⁵⁰ Sacher-Masoch aligned himself explicitly with Makart and Wagner, both of whom, he said “have challenged the old art-rules and half vanquished moral laws to which the judges of art fearfully cling...”¹⁵¹ Masoch discussed his own aesthetic philosophy in more detail in his 1873 *Über den Werth der Kritik*. There, he argues that morality and aesthetics are inexplicably linked and both constantly evolving; the literature of yesteryear that first appeared immoral now forms part of the accepted canon. Both Klopstock and Goethe experienced this negative reception, and “now a similar farce is

¹⁴⁸ “Die rohe Kraft, die rohe Sinnlichkeit sind nur noch befruchtenden Gestalten für moskowitzische Phantasieen.” *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ For more on nihilism in this period, see Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism Before Nietzsche* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁰ “Ich sass an Wanda’s Seite, und sie plauderte auf das Liebenswertigste und Geistreichste mit mir, wie mit einem guten Freunde, über Italien, über Pisemski’s neuen Roman und Wagnerische Musik.” Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, “Venus im Pelz,” in *Das Vermächtniss Kains*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Verlag der J.G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung, 1870), 245.

¹⁵¹ “Ein ähnliches Schauspiel bietet sich uns in unseren Tagen bei zwei Künstlern ersten Ranges auf anderen Gebieten dar. Ich meine den Maler Makart und den Tondichter Richard Wagner. Beide haben die sich an alternde Kunstregeln und halb überwundene moralische Gesetze ängstlich anklammernden Kunstrichter doppelt herausgefordert, zuerst durch Promulgierung neuer ästhetischer Gesetze ihrer Kunst und eine neue Form derselben, dann durch einen neuen sittlichen also in den Augen der ästhetischen Ultramontanen, unsittlichen Inhalt.” Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Über den Werth der Kritik* (Leipzig: Ernst Julius Günther, 1873), 29.

unfolding in our times with two artists of the highest rank. I mean the painter Hans Makart and the composer Richard Wagner.”¹⁵² These two, he argues, have promulgated new forms and aesthetic laws in their works, as well as “new moral content, which, in the eyes of the aesthetic ultramontanes, is immoral.”¹⁵³ Masoch argues that art does have a moral mission, but that it should portray “the chaos of human stupidity, vices and passions,” so that people can learn from it.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the ending of his *Venus im Pelz* sees the rather moralistic conclusion of narrator Severin, who claims that he has learned from his follies and that society should take measures to equalize educational opportunities for women. He explains

that woman, as nature has created her and as man is currently educating her, is his enemy. She can only be his slave or his despot, but never his companion. This she can become only when she has the same rights as he, and is his equal in education and work.¹⁵⁵

He argues—and it is repeated in Sacher-Masoch’s works over and over—that modern society has made it impossible for men and women to enjoy equal companionship. While he agrees with the contemporary notion that woman’s natural associations are with

¹⁵² “Ein ähnliches Schauspiel bietet sich uns in unseren Tagen bei zwei Künstlern ersten Ranges auf anderen Gebieten dar. Ich meiner den Maler Makart und den Tondichter Richard Wagner.” Sacher-Masoch, *Kritik*, 29.

¹⁵³ “Beide haben die sich an alternde Kunstregeln und halb überwundene moralische Gesetze ängstlich anklammernden Kunstrichter doppelt herausgefordert, zuerst durch Promulgierung neuer ästhetischer Gesetze ihrer Kunst und eine neue Form derselben, dann durch einen neuen sittlichen also in den Augen der ästhetischen Ultramontanen, unsittlichen Inhalt.” *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ “Der Idealismus der Kunst darf nie an den Objekten derselben zu Tage treten, nicht der Mensch, sein inneres und äusseres Leben dürfen idealisirt werden, sondern über dem Chaos menschlicher Thorheiten, Laster und Leidenschaften muss uns der Dichter das ewige Licht der Wahrheit entzünden, das uns den Weg zeigt, nach vorwärts.” Sacher-Masoch, *Kritik*, 31.

¹⁵⁵ “Dass das Weib, wie es die Natur geschaffen und wie es der Mann gegenwärtig heranzieht, sein Feind ist und nur seine Sklavin oder seine Despotin sein kann, nie aber seine Gefährtin. Dies wird sie erst dann sein können, wenn sie ihm gleich steht an Rechten, wenn sie ihm ebenbürtig ist durch Bildung und Arbeit.” Sacher-Masoch, “*Venus im Pelz*,” 367.

sensuality and nature, he complains that society's limiting of women to the domestic sphere has ruined any kind of equal relationship. The solution is to elevate women through *Bildung* and work (*Arbeit*). This resonates with the platform of the contemporary women's movement as led by Louise Otto, herself an outspoken advocate of Wagner. As will be seen in Chapter Four, the support of Wagner from certain women's rights activists also played a role in the reception of Wagner's works as threatening to societal expectations of sex and gender roles.

At the height of his notoriety and the beginning of the Bayreuth controversy, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch counted himself among the artists whose work was at the center of a fierce debate over morality in art. By grouping himself with Makart and Wagner, he only fanned the flames of a comparison that had been proposed in the Vienna press in 1870, to which many Wagner supporters objected, as seen in Otto's article in the *NZfM* 1871. Now those critics who already saw Makart and Wagner as a dangerous duo could add the author of *Venus im Pelz* to their watch-list of immoral artists who portrayed excess sensuality and/or deviant sexuality in their works. Masoch brought the additional baggage of the Russian nihilist philosophy that some critics perceived as a threat politically as well as culturally. Wagner's critics constructed him as a threat in a number of ways, but one of the unifying threads throughout his negative reception in this period was threat of sensuality. The way in which critical rhetoric related Wagner to the luxurious coloration of Makart's painting, or the lurid sensuality depicted and defended by Sacher-Masoch, illuminates the cultural associations that formed around Wagner in the early 1870s at the height of his controversy and popularity.

Chapter Four: “Woman of the Future”: Feminist Music Criticism and the Struggle over Wagner Reception

Who will your Composer’s Society be inviting, if they don’t want women; I would be almost too dumbstruck to write anything against it...I thought that precisely because they have emerged more decisively from the “snares of time” and so forth, that musicians would have improved themselves—if one has encountered examples like Röckel or Wagner. . . This is more than pre-revolutionary, this is pre-constitutional, antediluvian!¹ - feminist Louise Otto to Franz Brendel, 1849.

One comes to such aberrations of judgment and taste when, with the pharisaical and misunderstood motto: “The music [is] no longer empty entertainment,” one makes the noble woman, Music, into an emancipated one, into a learned Blue Stocking with big colored spectacles, thus robbing her of the most genial aspects of her sex and allowing the feminine weaknesses to be fully displayed. Thanks to the creator of “Artwork of the Future” this confused concept is elevated into a system...² -anonymous critic, *Kölnische Zeitung*, 1872.

¹ “Was ladet auch den(n) Ihr Tonkünstlerverein zur Zusam(m)enkunft ein, wen(n) sie keine Damen mögen; ich wäre beinah dum(m) genug gewesen zusagend zu schreiben.—Fangen Sie nicht gleich wieder an, sich mit mir zu “campeln”—ich dachte eben weil sie durch die “Fänge der Zeit” u.s.w. etwas entschiedener auftreten, die Musiker hätten sich gebessert—wen(n) man Beispiele wie Röckel oder Wagner erlebt—wen(n) Sie freilich eben solche Folgen sehen wie die, von denen Sie mir schreiben! Das ist mehr als vormärzlich, das ist vorconstitutionell, antideluvianisch!” Louise Otto to Franz Brendel, June 6, 1849 cited in Johanna Ludwig, “Zur bisher unbekanntten Briefen von Louise Otto-Peters an Franz Brendel, Julius Schanz, Adolf Hofmeister und Robert Schumann aus den Jahren 1847 bis 1853,” in *Louise Otto-Peters Jahrbuch* I/2004, 198.

² “Zu solchen Verirrungen des Urtheils und des Geschmackes kommt man, wenn man mit dem pharisäischen und missverstandenen Motto: “Die Musik keine eitle Gefallskunst mehr!” diese edle Dame zur Emancipirten, zum gelehrten Blaustrumpfe mit grosser gefärbter Brille macht und sie der liebenswürdigsten Eigenschaften ihres Geschlechtes beraubt, wobei die weiblichen Schwächen um so fühlbarer und ohne gleiches anmuthige Relief hervortreten. Es ist das Verdienst des Schöpfers des “Kunstwerkes der Zukunft”, diese Verwirrung der Begriffe zum System erhoben und zugleich eine zweite, mit dieser der Musik zugemutheten geistigen Bedeutsamkeit im drolligen Gegensatze stehenden Verirrung angebahnt zu haben.” “Ein Musikfest der neudeutschen Schule. Gefeiert zu Kassel vom Allgemeinen Deutschen Musikverein am 27, 28, 29, 30 Juni,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, 4 July (1872).

The shockwaves generated by the women's emancipation movement could be felt even in the realm of music criticism during the later nineteenth century. These two examples, one penned by founding feminist Louise Otto—the German equivalent of Susan B. Anthony—and by an anonymous critic from the musically reactionary *Kölnische Zeitung*, are separated by over twenty years but are linked by one common point: Richard Wagner. As a cultural icon, Wagner generated more than enough shockwaves himself, but the connection of Wagner's "progressive" musical-political ideologies and the ideals of the contemporary German women's movement has received little attention from musicologists. How had musicians "improved themselves" in relation to women's rights? How did women, particularly emancipated women, come to be associated with the supposed degeneracy of Wagner's art? Answering these two questions requires a thorough analysis of the musical-critical idiom, especially of the contributions from female authors who were especially sensitive to the issues of gender roles and social expectations in their day. Ultimately, it reveals a music criticism much more involved with the contemporary politics of gender and sexuality than previously thought.

Scholars have yet to explore the associations between the German women's movement and the rhetoric of music criticism from 1848 to 1883. The "Frauenfrage," as it came to be known, provides a crucial part of the immediate context for the discussion of music during this period. Not only did German feminism and struggle for women's rights produce heated discussion, parody, and vitriolic backlash in political spheres, some proponents of this movement took an active role in music criticism, challenging the notion that women merely listened passively and succumbed more easily than men to the

seductive power of music. As seen above, the publicly active Louise Otto avidly supported the “progressive” Wagner and the “New German School,” and she published treatises to this end. This immediate connection between bourgeois feminist politics and the “Artwork of the Future” reveals the layers of meaning inherent in certain terms such as “progressive,” while offering evidence of the widespread cultural perceptions of emancipated women being somehow related to the threatening art of Wagner.

The study of Wagner reception in this period too often remains trapped in an intellectual-historical model that places Wagner in a philosophical lineage with Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. For example, Roger Scruton’s analysis of *Tristan und Isolde* explores its medieval literary and philosophical sources while situating Wagner’s reworking of these ideas in an intellectual, but not social-historical, context.³ In general scholars rely on these traditional frames of reference, preferring to cite certain contemporary critics such as Heinrich Porges and Hans von Wolzogen, whose own interests tended toward the philosophical. The proliferation of scholarship based on this approach skews the study of Wagner reception towards the composer’s own attempts to intellectualize and historicize his artwork.

The few scholars dealing with Wagner and gendered reception focus their analysis on his views specifically or on his opera characters, while incorporating generalized conclusions about the nature of masculine-feminine roles in this period. Nietzsche often appears as the lone contemporary source for the discussion of gender roles in bourgeois society; very few researchers incorporate music criticism written by

³ Roger Scruton, *Death-Devoted Heart: Sex and the Sacred in Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

women or for women.⁴ Scholars today do not agree whether Wagner's views towards women and his female characters represent a progressive attitude for his time, or whether they support a stifling bourgeois ideology that relegated women to the domestic sphere. Usually work concerning Wagner's female characters examines Wagner's own relationships with specific women, his philosophical ideals about the "eternal feminine," and his subsequent portrayals of women in his works. Catherine Clément argued famously that all opera, including Wagner's, represents the "undoing of women," in that patriarchal structures of the plot necessitates the deaths of many female characters.⁵ On the other hand, scholars posit a generally optimistic view of Wagner's female characters as redemptors of men in the collection *Das Weib der Zukunft*, as well as in Jeffrey Peter Bauer's work on women and their role in salvation. Likewise, Dieter Schickling sees an "emancipatory" tendency in the *Ring* through Wagner's inversion of expected bourgeois roles; however, many of these works are unclear in the definition of "emancipation" and lack solid historical contexts.⁶

One exception to this trend is Joseph Horowitz's *Wagner Nights*, in which a detailed analysis of Anton Seidl's Wagner festivals in 1890s New York leads him to

⁴ See, for example, Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁵ Catherine Clément, *Opera, or, the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

⁶ See Sven Friedrich, "Gibt es eine Philosophie des Weiblichen bei Wagner?" in *Das Weib der Zukunft: Frauengestalten und Frauenstimmen bei Richard Wagner*, ed. Susanne Vill (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 44–56; and Peter Jeffrey Bauer, *The Changing Concept of Salvation in the Operas of Richard Wagner*; Wort und Musik Series, Salzburger Akademische Beiträge, eds. Ulrich Müller and Franz Hundsnurscher (Salzburg: Oswald Panagl, 1994). Eva Rieger's new book cites a few contemporary women commentators, both positive and negative, though her main contribution lies in analyzing Wagner's portrayals of his female characters through music; see Eva Rieger, *Leuchtende Liebe, lachender Tod. Richard Wagners Bild der Frau im Spiegel seiner Musik* (Düsseldorf, Artemis & Winkler, 2009).

conclude that for many women, Wagnerism functioned as a type of “protofeminism,” his characters combining “aspects of Romantic sentimentality with intimations of the new modernism” and his works offering a therapeutic escape in a stifled society.⁷ We lack similar work in the realm of contemporary German female reception, despite the fact that the most visible women’s rights support of the period Louise Otto published pro-Wagnerian reviews in various sources. What little exists in relation to Wagner reception by his contemporary women supporters tends to repeat the oft-cited contemporary notion that they were especially susceptible to his music, i.e., mere passive recipients.

