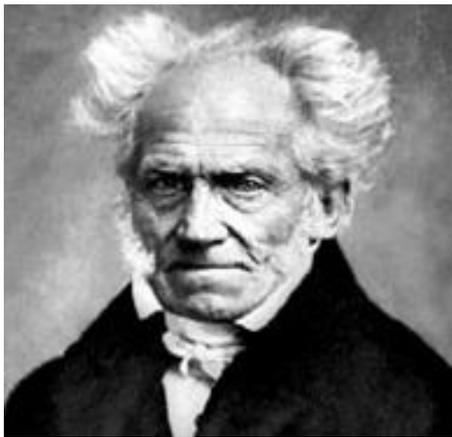


Wagner and Schopenhauer
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Talk given to the Manchester Wagner Society
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Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) and Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883)

This is a discussion of the relationship between two remarkable men who both significantly influenced European culture in the mid-nineteenth century. Schopenhauer was a philosopher but with a strong interest in music. Wagner was of course, principally a composer, but he was also a thinker as well.



For most of us, and above all else, it is Wagner's music that enthral and delights us. Without the music he would not be much remembered today as Thomas Mann has said.

But Wagner was unique among composers in publishing vast quantities of prose expounding his own ideas, philosophy and opinions. We have Cosima's Diaries and the testimony of contemporaries as evidence of the wide range of his intellectual interests. Bryan Magee (1983, p326) has claimed '...he was the only composer of the very front rank who was in any significant sense an intellectual.'

In this talk we explore one aspect of Wagner as an intellectual - his discovery of, enthusiasm for and indeed appropriation of, the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer.

Many thousands of words have been written on this topic, so tonight is just a glimpse into a very rich, and still actively debated, theme in Wagnerian scholarship.

However, you'll be glad to know that we will not be ignoring his music. Through some musical extracts we will explore how far Schopenhauer's influence can be traced in Wagner's operas.

September 1854 - the discovery of Schopenhauer

Wagner discovered the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer in September 1854, when he had just completed the composition of Rheingold and Act 1 of Walkure.

According to his own testimony the discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy transformed his thinking.

I had finished a fair copy of the Rheingold score by the 26th of September (1854). In the peaceful quietness of my house at this time I first came across a book which was destined to be of great importance to me. This was Arthur Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung What fascinated me so enormously about Schopenhauer's work was not only its extraordinary fate, but the clearness and manly precision with which the most difficult metaphysical problems were treated. (Mein Leben.p410)

A little later while engaged on the orchestration of Walkure, he refers to 'my favourite reading..the study of Schopenhauer.' (p426). Cosima comments in Jan 1870 'Time and again R harks back to the greatness of Schopenhauer' (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p184). Cosima's diaries testify to the numerous evenings spent reading Schopenhauer and of Wagner haranguing visitors about Schopenhauer's philosophy, bemoaning the fact that others didn't know about 'S' (e.g. Darwin) and claiming that other people's ideas had been anticipated by Schopenhauer.

Wagner seems to have regarded Schopenhauer's work as a definitive answer to philosophical questions. When Cosima asked Wagner whether he thought there was much still to be discovered in the philosophical field after Schopenhauer, Wagner replied 'To be described, much; to be discovered, I think not.' (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p116).

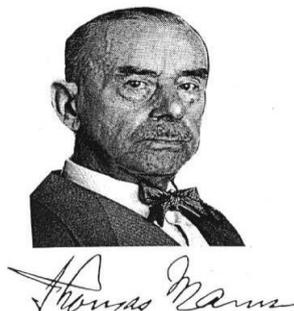
The enthusiasm in the Wagner household for Schopenhauer is captured by the great excitement that occurred on Jan 13 1875 when the portrait of Schopenhauer by Lenbach arrived (see image on p.1),

Arrival of the picture of S., in which Lenbach has wrought a real miracle! He saw S. once in Frankfurt, without knowing who he was: when he was later shown a photograph of the great man, he recognised the face, which had made an impression on him, and now he has reproduced its character in a unique way. Resemblance to R.: chin, the relationship of the head to the face, one eye half closed, the other wide open, the sorrowfully acute gaze which is peculiar to all geniuses. But one also finds S.'s whole character in it: his energy, purity, even the methodical business sense of the merchant's son. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p818)

But it wasn't just Wagner who judged Schopenhauer's influence to have been critical. Others from Nietzsche onwards have agreed that Schopenhauer's influence was hugely significant, though the extent and the nature of the influence remains controversial. Bryan Magee is one of the principal advocates of Schopenhauer's influence (Magee, 1983, 2000), while Barry Millington is inclined to think Magee overstates the influence of Schopenhauer (Millington, 2006).