The most recent work concerning the perceived relation of Wagner to a socially disenfranchised group appears in a special issue of *Opera Quarterly* devoted to *Parsifal*, which explores the associations between Wagner and homosexuals.⁸ Various authors analyze sources that suggest Wagner’s Bayreuth functioned as a safe haven for gay men, that the stage dramas spoke to them especially. Necessarily, many of these sources date from the 1890s and early 1900s, which saw a growing awareness of homosexuality and more permissive attitudes towards it, the most substantial example being Hans Fuchs’s book *Wagner und die Homosexualität* (1903), in which the author argues for a gay aesthetic in many of the composer’s operas.⁹ However, the association between emancipated women and Wagner’s works had already taken hold during the 1848 revolutions, and it suggests that modes of thinking about the sensuality of Wagner and

⁷ Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 224.

⁸ See *Opera Quarterly* 22 (2006).

⁹ Fuchs argues that Wagner portrays homosexuality through some characters and their relationships to women. See Hans Fuchs, *Wagner und die Homosexualität* (Berlin: Verlag H. Barnsdorf, 1903).

the threat of challenging gender norms became an issue in music criticism well before the 1880s.

Some of the more visible feminists also supported Wagner and his works. Louise Otto, a prolific novelist and co-founder of the influential *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*, and others, such as the Berlin-based author Hedwig Dohm, took an active role in publishing on issues related to women's rights, but she also incorporated the role of music as an important force for social change. As a revolutionary in the 1848/9 uprisings, Louise Otto saw a clear connection between the "progressive" social values of the women's movement and the "progressive" musical reforms of Wagner. Furthermore, she regarded music and its institutions as a site for advancing the equal appreciation of men's and women's work. In *Neue Bahnen* ("New Paths"), the journal of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*, she encouraged her women readers to learn more about the work of Wagner and Liszt, and she praised Wagner's female characters as ideal. She provides one demonstrable link, although not the only one, between the advocates of women's rights and "progressive" music. Understanding her ideas about Wagner will help situate his works within a political context that explicitly focused on the societal roles and values of women in this period.

In addition to the widespread visibility of the movement itself, this active support of feminists for the Wagnerian aesthetic in music might help to explain both the subtle positive and negative responses to the women's movement within music criticism. As we saw in Chapter Three, Wagner presented a threat to the status quo, specifically with his increased emphasis on sensuality in his works, which critics perceived and discussed in a number of nuanced ways. However, as the threat of the women's movement also called

traditional gender roles into question, Wagnerism broadly construed could be seen as part and parcel of the same movement. Just as Louise Otto considered the call for musical progress to be related to the women's movement, so too did some conservative critics see Wagner as a homologous threat to the structure of society along with the "emancipated" woman.

Historical Background of the Women's Movement, 1848–1880

During the 1840s, when Richard Wagner incorporated Young Hegelian revolutionary ideas into his theories about music and its function, some female revolutionaries turned their attention to women's rights. Indeed, many modern scholars date the beginning of modern German feminism to the period of the 1848/9 revolutions. Forerunners in France, most famously George Sand, had paved the way in this regard, but this period saw the first flowering of German feminist agitation, which took a decidedly less radical approach. Many supporters of women's rights took their inspiration from the kindergarten movement of Friedrich Froebel, whose first kindergarten (1839) employed female instructors on the premise that women were more suited to teach because of their natural roles as mothers.¹⁰ During this period of general political agitation, women were inspired to make the case for female emancipation, demanding recognition for women's work and education, and in some cases, the right to vote. Similar to the liberal movement itself, this agitation took on many forms and involved varying degrees of inspiration from radical democratic and/or socialist agendas, but in general the movement stayed closely tied to bourgeois ideals of femininity.

¹⁰ Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 61–62.

As Richard Evans and other historians have noted, the movement lost some of its radical edge after the conservative backlash during the 1850s, with a new focus on making small gains rather than demanding sudden change.¹¹ This is true of the liberal movement in general, and musicologists have often noted in a similar vein that Wagner's own political disillusionment led him to the more pessimistic ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer. What remains clear is a general moderate trend through the 1850-60s-70s until the movement reawakened with more radical developments in the 1890s.¹² Keeping this in mind, we can try to understand how they attempted to forge ahead in their ideals within the context of bourgeois politics and society.¹³

Just as the liberal movement in general was ill-defined, so were feminist efforts sporadic and based in certain metropolitan locations. As many laws and ordinances depended on local governing bodies, women's ability to join in political organizations depended on region. Consequently, much of the support for women's rights appeared in print through newspapers, pamphlets, novels, short stories, and plays. In this way, the "movement" formed a cross-regional network with more emphasis on printed communication and the discourse rather than being based in one physical location. The

¹¹ See Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894–1933* (London: Sage Publications, 1976).

¹² See Evans.

¹³ For this methodology applied to liberalism in general, see James Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) and Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894–1933*.

main actors in the movement often corresponded with each other, and the press formed a more public layer of support through the publications of both women and men.¹⁴

Due to this lack of an organized movement, scholars of women's history often focus their research on one particular city center, with Hamburg, Bremen, Hannover often explored as early locuses of the women's emancipation movement. After mid-century Berlin and Leipzig came to the forefront with the founding of two important women's organizations: in Berlin the Lette Society (1866) dedicated to helping women advance professionally, and in Leipzig the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein* (ADF, 1865).

Historians consider the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein* to be the first official organization in the history of the German women's movement. On October 17, 1865 a group of politically active women and men in Leipzig founded the society during the *Gesamtdeutsche Frauenkonferenz*. The declaration of its goals included "the liberation of feminine work, the construction of industry-exhibitions for female workers, the founding of industry-schools for girls... and finally also the cultivation of higher scientific education for suitable means..."¹⁵ While these goals constituted the most important part of the women's movement agenda in the 1860s and 1870s, they did represent a step backward from the more radical demands from the 1840s, such as

¹⁴ See Susanna Schötz, "Die Gründerinnen und Gründer des Allgemeinen deutschen Frauenvereins: Neuere Forschungsergebnisse" in *Louise Otto-Peters-Jahrbuch* II/2006, eds. Johanna Ludwig, Susanna Schötz, Hannelore Rothenburg (Leipzig: Sax Verlag/Louise—Otto-Peters-Gesellschaft e.V. 2007), 6–16.

¹⁵ "Er hält in diese Hinsicht, neben der Agitation durch Frauenbildungs-Vereine und die Presse, die Begründung von Produktiv-Assoziationen, welche den Frauen zur Befreiung der weiblichen Arbeit vorzugsweise empfohlen werden, die Errichtung von Industrie-Ausstellungen für weibliche Arbeitserzeugnisse, die Gründung von Industrie-Schulen für Mädchen, die Errichtung von Mädchen-Herbergen, endlich aber auch die Pflege höherer wissenschaftlicher Bildung für geeignete Mittel, dem Ziele näher zu kommen." Louise Otto-Peters, "Die Gründung des Allgemeinen Deutschen Frauenvereins," *Deutsches Wochenblatt* (1865), 354.

women's suffrage. The organization also focused on educating women about current advances in the field of women's work as well as certain trends in the arts.

Founding or honorary members of the society included the writer Louise Otto, Elisabeth Brendel the pianist and wife of the music critic Franz Brendel, the dramatist Ludwig Eckardt, and women's rights supporter Auguste Schmidt, all of whom took an active interest in music. As is evident from this group of members, the women's movement in the 1860s generally constituted an educated, middle-class movement that sought to gain recognition for women's activities within an existing bourgeois value system rather than creating a new social order. Given the middle-class emphasis on cultural education and particularly on music, as well as the artistic background of many founding members of the society, it may not come as a surprise that music assumed a role in their writings that bordered on the political.

As the demands of the movement receded from more obvious political issues such as women's suffrage, the cultural education took an equal place with recognition of women's work. This ideal became practice in March of 1865 when the same group of Leipzig residents founded the *Frauenbildungsverein*, a society dedicated to the cultural education for women by women. The society held a monthly concert and lecture night; often the women heard talks on topics of cultural import, or performances of chamber music by members of the organization. A typical evening at the *Frauenbildungsverein* might include *Lieder* performance and a lecture by Auguste Schmidt on a literary or historical topic such as the *Nibelungen* myths.

The *Frauenbildungsverein* represented a general trend among middle-class women to organize themselves into a more official space for the exchange of ideas and

shared values. Other similar societies existed in Breslau and Kassel. As societal expectations of middle-class education rose, these women took their education into their own hands, just as the philosophy and practice of the Froebel kindergarten had invested women with the authority to transmit knowledge as mothers and nurturers.

The movement, as represented by the *ADF*, espoused a traditional view of the woman as the nurturing, motherly figure (the *ewige Weibliche*), and sought to supplement it with the idea of woman as a well-rounded, working partner, equal in mind and abilities to her husband. As Ann Taylor Allen has demonstrated, this notion of “spiritual motherhood” formed a critical aspect of the philosophical arguments for women’s rights: many activists understood motherhood as a role that transgressed private and public boundaries and combined both individualistic and communitarian ideals.¹⁶ Most contemporary Germans who supported women’s rights believed in a separate-but-equal distinction between men and women; however, in an ideal world, their strengths would complement each other as they worked together in society. The women’s movement represented an attempt to augment this role of mother by making available traditionally masculine professions within the female realm. Writers often avoided the problem of balancing job and children that would come to dominate feminist discourse later in the course of its development; rather, they focused on the positive effects of exercising mind and body in meaningful work.

One example demonstrates the relation of feminist movements in the 1860s to earlier efforts and their effects. In the first year of *Neue Bahnen*’s publication, the editors sought to distance their organization from “emancipated” women, asserting that most of

¹⁶ Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood*, 59.

their journal's readers in the younger generation also mistrusted the word "emancipated" because it was linked conceptually to cigar-smoking, "free love" advocates of the 1830s such as George Sand. In short, claimed one author, everyone wanted to be a George Sand until the revolutions of 1848, after which they accepted a more moderate goal of living under the cloak of progressive principles.¹⁷ Nowadays, she offered, "Our younger readers mostly have an aversion to the word 'emancipated...'"¹⁸ By distancing themselves from the emancipated women who believed in "freie Liebe," the readers of *Neue Bahnen* could and did argue that their goals were entirely in keeping with German moral standards of the day. It also constituted a strategy for better acceptance among men who may have feared masculine women, known by the derogatory term *Mannweib* (man-woman). These women, on the other hand, presented themselves as moral and argued that their natural feminine abilities would help, not hinder, their activity in the public sphere.

General Reaction to the Movement

The demand for equal education and employment opportunities raised the question (literally, the *Frauenfrage*) about women's roles in society, presenting a revision, if not a threat, to the more traditional notions of womanly duties of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*.

Despite the fact that most feminists held moderate viewpoints (by standards in 1830s France as well as 1890s Germany), many critics complained about *Mannweiber* (man-women), *Emancipirten* (emancipated women), and *Blauestrümpfe* (Blue Stockings).

Critical articles, pamphlets, and cartoons appeared in the printed press, most of which

¹⁷ *Neue Bahnen* 1 (1866), 22–23.

¹⁸ "Unserer jüngeren Leserinnen haben meist nur darum eine Scheu vor dem Wort "Emancipirte" weil ihnen dieselbe eingeflösst worden ist, ohne dass sie den so zu sagen historischen Zusammenhang kennen." "Emancipirten," *Neue Bahnen* 1 (1866), 22.

expressed the concern that traditional gender roles would erode: women would become more masculine, and men in turn would become more feminine. Historian Katrin Schmersahl has argued that the attempt on part of sexologists to define scientifically “male” and “female” characteristics in this period constituted a reaction to the threat of the women’s movement.¹⁹ The following quotation, from the writer Bogumil Goltz’s 1859 work *On the Characteristics and Natural History of Women*, represents the general conservative attitude against the movement:

This is certain: The more our burgeoning culture brings the specific manly nature, the formally-trained reason and active nature of the man, his characteristic energy, his sharply accentuated understanding, his moral rhythm and rigorousness, the more he raises himself from the floor of nature and sensuality, the more a literary and civic history is developed from natural history, a school didactic from divination; so the necessity becomes more apparent for the woman to supplement this unnatural one-sidedness of the man with her specific Eve-nature, thus with grace, with passivity, with gentleness, with subservient devotion, with love and passion, with divinatory and poetic instinct. Instead of this, we experience today the unnaturalness, that in these over-stimulated times, the woman offers the men competition in literature and wants to emancipate herself, when she should just represent the ennobled naturalism.²⁰

Despite its overblown tone, the passage highlights an underlying worry, revealed by the keyword “should.” Goltz (1801–1870) emphasizes the dichotomy between men and women where the man represents logic and knowledge and the woman represents love

¹⁹ Katrin Schmersahl, *Medizin und Geschlecht: Zur Konstruktion der Kategorie Geschlecht im medizinischen Diskurs des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998).