Thomas Mann thought Schopenhauer's impact on Wagner was enormous.

His (Wagner's) acquaintance with the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer was the great event in Wagner's life. No earlier intellectual contact, such as that with Feuerbach, approaches it in personal and historical significance. It meant to him the deepest consolation, the highest self-confirmation, it meant release of mind and spirit. it was utterly and entirely the right thing. There was no doubt that it freed his music from bondage and gave it courage to be itself. (Mann, 1947, p330 also Quoted by Magee (2000 p133).



In the light of Thomas Mann's claims, this paper seeks to address three questions:

1. Who was Schopenhauer and what did he say?
2. What was it in the writings Schopenhauer that Wagner found so attractive and so interesting?
3. How did Schopenhauer's philosophy influence Wagner's work?

Schopenhauer

So let's start by saying something about Schopenhauer - the man, his life and character.

Danzig now Gdansk



Arthur Schopenhauer was born on 22 February 1788 in Danzig, now known as Gdansk, on the Baltic coast. Danzig was part of the Hanseatic League, a trading and ship-building centre which had periods of German control though it is now in Poland. His father was a successful businessman of Dutch origins, with ambitions for his son to continue in his business.

Young Schopenhauer



The young Schopenhauer, travelled widely and was educated in several schools including a boarding school in England, at Wimbledon, (which he hated) but it was there he learned to play the flute. He was an accomplished musician and continued to play the flute all his life. He also learned excellent English.

Even as a youth, he was independent minded, assertive, and socially at ease. However, he was given to irrational fears and terrors and was a hypochondriac (some similarities there with Wagner?).

Joanna Schopenhauer



His mother Joanna, was lively and sociable with literary ambitions but she never had a close motherly relationship with her son, while his father, Heinrich, the businessman, who was 20 years older than his wife, died in 1805 when Arthur was only 17, possibly from suicide.

It's arguable that Arthur's notorious pessimism may be explained by the combination of maternal

deprivation and the early death of his father.

The independently minded Johanna was now free to embark on her own career, and moved to Weimar in 1806, where she established an artistic and intellectual salon frequented by many of the luminaries of the day. Arthur benefited from some of the relationships he established in this circle, notably with Goethe, and with the oriental scholar Friedrich Majer, who gave him a life-long interest in Indian thought.



Goethe's endorsement of Joanna's writings was a major factor behind Johanna's quick social success: Johanna was the first upper-class woman in Weimar society to open the doors of her house to Goethe's lower class wife, and in gratitude, Goethe was commonly seen at her parties, which ensured their popularity.

Schopenhauer as a young man



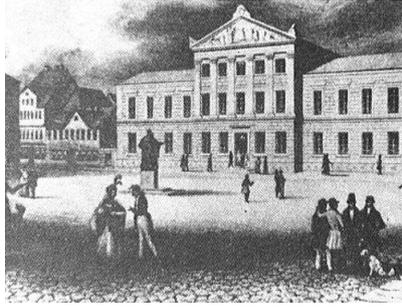
After his father's death, Arthur Schopenhauer didn't move to Weimar along with his mother. He remained in Hamburg because of a promise he had made to his father to continue to learn and work in his father's business.

Johanna had a difficult relationship with her son. When he did move to Weimar in 1809, his mother did not want Arthur to live with her. Many of the surviving letters she wrote to him attest to her exasperation towards Arthur's pessimistic outlook on life, his haughtiness, and assertive manners.

Arthur's relationship with his mother became increasingly stormy, and in 1814 she declared that she never wanted to see him again, and she didn't, though they corresponded sporadically by letter.

Gottingen

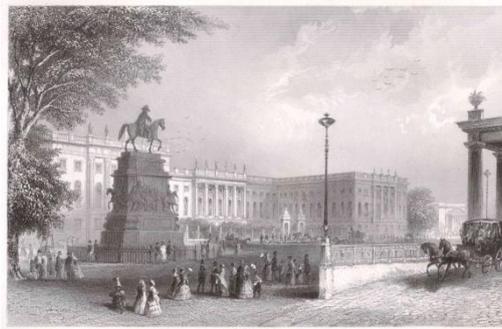
He studied philosophy at Gottingen, and wrote his doctoral dissertation in 1813, grandly entitled 'The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason', which established the main tenets of his



philosophy which he never changed in any major way. *The World as Will and Representation* was first published in 1818 (when Arthur was still only 30) but it received little attention at the time.

Berlin

In 1820 he was awarded the right to lecture at the University in Berlin where Hegel's more optimistic vision of historical progress was dominant.



But he chose to speak at the same time as Hegel. Two hundred attended the lecture of the professor, who was at the peak of his career, and the unknown Schopenhauer was left with a pitiful few (Janaway, 2002).

Schopenhauer developed a life-long contempt for professional philosophers who, in his view, put earning a living over searching for the truth. He particularly disliked Hegel,



whom he regarded as a charlatan deceiving everybody by writing in a deliberately obscure way. Schopenhauer had sufficient private income not to be beholden to any authority and he determined that he would remain outside the universities, to develop his ideas independently and (unlike Hegel) to write as clearly as he could.

Schopenhauer's key ideas

So let us look at the central ideas in Schopenhauer's philosophy that he first developed and published at this time (1818).

We may broadly divide the history of Western philosophy between those who have thought that what we see and experience is the source of our knowledge of the world (realists, positivists, empiricists) and those who have been more impressed by the limitations of experience and who

have posited a reality which is not knowable through our senses - idealists such as Plato and Kant.

So on the positivist or realist view (and here I am simplifying enormously) when we see, say, a chair we see what exists and what exists is independent of our seeing it. The chair is the object of our perception, but its reality is not dependent on our seeing it.

Idealists on the other hand will point out that everything we know about any chair must come through our sense perceptions (even if aided by microscopes or whatever) and that how the chair appears will depend on who sees it, where from, in what light conditions and so on. Furthermore, the world presents itself very differently to non-humans, say an ant or spider, a bat or a jellyfish. So the reality as we (human beings) know it is a creation of our (human) minds, and if there is an independent reality then we cannot know it.

Schopenhauer falls into the latter group of so-called 'Idealists'. His starting point is Kant and the fundamental duality of what we experience as phenomena (representative ideas) and 'things-in themselves' - the noumenal world, what Schopenhauer calls 'Will' (which is metaphysical and indivisible).

The fundamental idea is that all possible experience must come to us through our faculties and through our senses, and therefore what we experience depends as much on our capacities as on what is actually out there. So all experience is subject dependent.

The whole of this world is only object in relation to subject, perception of the perceiver, in a word representation. (W1, 3)

It is our intellect that by means of its own forms, space and time, and causality, apprehends as object the act of will, in itself metaphysical and indivisible... (W2, 328)

We cannot know an object in and of itself; we can only know an object through our experience of it. So there is the world of appearances (that which we experience) and the world as it actually is, which is unknowable - though we can have glimpses of it through careful analysis of the world of experience and, as we shall see, through music.

The world beyond human perceptions exists outside space and time and causality (which are creations of our intellect) - so it is unified, timeless and without purpose, that is you can't distinguish one thing from another. It is only in the world of phenomena where there is 'individuation' (as Schopenhauer calls it). The plurality of things only applies where there is space and time which are constructs of our minds. So outside our experience the world is one and undifferentiated. This is an idea which Schopenhauer later discovered was central to Buddhist thought.

He also thinks that everything is determined by what has preceded it. This is the principle of sufficient reason.

No truth is more certain than this namely that all that happens be it great or small happens with complete necessity. (W2, 319)

The Will

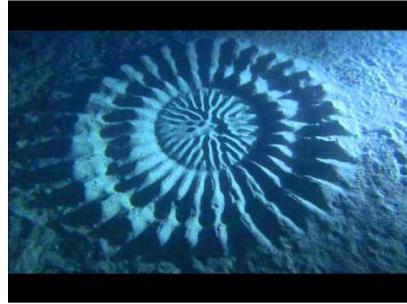
Schopenhauer thought that we can get some insight into the nature of the underlying reality of the world by examining our own experience. Unlike when we observe everything and everyone else, (including our own physical existence which is as much external to us as anything else), in our own case we are aware that there is an inner drive, or motivation, of which we are mostly only dimly aware - or even (here he precedes Freud) is unconscious, unknown to us.