²⁰ “Gewiss ist dies: Je mehr sich durch zunehmende Cultur das specifische männliche Wesen, die förmliche ausgebildete Vernunft und active Natur des Mannes, seine Charakter-Energie, sein scharf accentuierter Verstand, sein sittlicher Rhythmus und Rigorismus herausgestellt, je mehr er sich vom Boden der Natur und Sinnlichkeit lospärirt, je mehr aus der plastischen Naturgeschichte eine Literatur- und Staatsgeschichte, aus der Divination eine Schuldidaktik wird, desto mehr tritt die Nothwendigkeit ein, dass die Frau diese widernatürliche Einseitigkeit des Mannes mit ihrer specifischen Eva-Natur, also mit Grazie, mit Passivität, mit Weichheit, mit dienender Hingebung, mit Liebe und Leidenschaft, mit divinatorischem und poetischen Instinkt ergänzt. Statt dessen erleben wir heute die Widernatürlichkeit, dass die Frau in diesen übertribenen Cultur-Zeiten den Männern noch einen Wettkampf in der Literatur anbietet und sich emanzipiren will, wo sie allein noch den veredelten Naturalismus vertreten soll!” cited in Schmersahl, *Medizin und Geschlecht*, 29–30.

and nature. However, his writing is prescriptive rather than descriptive and suggests that gender roles did not always approach the ideal. While women *should* conform to the prescribed categories of daughter, wife, mother, and muse, many of them also published poetry, librettos, novels, and articles. As an author himself, Goltz may have felt threatened by this competition in the realm of literature. Others expressed their worries in less specific terms, usually arguing that the movement could erode expectations of behavior for both men and women, and even change the ideal definitions of masculine and feminine. As the historian Constantin Frantz summarized in an 1870 publication, “The natural feeling demands that man be manly and woman womanly; the feminine man and the Man-woman [*Mannweib*] appear loathsome to it.”²¹

The fact that the leading nineteenth-century German feminist wrote revolutionary music criticism has remained mostly undetected and unremarked in the field of musicology. In fact, Louise Otto-Peters offers a fascinating case study in the intersection of the women’s movement and musical politics, and her criticism in the musical press, as well as that appearing in the journal of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein*, provides significant counter-evidence to scholars who contend that Wagner’s ideology supported a conservative gender ideology. On the contrary, it demonstrates how Louise Otto and other women’s rights activists incorporated Wagner’s works into their own progressive ideology and took an active role in promoting them.

²¹ “Das natürliche Gefühl fordert, dass der Mann männliche, das Weib weiblich sei, der weibische Mann und das Mannweib erscheinen ihm widerlich.” Constantin Frantz, “Ein Beispiel der Verwirrung in der Emancipation der Frauen,” in *Naturlehre des Staates* (Leipzig: C.F: Winter’sche Verlagshandlung, 1870), 83.

The case of Louise Otto also reveals an overlap of artistic and political circles in the printed media, through the many cross references to authors who wrote for general newspapers as well as journals specific to music. Wagner himself may have been responsible for some of the cross-fertilization through his personal history as a revolutionary, since his philosophical writings struck a chord with those of a similar political persuasion. He also cultivated relationships with those who could help advance his support in various social circles. Among Wagner adherents who also promoted women's rights we can number the feminist Matilda von Meysenburg, the Berlin socialites Hedwig and Ernst Dohm, and the dramatist and literature professor Ludwig Eckardt.

While these examples provide evidence of the complex network of like-minded authors who took a strong position in favor of the "New German School" (particularly Wagner) Louise Otto offers the best example of the politically-engaged, feminist author who supported "progress in the arts." She functioned as a spokesperson for those who believed that music not only effected political ends, but could also act as a positive force in the movement for women's recognition and advancement.

Born in 1819, the self-taught Louise Otto pursued her writing and took an active role publishing on topics related to *Vormärz* politics in Meissen.²² With the appearance of her first novel in 1843, she became familiar in the Leipzig publishing circle, including Ernst Keil, who was to become editor of the influential family journal, *Die Gartenlaube*. Otto's first fiancé died in 1841 before they could marry, and she later fell in love with the

²² For more on her biography, see Ruth-Ellen Joeres, *Die Anfänge der deutschen Frauenbewegung: Louise Otto-Peters* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983); and *George Sand und Louise Otto-Peters: Wegbereiterinnen der Frauenemanzipation; Reden und Vorträge zur Tagung am 23./24. April 2004 anlässlich des 200. Geburtstages von George Sand*, ed. Johanna Ludwig, Susanne Schötz und Hannelore Rothenburg (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2005).

revolutionary August Peters during his imprisonment, which prevented them from marrying until 1858. That same year she and August moved to Leipzig, where she immersed herself in its musical life, attending concerts, writing reviews, and mingling with musicians. Here she became good friends with pianist Elisabeth Brendel, wife of Franz Brendel, an influential critic and chief editor of the influential, pro-Wagnerian journal, *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Tragedy struck Louise again when her husband August died in 1864, and she continued writing and publishing novels to support herself until her death in 1895. Though in the early 1840s she had occasionally written under the pseudonym Otto Stern, after she became Louise Otto-Peters she continued to publish under her birth name.²³

For Otto, music remained a central cultural issue, and she maintained her support of both Wagner and the progressive political ideals from the 1848 revolutions. While she did not sing or play music herself, she was an avid concert-goer and contributed to musical culture through numerous reviews in various papers and music journals. In fact, through her review of a musical soirée, Louise Otto came to meet Auguste Schmidt, the co-founder of the *ADF* and co-editor of its journal, *Neue Bahnen*.²⁴ As early as the mid 1840s, Otto had conceived of a *Nibelung* opera and wrote the libretto for it. She penned two large treatises on music and politics, *Die Musik und unsere Zeit* (1852) and *Die Mission der Kunst* (1861), which provide the most comprehensive explication of her artistic philosophy. Louise Otto's career offers a special case study in musical politics, because her particular version of Wagnerian revolutionary musical aesthetics derives

²³ Based on her own publications, I have chosen to call her Louise Otto, as I am focusing on her contributions to the musical critical realm, and this is how she would have been known.

²⁴ Schmidt's sister Clara was a concert singer whom Otto had reviewed favorably in a local newspaper.

from a contemporary feminist perspective that situates the search for an ideal masculine-feminine equality within the professional musical realm. Furthermore, she used the journal of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein* as an organ for presenting her musical ideologies to an audience of women, recommending that they, as responsible progressives, become familiar with and support the musical struggles of the New German School.

Like many other middle-class revolutionaries, Otto took an interest in the intersection of politics and music, and this led her to contribute articles to Franz Brendel's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, which at that time functioned as an organ for the progressives in music. One of these articles concerned political "Parties and Cliques," in which she argued that the movement of "progress," i.e., that promoted in Brendel's journal, should be openly supported by like-minded musicians and that it represented a true party because it was based on ideology rather than personal associations.²⁵ She, like many contributors to the *NZfM*, made an explicit analogy between musical and political progress, arguing that parties in the musical realm functioned the same way as political parties.

Her article provides one example of the political impulse behind the demand for reformed art during the late 1840s. For many progressives, the notion that music could play an active role in shaping society constituted a motivating factor in how they prioritized the goals of music. Certainly this period saw music assume an even more important place in society than before, but for my purposes the main point of interest lies not in whether modernity originated on one side of the debate or the other, but rather in

²⁵ Louise Otto, "Parteien und Cliquen," *NZfM* 27 (1847), 53–44.

the fact that the leading women's rights activist of the day incorporated the rhetoric of progress and women's emancipation in her ideas about music, and imbued it with a special power concerning the equality of men and women.

Louise Otto's contributions to mid-century music criticism offer an unexplored aspect of this political-artistic complex so often studied by Wagner scholars. As a self-educated middle-class woman, she was especially sensitive to women's position in society, and her self-designated progressive viewpoints were underpinned by the notion of equality for both men and women. She aligned herself with Wagner in the search for a national opera, but she urged the recognition of women's achievements in the artistic realm, focusing many of her own reviews on female performers or opera characters. In particular, she regarded musical institutions and organizations as venues suitable for advancing the equality of men and women.

One example of her specifically feminist approach to progressive music and politics concerns her relationship with Franz Brendel and his *Tonkünstlerverein*.²⁶ As she wrote to Brendel in 1849, if he wished his organization to be truly "progressive," it would have to include women participants. If not, the "Music of the Future" would be supported, ironically, by a "pre-revolutionary, pre-constitutional" organization precisely because of its attitudes towards women:

Whom will your Composer's Society be inviting, if they don't want women; I would be almost too dumbstruck to write anything against it.—Don't start again to speak of "camps" to me—I thought that precisely because they have emerged more decisively from the "snares of time" and so forth, that musicians would have improved themselves—if one has encountered examples like Röckel or Wagner—

²⁶ The *Tonkünstlerverein* was a society for composers and musicians centered around the musical ideology of Brendel and Wagner.

certainly if you see such consequences of which you write me! This is more than pre-revolutionary, this is pre-constitutional, antediluvian!²⁷

In addition, Otto lists the two Dresden revolutionaries, August Röckel and Richard Wagner as examples of musicians who have indeed “improved themselves,” in the context of social appreciation of women’s rights. This same view—or hope, rather—that music would be a site for the advancement of women finds expression in her later writings as well, and it helps to explain why she would support Wagner and recommend his work to other women. Interesting too is the notion that on account of their work musicians are more accepting towards women, possibly because of the androgynous nature of musical performance. Her support of Wagner stems from this revolutionary period, but unlike some others who felt betrayed by Wagner’s post-1849 artistic developments, she maintained her support, suggesting that whatever changes he incorporated or seemed to incorporate did not affect her particular goals and the relation of his art to them.

More than Wagner, however, Otto positioned her concern for the lower classes at the forefront of her musical writings. As a political activist during the revolutionary period, she wrote the “Adresse eines Mädchens” in which she made a special plea that reformers in power remember female factory and domestic workers. Likewise, in an article entitled “The Proletariat of Art,” she attempted to show the suffering plight of the

²⁷ “Was ladet auch den(n) Ihr Tonkünstlerverein zur Zusam(m)enkunft ein, wen(n) sie keine Damen mögen; ich wäre beinah dum(m) genug gewesen zusagend zu schreiben.—Fangen Sie nicht gleich wieder an, sich mit mir zu “campeln”—ich dachte eben weil sie durch die “Fänge der Zeit” u.s.w. etwas entschiedener auftreten, die Musiker hätten sich gebessert—wen(n) man Beispiele wie Röckel oder Wagner erlebt—wen(n) Sie freilich eben solche Folgen sehen wie die, von denen Sie mir schreiben! Das ist mehr als vormärzlich, das ist vorconstitutionell, antediluvianisch!” Louise Otto to Franz Brendel, June 6, 1849 cited in Johanna Ludwig, “Zu bisher unbekanntem Briefen von Louise Otto-Peters an Franz Brendel, Julius Schanz, Adolf Hofmeister und Robert Schumann aus den Jahren 1847 bis 1853,” in *Louise Otto-Peters Jahrbuch I/2004*, ed. Johanna Ludwig et al (Leipzig: Sax-Verlag, 2004), 198.

every day musician who must struggle simply to earn the daily bread. While this article appeared in 1848 in the *Demokratisches Album*, it formed a part of her larger, as yet unpublished book, *Die Kunst und unsere Zeit* (1852); the theme of the starving musician would return in her novel collection, *Orchesterstimmen*, published in 1871. Certainly, she argued, the genius born in poverty will rise above the hand-to-mouth existence to achieve fame and financial security, but this was the exception that proves the rule. She closed the article with these words:

No salvation remains other than a general reorganization of society.
The revolution is here, it will not let up again until it has made its way through all areas and completed its work.
A big, big project—will we see the conclusion?²⁸

Her concern manifested itself likewise in her calls for the “popularization of art.” Like many Young Hegelian revolutionaries, she saw art as a means for social change, and *Volksbildung* formed an important cultural component of the revolution. Otto considered the many German singing organizations and song-festivals to be positive signs of bourgeois progress toward this goal; “but,” she argued, “it would be especially desirable should music break into the lowest levels of society.”²⁹

She went so far as to offer one way to achieve this in her book, *Die Kunst und unsere Zeit*, a collection of her revolutionary-musical ideas, if not a full-blown manifesto

²⁸ “Es bleibt keine Rettung als eine allgemeine Reorganisation der Gesellschaft. Die Revolution ist da, sie wird uns nicht eher wieder verlassen, bis sie ihren Weg durch alle Gebiete gemacht und ihr Werk vollendet hat.
Ein grosses, grosses Werk—werden wir das Ende erleben?” Louise Otto, “Proletariat der Kunst,” *Demokratisches Album hrsg. von mehreren deutschen Schriftstellern* (Herisau: 1848), 344.