Life is driven by desiring of objects or feelings, and the satisfactions of those desires and it is this which he calls 'Will'. Schopenhauer describes the beginning of willing as follows: "a blind impulse, an obscure, dull urge, remote from all direct knowableness". The will is described as 'devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge' (W1, 275).

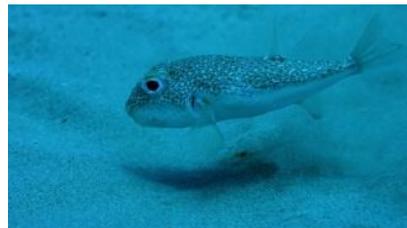
In inorganic nature the will appears as natural forces, what we might call energy today, driving the tides, the weather, volcanic eruptions and so on. Matter as energy is more familiar today than it was in Schopenhauer's time - so in a sense he anticipated modern physics.

In the animal world it drives behaviour, completely unconsciously, it is the striving of all living things - will-to-life - to exist, to survive, to reproduce and continue the species. In modern terms this is akin to Dawkins' selfish gene - emphasising that it is the survival of the species which drives the behaviour of the individual (Dawkins, 1976).

Let me give a simple example (Schopenhauer gives many examples from the natural world, but not this one). These sand circles are found on the sea bed off the coast of Japan.

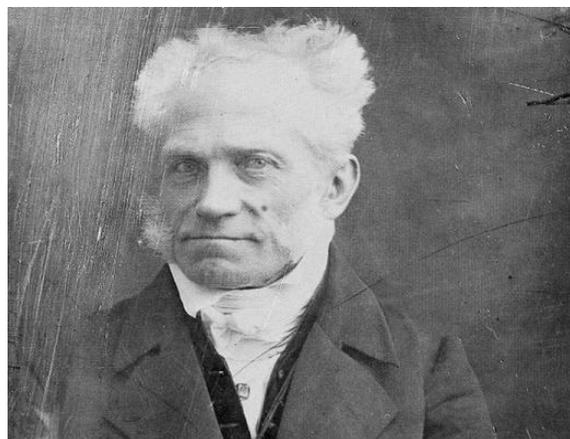


These beautiful symmetrical circles are the product of the pains-taking work of this creature - a male puffer fish.



Although the fish cannot give an account of his actions, he is driven to produce these circles because, only when he has completed a perfect circle, will the female puffer fish swim to the centre and be available for reproduction. This is just one example of the Will objectified in a particular way and driving, unconsciously, the behaviour of this creature. All creatures, including 'man' are equally driven by the 'Will'.

Schopenhauer achieves fame late in his life



We may jump forward now because, after a period of travel, and suffering illness and depression, Schopenhauer led a quiet life in Frankfurt, balanced between writing and recreation, which for him

was going to the theatre and the opera, walking, playing the flute, dining out, and reading The Times in the town's library.

It was his late work, Parerga and Paralipomena, (Appendices and Omissions) published in 1851, which was reviewed favourably first in England, that led to Schopenhauer's becoming well known. These were writings that were more opinionated than philosophical - for example there's a chapter on women which to modern sensibilities is extremely misogynistic (we will come back to that). There was demand for new editions of his writings, and he even became a topic for German university courses. He had republished The World as Will and Representation in 1844, adding a second volume elaborating his ideas. It was during this late flowering of Schopenhauer's reputation, when he became popular in intellectual circles, when Wagner came to know about him.

He died in Frankfurt on 21 September 1860.

Wagner did go to Frankfurt in 1860, while Schopenhauer was alive, but he didn't visit him. For once it seems Wagner was overwhelmed by the reputation of the great man. He says in Mein Leiben

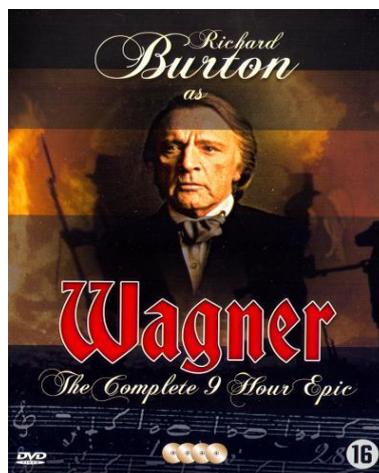
"a singular timidity restrained me from calling upon him...As with so many other things in my life, I again deferred one of its most precious opportunities until that fervently expected 'more favourable season... But, alas! he died that very year, a fact which led me to many bitter reflections on the uncertainty of fate" (Mein Leiben pp500-01).