²⁹ “Bisher sind es nur die mittleren Stände, die Bourgeoisie, welche diese Vortheile begriffen und benutzt hat. Aber es wäre besonders wünschenswerth, die Musik dränge in die untersten Schichten der Gesellschaft, dort zu helfen und zu lindern.” Louise Otto, “Über das Zeitgemässe in der Musik,” *Der Wandelstern und Beiblätter des Wandelstern* 36 (1847), 649.

of progressive musical ideology. Returning to the popularization of art, she addressed the problem of garden-concerts for the masses, who might sit there and “drink beer and eat cake” during the performance of Beethoven symphonies. Certainly she wished to see music brought to more people, especially to the “lowest levels of society,” but the idea that Beethoven’s music might be sullied by the clang of forks and dishes made her pause. “This problem, I confess, places my liberalism in a rather tight dilemma.”³⁰

Indeed, her own *bildungsbürgerlich* reverence for music of the masters—an art-religious impulse—casts her concern in a proselytizing light.³¹ In this way, she argued that charging high prices for concerts was no better than talking through a performance, desecrating the music by associating it with base capitalist principles. With revolutionary rhetoric she claimed that only “the aristocracy of money” could afford to attend multiple concerts and that the music would never become popular if “its most beautiful revelations are closed” to the masses.³² She also specified that by “Volk” she did not mean the bourgeoisie, but the lower classes.³³

One solution to the “tight dilemma” was to offer summer “symphony-concerts” in the parks (“of course, the cheaper the better”). First perform a symphony in some sort of venue, followed by “light” concert music in the second half for people who wanted to

³⁰ “Diese Frage gestehe ich, brachte...meinen Liberalismus in ein ziemlich enges Dilemma,” Louise Otto, *Die Kunst und unsere Zeit* (Grossenhain: Verlagsbuchhandlung von Th. Haffner 1852), 25.

³¹ For more on art religion in the later nineteenth century, see Jan Brachmann, *Kunst-Religion-Krise: Der Fall Brahms* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003).

³² “...und wie kann eine Kunst populair [sic] werden, wie kann sie bildend auf die Masse wirken, wenn diese gerade von ihren schönsten Offenbarungen ausgeschlossen ist?” Louise Otto, *Die Kunst und unsere Zeit*, 26.

³³ As is typical of many bourgeois commentators, her notion of the lower classes seems to be rather monolithic.

drink, eat, and chat. In this way, Louise Otto could maintain the reverence for the “temple of music” while still exposing it to the masses and garnering their interest in new performances. She did not advocate a simplified presentation of music by Beethoven or other canonical composers, but rather believed that people would come to appreciate it if they could hear it regularly—a goal currently prevented by a lack of money and the structure of society.

The genre that would most appeal to the “masses,” however, was opera. As Otto understood it, the *Volk* already had a natural interest in opera, and they were not to blame if that interest did not manifest itself as connoisseurship:

At the opera one finds not only the connoisseurs of art; there the masses rule. Oh, the masses are educable, even if they are called uneducated—and if they are so, it is not their fault, but rather the fault of those whose responsibility it was to lead them fully to the highest revelations of art...³⁴

Another factor contributing to the appeal of opera, as she argued, was its ability to unite the arts. “As I wrote before Wagner had published his writings,” she recalled in *Die Mission der Kunst* (1861), quoting her own work from the late 1840s, “Opera should be an artwork, yea, perhaps one of the greatest, because so many artists can unite themselves in it – and what has one made of it? One regards it only as a composition, reviews the bravura-arias, the singable melodies...³⁵

³⁴ “In der Oper versammeln sich nicht nur Kunstkenner, da herrscht die Menge. O, die Menge ist bildsam, wenn sich auch ungebildet heisst—and wo sie es noch ist, da trifft die Schuld nicht sie, sondern Diejenigen, in deren Hand es war, sie durch die höchsten Offenbarungen der Kunst zu dem Höchsten zu führen...” Louise Otto, *Die Mission der Kunst mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Heinrich Matthes, 1861), 123.

³⁵ “Die Oper soll ein Kunstwerk sein, ja vielleicht eines der grössten, weil so viele Künstler sich in ihr vereinigen – und was hat man aus ihr gemacht? Man betrachtet sie nur als Composition, prüft die Bravourarien, die noch singbaren Melodien...” Otto, *Die Mission der Kunst*, 127.

Thus the idea of a national opera was bound up with its ability to appeal to the *Volk*, as well as its ability to function symbolically as a democratic unification of the art and those who create art. It follows then that Louise Otto would propose opera as the logical site for the national artistic reform movement. In this way, she found an ideological kinship with Wagner and Brendel. She too had read through Hegel and Feuerbach, and many of her writings from the 1840s support the notion of a national opera; indeed, it is difficult to sort out the web of influences in the theorization of a national opera in this period.³⁶ Certainly Louise Otto's interest in "the popularization of art" and especially her concern for the lower levels of society was not unique to her; rather, it points to the tendency of some revolutionaries to romanticize the lower classes. As the anti-Wagnerian Paul Lindau would later note when he attended the Bayreuth festival in 1876, "The Bayreuthers had entertained the illusion of a migration of nations, made no accommodation for people who did have to come in all circumstances, and had forgotten that the main contingent comes from artistic and literary circles or the business spheres most closely connected to them...."³⁷

However, unlike either Wagner or Brendel, Otto's understanding of the proletariat provides clues to her underlying desire for equality between men and women. She would later write that an ideal marriage more likely occurred in the working classes because the women had to work equally with the men. Seen in this light, her revolutionary

³⁶ For more on Louise Otto's intellectually formative years, see Irina Hundt, "Die autodidaktischen Studien 'eines deutschen Mädchens' um 1840. Louise Ottos unveröffentlichten Notizen," *Louise Otto-Peters-Jahrbuch* 1/2004, ed Johanna Ludwig et al (Leipzig: Sax Verlag, 2004), 29–38.

³⁷ "Die Bayreuther hatten die Illusion einer Völkerwanderung gehegt, keine Umstände gemacht für Leute, die ja unter allen Bedingungen kommen mussten, und vergessen, dass das Hauptcontingent aus Künstler- und Schriftstellerkreisen, oder den Gesellschaftsphären, welche diesen nahe stehen, sich bildete." Paul Lindau, "Bayreuther Festtagebuch Nr 1. Vom 10–13 August," *Die Gartenlaube* 27 (1876), 569.

understanding of national opera derives from her love of the lower classes, itself based on the latent equality she believed that could be realized within that social stratum. By combining her interest in music with her concern for the working classes she proposed a reformed art that would communicate important social values to a group that could better incorporate them into an existing system.

Musical Projects of Louise Otto

Louise Otto contributed to the Wagnerian cause not only through publication of music criticism and through proselytizing in her women's journal, but also by writing an opera libretto to *Die Nibelungen* in 1846, which she originally asked Niels Gade to set to music.³⁸ In 1853 she also contacted Robert Schumann to request that he set her libretto, even though she knew that Wagner had also begun work on his own *Nibelungen* project. Schumann knew her through his brother Carl, who had published her novel *Schloss und Fabrik* in Schneeberg in 1846.³⁹ Despite her connections with Gade and Schumann, her writings on music firmly support the New German School, her silence on so-called "conservative" musicians and composers suggesting that she, like many of her associates, felt a strong preference for one side of the musical debate. It also seems that Schumann's successor, Brahms, did not make much of an impression on her.

After failing to secure a composer for her *Nibelung* libretto, Otto turned to a different national historical subject a few years later. In 1863 the composer Wendelin

³⁸ She published some of it in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. See *NZfM* 22 (1845), 175–76, 181–83.

³⁹ Johanna Ludwig, "Zu bisher unbekanntten Briefen von Louise Otto-Peters an Franz Brendel, Julius Schanz, Adolf Hofmeister und Robert Schumann aus den Jahren 1847 bis 1853." *Louise Otto-Peters Jahrbuch II* 2004, ed. Johanna Ludwig et al (Leipzig: Sax-Verlag, 2004), 192–204.

Weissheimer (1838–1910), student of Liszt and supporter of Wagner, approached her about composing a piece to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Theodor Körner, the young Romantic poet who died fighting in the Napoleonic wars of liberation. As she reported in an article in *Neue Bahnen* in 1872, this project soon developed into an opera.⁴⁰ By 1864 Otto had completed a five-act libretto on the subject of Theodor Körner, but she and Weissheimer encountered troubles in finding a venue. Her choice of a five act-scheme (a series of tableaux) proved her independence from the Wagnerian model, even while her desire to write an opera stemmed from the same impulse as Wagner's. King Ludwig II of Bavaria finally sponsored the premiere performance of *Theodor Körner* in Munich in 1872, again demonstrating how the personal network of Wagner supporters helped each other in the struggle for a common goal.⁴¹

***Neue Bahnen* as an Organ of the New German School**

With the founding of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenverein* in 1865, Louise Otto and Auguste Schmidt recognized the need for a journalistic organ—a forum that would extend news and ideas to women beyond the physical space of the *Frauenverein* meetings. The journal provided a way for women to stay abreast of various topics concerning women's advancement, and it also served as a record of activities undertaken at the *Frauenbildungsverein*. The articles and notices in *Neue Bahnen*,⁴² which took its

⁴⁰ Louise Otto, "Frauencharaktere einer neuen Oper," *Neue Bahnen* 8 (1872), 105.

⁴¹ The music for this opera has been lost, but for an analysis of the libretto see Elvira Pradel, "Die Frauengestalten in Louise Otto-Peters' Opernlibretti," in *Louise Otto-Peters Jahrbuch 1/2004*, ed. Johanna Ludwig et al (Leipzig: Sax-Verlag, 2004), 184–91.

⁴² Modern readers may associate the phrase "neue Bahnen" with Schumann's famous article about Brahms, which appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1853. While it is probably that Louise Otto knew

name from a novel Otto had written in 1864, also point to the interaction of musical and political spheres by demonstrating how notions of progress, especially for self-avowed women's rights activists, included the musical politics of the New German School.

The general goals of the journal involved keeping an educated audience of women informed about the progress of women in such areas as employment and education. In keeping with the women's movement in the 1860s, the journal represented a progressive viewpoint, demanding recognition for women as equal to men in educational and occupational potential, while still supporting the middle-class ideal of the "eternal feminine."⁴³ Its articles discussed women's political roles, the status of women in the workforce, family life, and the education of children. Contributors reported news about women who were active in the community and in various professional fields, including doctors, veterinarians, pharmacists, authors, teachers, actresses, musicians, and composers. Interested readers could follow the concert activities of such musicians as Clara Schumann, or learn of new compositions by Minna Brinkmann and Pauline Viardot-Garcia, of music books by La Mara (pseudonym of Marie Lipsius), or of the educational goals of music school founders Lina Ramann and Ida Volckmann. Many articles reported on activities at the *Frauenbildungsverein*, or on topics of general interest to the music lover, such as the function of art; one even alerted readers to a new metronome.⁴⁴

Schumann's article, the phrase was omnipresent in contemporary discourse, and employed just as frequently by New Germans within music criticism.

⁴³ The contributors to the journal largely avoided the problem that would later engulf feminist debates, namely, how to reconcile career and family.

⁴⁴ "Für die musikalischen Leserinnen," *Neue Bahnen* 17(1882), 75.

One contributor to the 1868 *Neue Bahnen* offered an opinion about music that may be considered representative of the journal. In a series of articles entitled “In the Service of Art” Thekla Naveau, a kindergarten teacher from Sondershausen, maintained that women were fundamentally important in the creation and reception of music. She accepted the premise that men had more faculty for logic and reasoning and that women were more emotionally oriented; however, she argued, “Art is not only a thing of reason; it addresses foremost and directly the feelings and fantasy,” and thus women were more suited to understanding and producing it.⁴⁵ She hereby reinterpreted the common belief that women were more susceptible to music’s seductive power; on the contrary, women were empowered by their ability to understand the force of music. This explained why so many women had inspired pieces of music, even dating back to troubadour times—not because they were objects to be wooed, but because they immediately comprehended the music. If women thus far had not achieved as much as men in the performance and composition of music, that could be explained by the lack of educational opportunities for women.⁴⁶ And in spite of these educational barriers some women had already succeeded, such as Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, Clara Schumann, and their like. In the course of three articles, Naveau concluded that to be in the service of art was to perform it, to encourage its presence in the family and society, and, if possible, to become active in its composition. This article represented the general attitudes of the *ADF* toward women,

⁴⁵ “Die Kunst ist nicht allein Sache der Vernunft, sie wendet sich zuerst und unmittelbar an das Gefühl und die Fantasie.” Thekla Naveau, “Im Dienste der Kunst,” *Neue Bahnen* 3 (1868), 20.

⁴⁶ “Fehlten doch bisher der Frau immer und überall zur Ausbildung ihrer geistigen Fähigkeiten Mittel und Wege, die dem Manne offen standen.” Ibid.

celebrating their strengths in relation to music, while transforming an accepted belief into an empowering advantage.