Wagner in Zurich



Let us return to 1854, the year that Wagner discovered Schopenhauer.

The background is portrayed in this **first extract from Tony Palmer's film of Wagner's life.**



Here we see Wagner in exile, suffering from various illnesses, seeking inspiration from mountain walking, somewhat depressed, estranged from Minna, and with huge financial problems.

In his reading of the *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Wagner came face to face with the uncompromising pessimism of Schopenhauer. Wagner later described his outlook prior to reading Schopenhauer as 'a Hellenistically optimistic world'. But Schopenhauer has these grim words about optimism:

Optimism is a pernicious doctrine for it presents life as a desirable state and man's happiness as its aim and object...it is far more correct to regard work, privation, misery, and suffering, crowned by death, as the aim and object of our life (as is done by Brahmanism and Buddhism, and also by genuine Christianity). (W2, 584)

Suffering

Schopenhauer's view is that the unconscious striving to live and to reproduce, driven by the Will, makes the world necessarily a place of suffering. It leads to a world in which every animal's survival is at the expense of another's. Predators attack their prey, lions rip apart antelope, older male lions eat the lion cubs of a rival male, female spiders eat the male after insemination, sharks attack whale calves, polar bears devour seals who in their turn eat fish and so on.



According to Magee, the world, as described by Schopenhauer, is an 'appalling nightmare' (Magee, 1987).

The will to life applies as much to man as to animals. 'As a material organism, each individual is driven by the will to life: striving for one's own ends is fundamental to each individual.' (Janaway, 2002, p98)

Man is driven by egoism....

The chief and fundamental incentive in man as in the animal is egoism, that is, the craving for existence and well-being. (B, 131).

And it is this egoism, the unconscious driving of the will to dominate which leads to conflict, violence, wars and human suffering.

All willing springs from lack, from deficiency, and thus from suffering. Fulfillment brings this to an end: yet for one wish that is fulfilled there remain at least ten that are denied. Further, desiring lasts a long time, demands and requests go on to infinity: fulfillment is short and meted out sparingly... No attained object of willing can give a satisfaction that lasts and no longer declines; but it is always like the alms thrown to a beggar, which relieves him today so that his misery may be prolonged till tomorrow.(W1 p196)

Thus we see that for Schopenhauer, his pessimism derives from his metaphysics, and is not just a reflection of his personality.

Renunciation

So if the world is so awful is there any way out? The only solution available which will reduce the effect of the conflict of wills is the renunciation of the will-to-life. He says:

'Nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist. (W2, 605)

The will turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasures in which it recognises the affirmation of life. Man attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete denial of the will. (W1, 379)

Asceticism or the denial of the will requires voluntary poverty, chastity, constant privation and he compels himself to refrain from doing all he would like to do. (W1, 382)

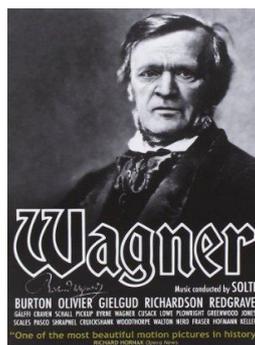
What was it about Schopenhauer and his writings which appealed to Wagner?

I suggest that one of the reasons for Schopenhauer's appeal was that Wagner saw in Schopenhauer a figure who matched his own self-image. He saw a man of strong opinions, confident in his own abilities and yet unrecognised by society for many years, finally achieving fame and recognition that he deserved.

Secondly, the changes to Wagner's circumstances following the 1849 revolution contributed to his bleak mood while he was in Zurich: the revolution had failed, he was a political refugee, he was suffering a variety of illnesses, he was depressed, with an unhappy marriage, and unable to get his operas performed. This is the period when he was undergoing what Newman calls a 'growing estrangement from the world' (Newman, 1937, p293) and which according to Wagner's testimony was a life of 'almost unrelieved misery and frustration' (Taylor, 1983, p200).

Thirdly, in Schopenhauer's writing he received confirmation of his own ideas which he had already formed or which were forming. We will return to this point.

Video extract from Tony Palmer's film which imagines Wagner being subjected to one of his many sulphur water treatments to cure his erysipelas while reading *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* and saying to his companions 'Suicide the supreme assertion of the will, sacrifice and denial of the will, I must live on and suffer'.