A similar anonymous article from 1874 posed the question: “Why do women compose so little?” According to this author, education was to blame for the lack of female composers, because boys learned the rules of composition in school, while girls learned only the most rudimentary rules of harmony from “inexperienced female teachers” who feared going into detail.⁴⁷ Such articles highlighted the different standards in education (even in music) that contemporary women perceived, and encouraged women to pursue the intellectual “men’s work” of composition. In “Zum weibliche Culturkampf” from the same issue, Louise Gutbier expressed this ideal in more general terms:

The man should not be so proud as to take the giants’ work of the intellect solely upon himself; he should gladly recognize the participation of women in the newly, encouraging [*anhebend*] cultural epoch. For the relationship will not be a good one until the female sex is made active, and becomes more than a passive half in the public sphere. Therefore we will allow the Woman of the Future to have the same career choices as the man.⁴⁸

This quotation encapsulates the unifying message found in *Neue Bahnen*: women should develop their intellectual faculties and become more active within the public sphere.

⁴⁷ “Wenn Mädchen nicht von besonderem inneren Drange getrieben werden, lernen sie meist die Gesetze der Harmonie als etwas Nebensächliches, und während sie durch lange Stunden die Finger üben, erscheint ihnen jede Beschäftigung mit harmonischen Regeln wie ein verlorener Posten. So entstand und entsteht weibliches Virtuositentum der schlimmsten Art. Die in musikalischer Wissenschaft unbewanderten Lehrerinnen vermeiden ängstlich jede Unterweisung, bei welcher ihr oberflächliches Wissen leicht bemerkbar werden könnte.” “Aus der Musikwelt,” Ibid.

⁴⁸ “...Der Mann sollte drum nicht so stolz sein, die Riesenarbeit des Geistes auf sich allein nehmen zu wollen, gerne sollte er in der neu anhebenden Culturepoche die Theilnahme des Weibes gelten lassen, denn nicht eher wird das Verhältniss ein richtiges sein, bis auch das weibliche Geschlecht fähig gemacht, mehr als die passive Hälfte auf den öffentlichen Gebieten zu sein. Indess lassen wir dem Weibe der Zukunft gleiche Berufswahl wie dem Manne.” “Zum weiblichen Culturkampf,” *Neue Bahnen* 9 (1874), 97.

These views fed into the belief that the progressive woman would enjoy a happier relationship if she were the active and intellectual equal of her husband. As seen in Thekla Naveau's article, this demand for progress did not overturn the more fundamental idea that women represented the natural element in the world, that they were more in touch with their emotions; rather, it encouraged women to develop skills in areas that had been the traditional province of men.

They could achieve equality more easily in the musical realm due to their natural tendency to understand the emotional content of music, and by developing their intellectual capabilities for composition. In fact, the model couple in marriage cited by Louise Otto was none other than Elisabeth and Franz Brendel. A founding member of the *ADF* and accomplished pianist, Elisabeth died in 1867, and soon afterwards, Otto published a biography of her in *Neue Bahnen*, concluding that her relationship with Franz had been ideal. Elisabeth had forgone a concert career because of illness; however, she had exerted her influence beyond the domestic sphere, working with Franz to spread the "Music of the Future" by supporting composers and performers. For his part, Franz, according to Otto, recognized the equality of women completely through his support both of Elisabeth and of the *ADF*.⁴⁹ Elisabeth could accompany him both intellectually and in her work, allowing the couple to fight for a common goal—in this case, the progress of the Wagnerian movement.⁵⁰ Using revolutionary rhetoric, Louise Otto argued that there

⁴⁹ Franz Brendel was also present at the first meeting of the general women's group in which they decided to found the *ADF*.

⁵⁰ "Die Gattin, fähig den Gatten überall hin mit ihrem Geist zu begleiten, mit ihm zu arbeiten und zu kämpfen für die gemeinsamen Principien, kannte doch kein eifrigeres Bemühen, als das ihren Gatten auch jeden kleinen Wunsch an den Augen abzusehen, ihm die sorgsamste und pünktlichste Hausfrau zu sein und einen Theil der Mühseligkeiten seines Berufes ihm aus dem Wege zu räumen." *Neue Bahnen* 2 (1867), 12.

had been victims and martyrs of the New German School, “for it is the same battle in all areas.”⁵¹ Transitioning so smoothly from progress for women to progress in music suggests that she understood the two as part of the same movement. Certainly, she valued the social power of music highly, as seen from her treatises on the subject, and this suggests that she considered women’s abilities to achieve in the musical realm on par with men’s.

Discussions of Richard Wagner and the New German School appearing in *Neue Bahnen* were particularly positive, and revolutionary rhetoric that pervaded music criticism of the New German School also pervaded the women’s journal. In light of the heavy preference accorded to Wagner in *Neue Bahnen*, it may well be that the phrase “Woman of the Future” (*Weibe der Zukunft*) in Louise Gutbier’s article was borrowed from the composer himself, who had used it in reference to Senta in *Eine Mittheilung an meine Freunde* (1851).

In the 1868 *Neue Bahnen*, an anonymous reviewer (most likely Louise Otto herself) discussed two recent musical treatises, Franz Brendel’s *Geschichte der Musik*, and Lina Ramann’s collection of essays entitled *Aus der Gegenwart*. The common aim of these writings was to “bring the public closer to the movement for progress,” which the author deemed a “worthy goal.”⁵² Furthermore, she found it “unbelievable, what backward views part of the press still held towards the so-called ‘Music of the Future.’”⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Im Anschluss an die musikalischen Fortschrittsbestrebungen suchen sie diesselben dem grössern Publikum näher zu bringen. Dies ist allerdings ein sehr verdienstlicher Zweck; denn es ist unglaublich, welche verkehrte Ansichten ein Theil der Presse noch immer über die sogenannte “Zukunftsmusik” zu Tage födert, weshalb wir fürchten müssen, auch ein Theil unsrer Leserinnen sei sich noch nicht klar über den Fortschritt und seine Kämpfe auf musikalischem Gebiet.” “Literatur,” *Neue Bahnen* 3 (1868), 88.

Worried furthermore that some readers of *Neue Bahnen* might be “unclear about progress and its battles in the musical realm,” the author recommended both books.

Recommending Brendel’s and Ramann’s works under the umbrella term “progress” helped strengthen the conceptual bond between political and artistic movements. Wagner’s and Liszt’s struggles in the musical realm formed part of the same larger concept of progress as Otto suggested in her obituary for Elisabeth Brendel. In the review, the author offered what might come across as an obligatory recommendation to learn about the Music of the Future for the woman who considered herself progressive.⁵⁴ In addition, readers of *Neue Bahnen* were directed to the publications of other Wagnerites such as Ludwig Eckardt, who had become an honorary member of the *ADF*, and the philosophy professor Rudolf Benfey, both of whom had published music criticism of the Wagnerian variety.

In offering women’s perspectives on news events, one correspondent who had attended the 1868 *Tonkünstlerversammlung* in Altenburg reported on the apparently equal status of women participants at the gathering. She offered that this was the first large meeting which had as many women participants as men.⁵⁵ Considering that many German states forbade women’s participation in political societies during this time, this fact becomes all the more impressive. More than simple statistics, the author continued, made this an important step forward for women:

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See Susanne Vill, ed., “*Das Weib der Zukunft:* ” *Frauengestalten und Frauenstimmen bei Richard Wagner* (Stuttgart: J.B.Metzler, 2000).

⁵⁵ “Die ‘Neuen Bahnen’ fanden schon mehrfach Gelegenheit, dieses Vereins zu gedenken und war dies um so berechtigter, als derselbe beinahe der erste grössere Verein überall verstreut lebender Mitglieder ist, welcher die Frauen den Männern ganz gleichstellt.” *Neue Bahnen* 3 (1868), 143.

Here the women appear not just as accessories [*Anhängsel*] of men, nor as simply tolerated, they are not considered superfluous here and ignored as much as possible, as unfortunately seems to be the case in other organizations, but rather they are recognized as united in the common service of the idea of music—they occupy no higher, but also no lower place than men, and that gives everyone the feeling of the kind of belonging and of inoffensive security [*harmlosen Sicherheit*] that cannot happen in those places where the men view the attending women as intruders, or in the best case, as the “adornment of the festival,” but not as equal members.⁵⁶

She lauded the male participants for regarding the women as equals, thus echoing the sentiments of Louise Otto, who had once cited musicians such as Wagner for having “improved themselves” through supporting women’s rights. The author also mentioned specific women who took part in the meeting as “composers and writers” rather than as performers, including Lina Ramann, Flora Terne, Louise Otto-Peters, Emilie Wiegand, and Bertha Raschig.⁵⁷ The activities the author chose to list included musical performances, and a lecture given by Dr. Marbach entitled “On the rebirth of dramatic art through music”—a topic with clear Wagnerian overtones.⁵⁸ Once again, the juxtaposition of progressive musical politics with the aims of the women’s movement—equality in work and the arts—implied an ideological connection between the groups. Additionally, the positive reception of women within the musical sphere, specifically in

⁵⁶ “Die Damen erscheinen hier nicht nur als Anhängsel der Männer, noch als die nur Geduldeten, sie werden hier nicht, wie dies leider bei andern Versammlungen vorkommt, als überflüssig betrachtet und so viel als möglich ignoriert, sondern sie sind hier da und anerkannt im gemeinsamen Dienst der Idee, hier der Tonkunst, in deren Interesse man sich vereinigt – sie nehmen keine höhere, aber auch keine niedere [sic] Stufe dabei ein wie die Männer und das giebt auch Allen das Gefühl jener Zusammengehörigkeit und jener harmlosen Sicherheit, die natürlich da nicht walten kann, wo die Männer in den anwesenden Frauen nur Eindringlinge, im beste Falle den ‘Schmuck des Festes’ nicht aber sich gleichgestellte Mitglieder sehen...”
ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ This idea would come to fruition most fully in Nietzsche’s famous 1872 *Die Geburt der Tragödie*.

some progressive communities such as the *Tonkünstlerversammlung*, may have helped to make its rhetoric of progress become a reality for women.

A Contemporary Feminist Perspective on Wagner's Female Characters

Neue Bahnen provided Louise Otto with a platform for discussing Wagner's female characters in depth, as representatives of progress in music that could be appreciated by other women. Her writings offer a unique glimpse into what attracted contemporary women's rights supporters to Wagner's portrayal of women, which offers an important aspect of historical context that modern scholars often overlook in analyzing Wagner's relation to gender and sexuality in this period. Contrary to some recent negative interpretations of Wagner's female characters, Louise Otto found them admirable and even "ideal" in that they retained their femininity but helped actively propel the action.

While many contemporaries did not analyze gender roles in Wagner's operas, some critics were appalled at Wagner's treatment of women on stage. For example, at the premiere of the *Ring* in 1876, the scene in *Götterdämmerung* when Siegfried forcibly steals the ring from Brünnhilde caused a scandal among theater-goers, and some well known critics such as Paul Lindau and Ernst Keil (both contributors to *Die Gartenlaube*) complained it exhibited too much violence towards a woman.⁵⁹ As early as 1866, a critic identified as "E.R." (possibly the conservatory composer Ernst Rudorff) wrote for the *AmZ* that "In *Lohengrin* and *Flying Dutchman* the main idea is the flawlessness of man

⁵⁹ See discussion and Friederich von Stade's replies in *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 7 (1876), 677.

and the complete subordination of woman, through which he becomes a god and she a slave.”⁶⁰

The picture presented in *Neue Bahnen*, however, offers a different and positive account of Wagner’s female characters. Louise Otto, who had been a supporter of Wagner since the late 1840s, contributed a number of articles about Wagner’s treatment of female characters. In discussing how she conceived of creating roles for three women characters in her own opera libretto for *Theodor Körner*, she wrote that her goal had been to represent on stage “the mission [*Aufgabe*] of women... to be as effective in public life as in the arts and in the home.”⁶¹ With such criteria in mind, she considered Wagner to have successfully created female characters in both his early and later operas, focusing on their superior character qualities and their roles in the action.

By 1861 Otto had already contributed an article to Brendel’s *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in which she analyzed the roles of Elsa, Senta, Elisabeth, and Irene. Ten years later she returned to the theme to include Wagner’s latest female character Eva, maintaining that while much had already been written about *Die Meistersinger*, it mostly concerned the male characters. She wrote that in her earlier work she had

proved how scarcely any other poet, let alone another musician, has brought the eternal feminine to stage with such insight as Wagner. And if he is an especial genius who treads new paths, so it must satisfy us particularly as women that he pays such attention to women by displaying in them always and everywhere the element of purity of soul, devotion, greatness, elevation – in a word, an ideal,

⁶⁰ “In ‘Lohengrin’ und ‘Fliegende Holländer’ ist der Grundgedanke die Unfehlbarkeit des Mannes und die unbedingte Unterwerfung des Weibes, wodurch er zum Gott, sie zur Slavine wird.” “Die moderne ‘grosse’ Oper und die Musik im Concert. Meyerbeer, Wagner und Brahms,” *AmZ* 3 (1866), 64.

⁶¹ “Es ist mir gelungen, in drei deutschen Frauengestalten, welche der Geschichte der Erhebung Deutschlands vor fünfzig Jahren angehören, unsere Idee: das es die Aufgabe der Frauen sei, mitzuwirken so gut im öffentlichen Leben wie in der Kunst und im Hause, dass es im Vaterlande, in der Menschheit besser werde, auf die Bühne zu bringen...” “Frauencharakter in neuen Oper,” *Neue Bahnen* 13 (1872), 105.

which, far from being presented as something improbable or untrue, comes so much closer to the actual nature of women in word and action that we all sympathize with it and experience it and could wish for nothing else from these characters sketched with a masterstroke.⁶²

Eva in particular exhibits this ideal, and Otto cites some of her discussion with Hans Sachs in Act 2—a scene that had garnered much positive attention from critics in general; in contrast, Otto offers an important feminist perspective on the exchange:

An unspoiled girl (but not uneducated, as one sees already from her previous words) and the healthy sense of the people make for a more valid judge than the wigged master who only adheres to the rules.⁶³

She thereby offers a complementary and alternative reading to Wagner's own suggestion that Walther himself relies on good artistic sense to overcome the stifling rules of the pedants. Eva becomes heroic in this sense, and thus makes a suitable partner for Walther, just as Otto's ideal of a married couple extols equal talent working toward a similar goal.

In her review of the first Leipzig performance of the Ring Cycle in 1877, Otto discussed mainly the female singers and characters in the work. She found it amazing how Wagner crafted his female characters and distinguished them from one another musically and poetically. More important, she found it fascinating that, in contrast to the “masculine greed, raw passion and assaults, insidiousness and evil,” the females are

⁶² “Ich hatte damals nachgewiesen, wie kaum je ein anderer Dichter, geschweige denn ein anderer Musiker das Ewig-Weibliche so auf der Bühne zur Erscheinung und Erklärung gebracht, wie Wagner—und wenn er vorzugsweise ein Genius ist, der auf neuen Bahnen wandelt, so muss es eben uns Frauen zu ganz besonderer Genugthuung gereichen, dass er auf diesen so der Frauen sich annimmt, dass sich in ihnen immer und überall das Element der Seelenreinheit, Hingebung, Grossheit, Erhebung, mit einem Worte, eine Idealität offenbart, die weit entfernt, etwa unwahrscheinlich oder gar unwahr dargestellt zu sein, vielmehr ganz dem wirklichen Wesen des Weibes entsprechen durch Wort und Handlung so menschlich nahe vor uns hintritt, dass wir Alles mitempfinden und erleben und keinen Zug anders wünschten an diesen mit Meisterhand entworfenen Charakteren.” Louise Otto-Peters, *Neue Bahnen* 12 (1871), 23.

⁶³ “Und das ist die Tendenz des ganzen Stückes: Ein unverdorbenes (aber nicht ungebildetes, wie man schon aus Eva's vorigen Worten sieht) Mädchen und der gesunde Sinn des Volkes sind in Sachen der Kunst rechtsgültigere Richter als die verzopften Meister, die sich nur an alte Regeln halten.” Ibid.

always noble, pure, and elevated.⁶⁴ Seen against the conservative charge of immorality in the *Ring*, Otto's praise functions as a reply that there was morality in the *Ring*—on part of its female characters. In particular she considered Fricka to be a respectable defender of marriage and morals, and Brünnhilde a noble and brave warrior-virgin. Some male commentators found Fricka to be the very image of the nagging wife, but Louise Otto considered her admirable in her championing of the moral code and her ability to chastise Wotan frankly. She also highlighted the power of persuasion that Brünnhilde exercises over Wotan; in both cases Otto valued strong female characters who could exert influence on the plot. While she spent most of her reviews analyzing the female characters, Otto also praised the “symphonic music” in the closing scene of *Walküre*, which lingered in the listener's memory after the performance.⁶⁵

In short, Louise Otto's judgments reveal the goals of the women's movement more broadly. The female characters should be equal to men in education and public role, as well as uphold the nurturing, motherly role epitomized by the “eternal feminine.” They are educated, intelligent, moral, and exert an equal amount of influence as men on the action. If these seem like modest demands for women's rights by today's standards, we should remember that the bourgeois women's movement as led by Louise Otto had, like much of the liberal impulse, lost some of its revolutionary zeal since 1848 and sought to expand the abilities and opportunities of women within the existing system.

⁶⁴ “Es ist geradezu bewunderswürdig wie hier Wagner die verschiedensten Frauencharaktere dichterisch und musikalisch zugleich zu gestalten und von einander zu unterscheiden weiss und wie hier gerade entgegen der männlichen Habsucht, rohen Leidenschaft und Vergewaltigungen, Hinterlist und Bosheit in den Frauen immer das Edle, Reine, Erhabene entgegentritt.” Louise Otto, *Neue Bahnen* 13 (1877), 86.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

This is not to conclude that all Wagner supporters also supported the women's movement as represented by the *ADF*, or that its female members were all Wagner supporters. But it offers more context for understanding how some Wagner critics might have felt uncomfortable with his portrayals of women and sexuality on stage, at the same time creating a very real connection between the threatening demand for women's rights and Wagner's own disdain for musical and moral norms. Certainly Louise Otto was no unknown activist striving in obscurity; she published in as many outlets and in as many genres as possible: opera librettos, poems, novels, theoretical treatises and short articles on a variety of subjects, but always with the goal of women's advancement in mind. Her championing of Wagner offers clear evidence that, for some emancipated women, Wagner's works lived up to their progressive designation, not only in dramatic and musical terms, but also in their portrayals of women on stage.

Musical Connections

Why did Wagner's works hold such attraction for Louise Otto and other supporters of women's rights? As established earlier, Otto found a philosophical and artistic kinship with Wagner as concerned national opera, and his creation of female characters resonated with her notions of the modern, emancipated woman. We might also explore one particular scene from *Walküre* that she found particularly effective:

And how noble this brave warrior-virgin, who defies even Wotan's resolution because she knows that he came to it unwillingly; and then she finds it the greatest punishment that he tells her "You were a Valkyrie"—and with it condemns her, like other women, "to belong to the ruling man"! such that he mercifully casts a magical fire around her dwelling so that only the "worthiest hero" can pass through it!⁶⁶

⁶⁶ "Und wie edel diese kühne Schlachtenjungfrau, die sich selbst Wotans Rathschluss widersetzt, weil sie weiss, dass er ihn unfreiwillig fasste und dann es als die grösste Strafe empfindet, dass er Ihr sagte;

The scene in question is the third and final scene in Act III of *Die Walküre*, in which Brünnhilde convinces Wotan to lessen her punishment, and it is this power dynamic between Brünnhilde and her father that garners the attention from Otto. As she argues earlier in her review, Wagner makes his female characters effective not only through the text, but also through their musical representations.

Investigating the musical action—or rather, its role in the drama—offers a possible insight into how we might hear the subtle way in which Brünnhilde persuades Wotan to change his mind. This might even lead to a “protofeminist” hearing of the scene, after what Louise Otto pointed out in her review. In general, the tonal trajectory of the 749-measure scene is E minor to E major, with continually developing harmonic complications as the discussion between Wotan and Brünnhilde deepens in intensity. Throughout the dialogue, the tension is made manifest through the harmonic tug and pull of E minor/major as well as more local moments of harmonic difference between Wotan and Brünnhilde. At the moment when Brünnhilde wins over Wotan, however, we have an important moment of harmonic stability and a return of the Valkyrie leitmotive.

As the scene begins, however, the introductory tone is set with a solid 24 bars of E minor, divided into 8-bar phrases, with local color on D naturals and C naturals. This passage is unified leitmotivically as well, permeated as it is with the descending figure often called “Wotan’s despair.” Brünnhilde’s questions are reflected in the tentative half cadences, although even these gain more direction as they become more solidly centered in E minor, underpinned by a B pedal in measures 62–5. Her final question ends on a

“Walküre bist Du gewesen”—und sie verurtheilt dereinst gleich andern Frauen “zu gehorchen dem herrschenden Mann”! —so dass er gnädig um ihre Wohnung das Feuer zaubert, das nur “der würdigste Held” durchschreiten kann!” Louise Otto, *Neue Bahnen* 12 (1877), 87.

briefly tonicized B minor. Wotan's answer, "Frag' deine That, sie deutet dir deine Schuld!" provides the first cadence in E minor (m. 73) and reflects their relationship at that moment, Wotan in control of the tonic, Brünnhilde the dominant. It represents one of the longest periods of a stable key area until after the resolution of conflict between the two. At this point they converse within the same key area and have not reached their main points of contention yet. For the most part, this opening section of the scene stays close to E minor, with brief excursions into B minor, A major, and F-sharp minor.

As the dialogue develops they begin to move into other key areas, first to those related to E minor, then to more remote areas. At Brünnhilde's first response to a question from Wotan, we see an example of the harmonic tug and pull that dominates the scene. Wotan queries "So hätt' ich Verrath nicht zu rächen; zu gering wär'st du meinem Grimm?" leading to a cadence on B minor, but as Brünnhilde reminds him that he too loved the Wälsungen, she arrives at an A-major cadence on "liebtest" in measure 114.

Throughout the scene, Brünnhilde attempts to change Wotan's mind about the severity of her transgression. It takes time for the characters to reach another tonal agreement after the initial exchange in E minor. Wotan's long argument beginning with "So thatest du" is even supported by a change in key signature to A-flat major in measure 244. His rage dwindles toward the twilight motive on E-flat, setting up the largest tonal digression in the scene, and the introduction of the fate motive. This reaches its furthest point from E (a tritone away) in the phrase "da labte süß dich selige Lust" (mm. 264–7) which begins in A-flat and moves through an augmented chord briefly back to a E minor triad on the word "Trank." His monologue ends in A-flat minor (m. 299). Brünnhilde tries to steer the music back towards E with a deceptive cadence from a D dominant 7th

chord in measure 327 (“die eig’ en Hälfte fern von dir halten, dass sonst sie ganz dir gehörte”). Wotan, however, tells her she must follow a new love with a cadence to A minor as their battle of wills continues.

At Brünnhilde’s “Du zeugtest ein edles Geschlecht” she makes progress towards convincing him. Wotan’s previous line ends on a B and her new strategy of persuasion, arguing that Sieglinde carries Siegfried, answers this in E. Its regular pizzicato string accompaniment gives it a sense of rhythmic direction, aria-like, as well. When Wotan interrupts her, telling her not to speak of the Wälsungen, she picks up and incorporates his melodic material in her second verse (“Sieglinde hegt die heiligste Frucht...”) This portion of their dialogue also demonstrates how at times the implied tonic of one phrase may be interrupted with another key area, as in the case of Brünnhilde’s reminder that she guarded the sword Wotan made for Siegmund (mm. 399–401). He interrupts her, taking it back to B minor for the entrance of the Annunciation of Fate motive.

Example 1.

The image shows a musical score for a scene from Wagner's Ring Cycle. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is the vocal line for Brunnhilde, marked 'BRÜNNHILDE: heimlich.' and 'p'. The lyrics are 'Sie wahret das Schwert, das du Siegmund schuf. Und das ich ihm in'. The second system is the piano accompaniment, starting with 'etwas bestimmt.' and 'pp', followed by 'cresc.', 'dolce.', and 'mollto cresc.'. The third system continues the piano accompaniment with 'Stücken schlug!' and 'Nicht streb,'. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, dynamics, and articulation marks.

Now the turning point comes when Brunnhilde learns of her punishment, as Louise Otto had pointed out. Although Wotan tells her he cannot change her fate, she never accepts this unconditionally. At the word “Weib” she reacts on a diminished 7th and moves into C minor. This time Wotan’s reaction (“Zu viel begehrt du”) answers over a G pedal and moves only towards F minor (iv), as opposed to his more radical harmonic interruption from before. Brunnhilde tells him he must grant her this one request with the same V/F minor, in what might be an attempt to answer Wotan in his own harmonic terms, but she quickly transitions back towards C minor. The Contract motive appearing over the word “Speer” outlines C minor with b2 and the B natural in the bass against Brunnhilde’s A flat suggests a B diminished 7th (that is, dominant function in C minor); however, Brunnhilde is too upset to remain in C minor and winds up with a surprise cadence to D major on “Preis.”

Example 2.

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and piano piece. The score is written in D major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system features a vocal line with the lyrics "Spur zer stö - re dein Speer: doch gieb, Grau -" and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *mf cresc.*, and *mf*. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics ". sa - mer, nicht der gräss - lichsten Schmach sie preis!" and the piano accompaniment. The piano part in the second system includes dynamic markings *ff* and *f*. The score concludes with a final cadence in D major.

This D major cadence heralds the entrance of the Valkyrie motive in its own relative major (originally it had appeared in B minor at the beginning of Act 3). D major may also serve as a corrective to the previous flat key areas during the argument. This point also marks a relatively long period of tonal stability as Brünnhilde continues with longer notes and more forceful tone, supported by full orchestra. The phrase pushes towards a cadence with a bassline firmly supporting D major, and Brünnhilde's high A is her highest note in the scene and represents a climactic moment.

Example 3.

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BRÜNNH

Zung; es fres - se ihr Zahn den Za -
 tongue, to bite with tooth the cra -

- - - gen, der frech sich wag - - - te dem
 - - - ven, who rash - - - ly dar - - - eth to

freis - li-chen Fel - - - sen zu nah'n!
 draw near the threat - - - en - ing rock!

(Wotan, überwältigt und tief ergriffen, wendet sich
 (Wotan, overcome and deeply moved, turns eager.)

This climactic moment is the point when Brünnhilde convinces Wotan to protect her with magic fire as she sleeps. Brünnhilde is supported with full orchestra on the downbeat, made all the more dramatic by the preceding rest in every instrumental voice. Brünnhilde has regained her Valkyrie power in stark contrast to the timid E-minor questions from the beginning of the scene. Perhaps at the same time, the Valkyrie motive provides Wotan

with a fond reminder of earlier times when Brünnhilde functioned as his other half. This dramatic cadence in D major, two-thirds of the way through, functions as the turning point in the scene as we soon realize that both Brünnhilde and Wotan have come to a resolution: she accepts her fate but he also is moved to help her. Wotan moves back into E minor/major and the scene comes to a conclusion; the tension is resolved.

The dramatic trajectory of this scene, supported by the musical structure, helps to support Otto's emphasis on the power of Brünnhilde over Wotan. The ebb and flow of harmonic stability, the instrumentation, and the proportions of the scene all indicate the importance of Brünnhilde's D major cadence as the final persuasive point that wins over Wotan. Even if some members of the audience at the *Ring* premiere in Leipzig were not familiar with feminist politics or especially attuned to the portrayal of female characters, they too might have been able to recognize the active role that Wagner ascribed to Brünnhilde, and that Louise Otto admired as progressive.

Influences of the Women's Movement in Music Criticism

Louise Otto published positive reviews of Wagner and his female characters and a strand of rhetoric in music criticism reflects other critics' awareness of the women's movement and its relation to Wagner. In different cases, we see critics discussing female performers and composers with a new sensitivity of gender roles brought about by the demand for women's rights. One important aspect of this reaction is the association of Wagnerism with the threat of the "emancipated woman," through various rhetorical strategies.

As the writings of Louise Otto and the articles in *Neue Bahnen* proved, there existed a connection between the politics of women's rights and the Wagnerian direction in music. We know that Wagner incorporated political philosophy heavily into his own

Weltanschauung, and his prose works helped raise the awareness of politics and music in the critical discourse more generally, despite some critics' attempts to divorce music from the political. However, musicological scholarship has thus far focused too much attention on Wagner's own writings and similar expressions of political discontent in music criticism, while largely ignoring the women's movement (*Frauenfrage*) and its impact on the understanding of Wagner reception and of musical sensuality more generally. As the contemporary Bachofen and others demonstrated, this period experienced not only a demand for women's rights in traditionally masculine arenas, it also saw an increased appreciation of things feminine, as part of both the emancipation movement and the reaction to it. For Wagner in particular, this meant that the belief that women were more susceptible to his music became so prevalent that some critics could poke fun at it. Reporting from Bayreuth in 1876, one anti-Wagnerian critic wrote, "many true Wagnerians admit such effects, and if you say to one that Wagner's music works in a unique way on the delicate sex and brings about hysterical states, he presses your hand and says, therein lies the greatness of the matter...."⁶⁷ For others, this association assumed a negative connotation because they viewed women's emancipation as a sign of cultural decline: just as Wagner's theories threatened the standards of society, so did the emancipated woman. Any music that spoke to women and incited them compounded this danger.

⁶⁷ "Mancher echte Wagnerianer gibt solche Wirkung selbst zu, und wenn ihr einem sagt, dass Wagners Musik besonders auf das zarte Geschlecht in einer ganz aparten Weise einwirkte und hysterische Zustände hervorbringe, so drückt er euch gerührt die Hand und sagt, darin liege gerade das Grosse und es habe damit seine vollkommene Richtigkeit." "Briefe eines Patronatsherrn, 19 August," *Kölnische Zeitung*, 23 August (1876).

One of the general results of the increased visibility of the women's movement was the rise of literature for an exclusively female audience. In the realm of music this included literature (about music) for women. General newspapers occasionally ran series of "letters to a female friend" that sometimes addressed an imaginary female reader. Perhaps the most famous example was Paul Lindau's short collection *Ueberflüssige Briefe an eine Freundin*, which went through numerous editions.⁶⁸ This is not to say that all authors who wished to take advantage of the growing female readership supported women's rights or particularly understood the relationship and contributions of some such as Louise Otto to the Wagnerian cause.

The book *Richard Wagner und seine Schöpfungen für die deutsche Frauenwelt* by Dr. Hermann Stohn offers one such example of a general introduction to Wagner's music dramas designed for women. Stohn's preface better reveals the perception of Wagner's *effect* on women, than an appreciation of how women could become (or rather, had already become) active participants in the Wagnerian movement:

It must truly be a great man whose ideas of reform can turn people against one another for decades, who is so loved and hated!—Now the German women's world stands outside of this battle of the spirits; but how could they be unmoved by his creations which express the most forceful dramatic power and passion cloaked in the most charming [*reizvoll*] of music, whose waves of sound shake the heart, befuddle the senses with their magic?⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Paul Lindau, *Ueberflüssige Briefe an eine Freundin. Gesammelte Feuilletons* (Breslau: S. Schottlaender, 1877).

⁶⁹ "Das muss doch wahrlich ein grosser Mann sein, um dessen reformatische Ideen seit Decennien die Geister auf einander platzen, der so geliebt und so gehasst wird! – Nun, die deutsche Frauenwelt steht ausserhalb dieser Geisterschlacht; aber wie könnte sie unempfindlich sein gegen Schöpfungen, in welchen die gewaltigste dramatische Kraft und Leidenschaft in dem reizvollsten Gewand einer Musik sprechen, deren Tonwellen herzerschütternd, sinnbethörend das Gemüt mit ihrem Zauber bestriicken?!" Hermann Stohn, *Richard Wagner und seine Schöpfungen für die deutsche Frauenwelt*, 3 ed. (Leipzig: Verlag von Gebrüder Senf, 1882), i.

Other critics had complained that Wagner's music exerted a powerful magical effect on listeners (Nietzsche would be the most famous contemporary proponent of this viewpoint in his polemic *Der Fall Wagner*), but Stohn articulates this notion with the common sex-specific twist that women are more susceptible to Wagner's "magic" than men. However, his subsequent discussion of Wagner's works offers no further evidence that the book is designed for a female audience; instead he focuses on explaining the plots and describing the main characters. However, the book's quick succession of editions (three in the first six months of publication) suggests that the female market especially for Wagner had rapidly increased in the 1870s and early 1880s.

In other ways, music critics displayed their awareness of the women's movement, and some of them supported the idea of women's advancement more vocally than others. Wilhelm Tappert, a Wagner supporter in Berlin, often reported on the musical activities and their cultural meaning for the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, among other music journals. In this particular "Letter from Berlin," Tappert discusses female composers in the context of the general movement.

Noteworthy, that in our times, where the motto "work abilities of the female sex" is in every mouth, there are so many women active in a field in which hardly lends itself to particular work, namely, in composition. Female composers were rare until recently, though people of average memory could recall the few names by heart . . .

⁷⁰

⁷⁰ "Merkwürdig, dass in unseren Tagen, wo die Schlagworte 'Erwerbsfähigkeiten des weiblichen Geschlechts' in aller Mund ist, so viele Frauenhände auf einem Gebiete thätig sind, auf welchem sich schwerlich etwas Besonderes erwerbslässt, nämlich in der Composition. Die Componistinnen waren bis lang selten, auch Leute von mittelmässigstem Gedächtniss konnten sich die wenigen Namen: Corona Schröter, Johanna Kink[?], MatthLieu[?], Clara Schumann, Emilie Meyer und Hedwig He[r????] auswendig behalten..."Tappert, "Briefe aus Berlin," *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 2 (1871), 326.

He goes on to question why women do not conduct orchestras, since they are indeed capable of doing man's work. Tappert does not discuss education as a main obstacle in this goal, as did some women commentators, but he seems relatively supportive of the endeavors of women in music.

Wilhelm Langhans, a music pedagogue in Berlin and author of a popular history of music of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, wrote a book on improvement of the musical judgment through education. In it he discussed women's ability to play numerous instruments, especially in terms associated with the *Frauenfrage*:

Also for the feminine sex, which since the disappearance of the harp has become the slave of the piano, I demand complete emancipation in the instrumental realm. That so commonly heard opinion, that the grace of the female appearance is compromised through the violin, should be entirely disproved since a [Theresa] Millanollo, a [Wilma Norma-] Neruda has proved the opposite *ad oculos*. We also need only use the accomplishments of these two artists to disprove the objection that the sentimental-leaning feminine nature offers not enough counterbalance to the likewise predominantly sentimental character of string instruments. And he who considers this evidence not enough, who sees in them only exceptions that prove the rule, should turn, for example, to Paris, where the dissolution of musical prejudices has advanced farther than with us, and he will learn from the multitude of violin-playing women that his objections were unfounded. Even the many accomplishments of lesser value than the aforementioned prove the correctness of my opinion about the emancipation of the feminine sex in this respect.⁷¹

⁷¹ "Auch für das weibliche Geschlecht, welches seit dem gänzlichen Verschwinden der Harfe dem Clavier verfallen ist, verlange ich vollständige Emancipirung auf instrumentalem Gebiet. Das so häufig ausgesprochene Bedenkken, die Grazie der weiblichen Erscheinung werde durch die Violine compromittirt, dürfte gänzlich unhaltbar geworden sein, seitdem uns eine [Theresa] Millanollo, eine [Wilma Norma-] Neruda das Gegentheil *ad oculos* demonstirt haben; auch brauchen wir uns nur auf die Leistungen dieser beiden Künstlerinnen zu stützen, um den Einwand zu widerlegen, die besonders zum Sentimentalen neigende weibliche Natur biete kein genügende Gegengewicht gegen den ebenfalls vorwiegend sentimentalen Charakter des Streichinstruments. Und wem der Hinweis auf jene Spitzen des Violinspiels ungenügend erscheint, wer in ihnen nur eine Ausnahme sieht, welche die hergebrachte Regel bestätigt, der wende sich z. B. nach Paris, wo die Beseitigung musikalischer Vorurtheile weiter fortgeschritten ist als bei uns, und er wird an eine Mengen von violinspielenden Damen die Erfahrung machen, dass seine Bedenken ungegründet waren, dass vielmehr auch Leistungen von geringerem Werth als die erwähnten für die Berechtigung meines Antrags auf Emancipirung des weiblichen Geschlechts nach dieser Seite hin, den Beleg liefern." Dr. W. Langhans, *Das musikalische Urtheil und seine Ausbildung durch die Erziehung* (Berlin: Verlag von Robert Oppenheim, 1872), 34.

Langhans challenges his readers with provocative rhetoric to support the “emancipation” of women from the piano, which involves the dissolution of a “prejudice.” He saves the worst blow for last, when he makes the argument that Paris is more advanced than Germany. In 1872, after the Franco-Prussian War, when most music criticism reached a highpoint of Francophobic nationalism—a point on which even Brahms and Wagner could agree—this represents a strident call for “progress.”

Negative Reaction

Music criticism did not remain immune to the spreading fear that if women began to assume traditionally masculine roles, men would assume feminine roles. For example, one cartoon in a general newspaper used a musical scenario to parody the women’s movement: it showed a man playing a harp while a woman sat back and listened.⁷² This could be taken as a direct response to music teachers such as Langhans who demanded that women be “emancipated” from instruments traditionally cultivated only by women. The flip side of his demand might be taken as an invitation for men to take up those traditional instruments. Taken more generally it might suggest that music had already advanced the deterioration of gender roles more so than had occurred in other fields.

Of course in some circles, generally anti-Wagnerian ones, the demand for women’s rights could also be understood as a concomitant threat to Wagner’s own morally questionable characters and plots, as well as his rule-breaking music. This also complicates the thesis that Wagner’s music threatened certain conservatives because of

⁷² Susanne Schötz, “Kaufleute, Kommiss und die Emanzipation der Frau: Diskussionen im Leipziger Handelsstand 1865/1866,” in *Politische Denkerin und Wegbereiterin der deutschen Frauenbewegung*, ed. Ilse Nagelschmidt, Johanna Ludwig (Dresden: Sächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1996), 107–17.

any “feminine,” and by extension, sexual qualities, and I have argued already that threatening musical sensuality was not considered the exclusive domain of either men or women. Rather, some critics perceived a direct political link between Wagner’s work and the *Frauenfrage*, as seen in certain articles explicitly relating the threat of Wagnerism with the threat of the women’s movement. Both movements made heavy use of “progressive” rhetoric, as demonstrated by the very visible work of Louise Otto and many of the active Wagnerians also moved in liberal circles that encouraged the support of women’s rights, as did the Dohms in Berlin. Likewise, negative reactions to the women’s movement in general and to Wagner in the musical realm employed similar rhetoric; one critic commented that women who wished to transcend their natural roles as wives and mothers were “overexcited fools who belong in a center for nervous disorders”—a sentiment that echoes the charges of illness and degeneracy lodged against Wagner’s works.⁷³

One anonymous critic in the *Kölnische Zeitung*, which was known in the music world for its conservative opinions, having had Ludwig Bischoff, Franz Gehring, and Ferdinand Hiller as regularly contributing music critics, described the New German music festival in 1872 in Kassel. After providing a cynical and detailed description of Raff’s *Wald-Symphonie*, the critic lists other pieces performed at the festival. Then in discussing the general problems of the New German School, the author offered this analogy:

⁷³ “Diejenigen “Vorkämpferinnen” ihres Geschlechtes, welche trotz dieses Vetos der Natur die radicale Umwandlung aller bestehenden Verhältnisse predigen, indem sie der Frau dieselben Rechte und Pflichten erringen wollen, wie sie uns Männern zustehen (nur etwa den Kriegsdienst, nicht aber die politische Carriere ausgenommen), sind, um es unhöflich, aber ehrlich auszudrücken, überspannte Närrinnen, welche in eine Anstalt für Nervenkranken gehören und keineswegs in die Literatur...” Carl Emil Frazos, “Fräulein Doctor,” *Breslauer Zeitung*, 2 April (1880).

One comes to such aberrations of judgment and taste when one runs with the pharisaical and misunderstood motto: “The music [is] no longer empty entertainment” and makes the noble woman into an emancipated one, into a learned Blue Stocking with big colored spectacles, thus robbing her of the most genial aspects of her sex and allowing the feminine weaknesses to be fully displayed. Thanks to the creator of “Artwork of the Future” this confused concept is elevated into a system and at the same time has brought about a second aberration that stands in droll opposition to the expected intellectual/spiritual relevance of music.⁷⁴

Four years later, a Wagner supporter wrote a series of letters from the Bayreuth premiere of the *Ring*, and while his overall impression of the work was positive, he disagreed with Wagner’s portrayal of the two romantic couples in *Walküre* (Wotan-Fricka and Siegmund-Sieglinde). Like many, he objected to Wagner’s romanticization of incest, but more interesting is his interpretation that modern “marriage-politics” replaces “fate” as a mover of the plot.

In today’s world after Wagner’s theory, politics takes the place of ancient fate; here is the most agonizing marriage-politics; the nagging of the obstinate rights-advocating woman is what compels the god of gods to remove his protective hand from the pair whose deed he completely supported from the spontaneity of inner force; but she meanwhile fills him with such fury that he seals the vengeful [*des Giels voll*] downfall of himself and the entire world order.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ “Zu solchen Verirrungen des Urtheils und des Geschmacks kommt man, wenn man mit dem pharisäischen und missverstandenen Motto: “Die Musik keine eitle Gefallskunst mehr!” diese edle Dame zur Emancipirten, zum gelehrten Blaustrumpfe mit grosser gefärbter Brille macht und sie der liebenswertesten Eigenschaften ihres Geschlechtes beraubt, wobei die weiblichen Schwächen um so fühlbarer und ohne gleiches anmuthige Relief hervortreten. Es ist das Verdienst des Schöpfers des “Kunstwerkes der Zukunft”, diese Verwirrung der Begriffe zum System erhoben und zugleich eine zweite, mit dieser der Musik zugemutheten geistigen Bedeutsamkeit im drolligen Gegensatze stehenden Verirrung angebahnt zu haben.” “Ein Musikfest der neudeutschen Schule. Gefeierte zu Kassel vom Allgemeinen Deutschen Musikverein am 27, 28, 29, 30 Juni,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, July 4 (1872).

⁷⁵ “Vertritt nach Wagner’s Theorie in der heutigen Welt die Politik die Stelle des antiken Fatums, so ist es hier die qualvollste Ehestandspolitik, das Keifen des starrsinnig auf ihre Rechte pochenden Weibes, was den Gott der Götter bewegt, die schützende Hand von dem Paare zurückzuziehen, dessen That er aus der Unwillkür des inneren Triebes vollkommen billigt, während sie ihn doch zugleich mit solchem Grimm erfüllt, dass er des Giels voll seinen eigenen und dieser ganzen Weltordnung Untergang beschliesst.” “Briefe eines baireuther Patronatsherrn. V,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, 18 August (1876).

Not only does the author complain that Wagner's political positions are coming to play in a mythological music-drama in which fate should be the prime mover of action, he also draws women's rights activists into the picture, suggesting that Wagner either supports the women's rights or is playing to an audience that finds such "marriage politics" acceptable. Fricka might be seen as a portrait of the stereotypical nagging wife, but the phrase "auf ihre Rechte pochenden Weib," constitutes a rhetorical flourish that specifically singles out the activists who worked for women's advancement. Ironically, Fricka says nothing of modern rights for women in her dialogue with Wotan in Act 2, scene II of *Die Walküre*; rather, her arguments are based on the premise that marriage should not be violated by adultery or incest – a traditional view that most middle class men and women would have agreed upon. It was for this very reason that Louise Otto admired Fricka, and one might offer that perhaps it was the tone or force of Fricka's arguments that so irritated the critic in question. That the critic would relate Fricka to the rights activists suggests further stereotype of the strong woman as negative and threatening. That this should take place "in today's world, after Wagner's theory" once again reinforces the notion, held by some contemporaries, that Wagner and the emancipated woman presented a homologous threat to the social order.

A different interpretation of the Wagner-woman threat came from the pen of Viennese parodist Daniel Spitzer, who had by 1876 already made a name for himself in publishing (with snide commentary) the personal letters of Wagner to his milliner. Spitzer wrote for the *Neue Freie Presse*, known as Hanslick territory, which had produced one of the more vitriolic responses to the *Ring* premiere in 1876. In a parody

featuring the “Jewish Wagner supporter,” and thereby highlighting yet another uncomfortable cultural trope, Spitzer also brings to the foreground the nature of the Wagnerian heroine:

“Now in my head only giants with clubs go around, and dwarves with humps bigger than they are, and the useless [*nutznixigen*] Rheinmaidens and Venus and an entire menagerie of dragons and swans and little forest birds and horses...”
“It appears that you made a bad impression on the major’s widow with your heroic charmer?” [*Heldenreizerin*]
“Heroic charmer? Ach, until now I have only regarded her as a charming voice. At least I have always loved her only platonically, because she comes closest to my ideal of a woman. Just as Siegfried’s first love is the giant-woman Brünnhilde, so was my first love as a youth the two caryatids in front of the Pallavinci palace at the Josefsplatz. Oh, what blessed moments did I spend in front of this giant body!
And I was so romantic already in my youth that on one bright moonlit night, there with the four women with their giant lips laughing at me seductively, I pulled out a pencil and wrote my name on the body in order to possess one symbolically. No, I don’t like these bric-à-brac women whom one has to worry about breaking in pieces when one embraces them.” And with that he stretched out his thin, childlike arms...⁷⁶

Spitzer is drawing a subtle parallel: as unnatural as it is for a Jew to support Wagner in the wake of the infamous *Das Judenthum* pamphlet, so is it wrong for the man with thin, childlike arms to fall in love with the giant woman. Spitzer may also be playing upon the

⁷⁶ “In meinem Kopf gehen nur mehr Riesen mit Keulen herum und Zwerge mit Buckeln, die grösser sind als sie, und die nutznixigen Rheintöchter und die Venus und eine ganz Menagerie von Drachen und Schwänen und Waldvögelein und Pferden...
'Es scheint, dass du mit deiner 'Heldenreizerin', um mit Wotan zu sprechen, der Majorswitwe, trübe Erfahrungen gemacht hast.'
'Heldenreizerin? Ach, bis jetzt habe ich sie nur als Stimmungsreizerin betrachtet. Uebrigens habe ich sie immer nur platonisch geliebt, denn sie kommt meinem Ideal eines Weibes am nächsten. Du weisst ja, dass ich nur die herkulischen Weiber wahrhaft lieben kann. So wie Siegfrieds erste Liebe das Riesenweib Brünnhilde ist, so war ich als Jüngling zum erstenmal in die beiden Doppelkaryatiden vor dem Palais Pallavicini auf dem Josefsplatz verliebt. O welche seligen Augenblicke habe ich vor ihren riesigen Leibern zugebracht!
Und so romantisch war ich schon in meiner Jugend, dass ich einstens in einer mond hellen Nacht, da mich die vier Weiber mit ihren Riesenlippen wieder verführisch anlachten, einen Bleistift heraszog und meinen Name ihnen auf den Leib schrieb, um so symbolisch von ihnen Besitz zu ergreifen. Nein ich mag nicht diese Nippes-Weiber, die man zu zerbrechen fürchten muss, wenn man sie umarmt.' Und dabei streckte er seine dünnen Kinderarme aus...” Daniel Spitzer, *Verliebte Wagnerianer*, 3rd ed. (Vienna: Verlag von Julius Klinkhardt, 1880), 108.

fears of the *Mannweib*, the catch-all concept for the masculine woman, who might threaten society through her emancipated actions as well as her apparent subversion of sexual normativity. As seen above, some critics explicitly associated Wagnerian female characters with women who demanded their rights, and in this light, Spitzer may be pointing out the reversal of gender expectations for godly giant-like women in the *Ring*. Through their larger-than-life physical presence, these women constitute a threat, and the parodist Spitzer can only place them aside the scrawny Jewish Wagnerite.⁷⁷

That conservative critics might deride Wagner's female characters as women's rights supporters or "giant-women" should not come as a surprise given the association of Wagner with other groups of socially threatening groups. A trend in 1870s Wagner reception posits that many supporters of Wagner belong to the younger generation, who might be social misfits, especially those "youths with the long, Music-of-the-Future hair."⁷⁸ We might understand how the long hair of younger male Wagnerites could prove equally unsettling to those conservative critics as any masculine women did; in both cases the people are threatening established norms of appearance and behavior, just as Wagnerian homosexuals would in the 1880s and 1890s. The struggle for and against Wagner, with its long-haired youths and its vocal women's rights supporters, might be

⁷⁷ For discussion of cultural associations of Jewishness with physical abnormalities in the context of Wagner's work, see Marc Weiner, *Wagner and the anti-Semitic Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

⁷⁸ "(die Jünglinge mit den langen Zukunftsmusikhaaren)...." Karl Gutzkow, "An eine deutsche Frau in Paris, IV," *Die Gartenlaube* 20 (1869), 311.

interpreted as a generational problem, and indeed one critic complained that the anti-Wagnerites had one thing in common: old age.⁷⁹

Ironically, however, both the women's rights movement as well as the fashionable long hair began around the time of the revolutions in 1848, so that by 1876 wearing long hair might be a retro-fashion statement with revolutionary implications (not unlike the superannuated hippies of today). Certainly by the early 1850s, newspaper critics could maintain that long hair had already "long been a sign of freedom."⁸⁰ Perhaps this sign of freedom, or the conscious presentation of such a sign, is what so annoyed critics who preferred music to be apolitical and well-grounded within a classical heritage. That Wagner should bring his contemporary "marriage politics" into his music-dramas, which were attended by emotive females who demanded recognition for women's work and education, constituted only another sign of the decline of modern society.

⁷⁹ See "Das Philisterthum in der Musik. Ein Capitel über Anti-Wagnerianer," *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 3 (1872), 183.

⁸⁰ "Lange Haare waren schon von Alters ein Bild der Freiheit." "Morgengedanken beim Toiletmachen," *Münchener Punsch* (1851), 58.

Epilogue

For many critics and music lovers, the competing currents of sensuality and purity helped produce a sometimes polemical rhetoric in the music criticism of this period. The apparent cultural threat of Wagner and his works inspired many critics and listeners to uphold musical and moral purity as an antidote while they simultaneously attacked Wagner for over sensuality. Many of the modes of this criticism foreshadowed thinking that flourished after Wagner's death in 1883, as cultural debates over the degeneration of art and the development of rational science brought music criticism to a fever pitch.

I hope to have shown how Wagner derived many of his revolutionary ideas about the sensuality of art and its effects from Feuerbach, thus complicating our notion of Wagnerian sensuality as derived mainly from Schopenhauer. In turn, many critics responded to what they perceived as dangerous in many aspects of Wagner's works, with the underlying thread offering a way of uniting critical tropes of Wagner as seductive, magnetic, and unhealthy. At the same time, the open support of some women's rights activists for Wagner also offered critics a way to link the threat of that cultural movement with the threat of Wagner.

Notions of musical purity often functioned in a negative relation to sensuality; that is, musical purity might be seen as a *lack* of sensuality, either through more tonal contrapuntal tropes borrowed from early music or less colorful orchestrations. Pure music offered many of its supporters a moral antidote to what would be known more and more

as “degenerate” music as the century progressed. Early nineteenth-century notions of a healthy, pure church music combined with later applied to instrumental music, and end with the Wagnerian counterattack, which devalued pure music in favor of a more sensual artform. Understanding musical aesthetics in terms of “pure” music rather than “absolute” helps to cut across generic boundaries and capture the moral overtones with which the rhetoric was imbued.

Extreme rhetoric reveals deep-seated cultural beliefs and provides a lens through which to examine the reception of many composers in conjunction with cultural trends. In light of the Wagnerian imperative for sensuality, rhetoric depicting Brahms as ascetic and chaste calls into question earlier notions of musical purity while complicated gendered norms of the time. Future research might investigate the roles and reception of other composers such as Franz Liszt, Anton Bruckner, and the next generation including Gustav Mahler, Hans Rott, and Richard Strauss. The framework of sensuality and purity may provide fresh insight into cultural and aesthetic problems beyond the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.

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