Schopenhauer on Art

Undoubtedly one aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy which Wagner found attractive was his aesthetics. Aesthetic contemplation, for Schopenhauer, occurs when man is "elevated in this way above himself, his person, and all willing" (W1, 201) and achieves 'pure will-less knowing' (W1, 202).

When we view something entirely from an aesthetic point of view we view it disinterestedly. So aesthetic contemplation is the antithesis of the impetuous and dark impulse of willing - it is eternal, free, serene subject of pure knowing. Whereas willing is driven by the genitals,

contemplation is driven by the brain. (W1, 203)

For example, a farmer looks at a landscape to see its potential to make a living, but if we view it aesthetically we look only for its beauty, 'the sublime in landscape' and we are able to 'lose ourselves in contemplation of the infinite greatness of the universe..[and].forget individuality' (W1, p205).

In appreciating art it is

never known by the individual as such but only by him who has raised himself above all willing and all individuality. (W1, 234)

And it is the 'genius' who can achieve this selflessness above all others:

genius is the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own interest, our willing, and our aims, and consequently to discard entirely our own personality for a time, in order to remain pure knowing subject. (W1, 184)

The objects of genius as such are the eternal Ideas, the persistent, essential forms of the world and all its phenomena.

One can see here some ideas that would have appealed to Wagner - who was convinced of his own genius - because it suggested that his perceptions of the world were somehow greater than, more noble than, and reaching a higher reality, than mere mortals (like Minna and Cosima for example).

Music

Schopenhauer gives art a privileged status in the total scheme of things and among the arts music is supreme in providing a unique access to the inner nature of things - the Will.

Most arts are in some sense representational - they copy reality. Although the greatest art captures the ideal reality, or the essence of things, it is still a copy. But (music)

...stands quite apart from all the other (arts). In it we do not recognize the copy, the repetition, of any idea of the inner nature of the world. Yet it is such a great and exceedingly fine art its effect on man's innermost nature is so powerful, and it is so completely and profoundly understood by him in his innermost being as an entirely universal language whose distinctness surpasses even that of the world of perception itself. (W1, 256)

The composer reveals the innermost nature of the world, and expresses the wisdom in the profoundest language that his reasoning does not understand. (W1, 260)

Everywhere music expresses only the quintessence of life and of its events, never these themselves. (W1, 261)

Music gives the innermost kernel preceding all form, or the heart of things.(W1, 263)

As Reinhardt says, 'It is certainly understandable that Wagner the musician should have been profoundly moved by this panegyric, so rich in striking observations' (Reinhardt, 1992, p289).

For example Schopenhauer wrote this about the duet 'Quai cor tradisi' in Act 2 of *Norma*:

The genuinely tragic effect of the catastrophe, the hero's resignation and spiritual exaltation produced by it, seldom appear so purely motivated and distinctly expressed as in the opera (Bellini's) Norma, where it comes in the duet Quai cor tradisi, qual cor perdesti (What a heart you betrayed, what a heart you lost). (W2, 435)

Musical extract: Joan Sutherland (Norma) John Alexander (Pollione) with London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, cond by Richard Bonyngne, 1964, Decca.



However, we should note that Schopenhauer's view of the superiority of music among the arts contradicted some key aspects of Wagner's previously published work. Notably, Wagner had argued for parity between poetry and music in his treatise on the Artwork of the Future (1849). Wagner came to modify this view, partly because of the influence of Schopenhaurian aesthetics (Reinhardt, 1992) p290.

Schopenhauer's view of Wagner.

In his writing about music, Schopenhauer expresses his enthusiasm for Mozart, Rossini, Haydn, and as we have seen Bellini.

Still in the throes of his initial excitement in discovering the writings of Schopenhauer, at Christmas 1854, Wagner sent to Schopenhauer a copy of the poem of *The Ring* with no letter except to say it was sent 'with reverence' but he received no reply. However, Schopenhauer is reported to have said to Ritter 'I admire how Wagner, in his Nibelungen, brings the dark legendary figures humanly near to us Then: He is a poet, but no musician.' (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, Vol 2, 1978, p40)

Schopenhauer had attended performances of *Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhauser*, but the lover of Mozart and Rossini, could not see the merits of Wagner's music - for example the Venusberg music, which must have sounded very strange to his ears.

Musical extract: Venusberg from *Tannhauser*, Michael Halasz conducting the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra



Schopenhauer wrote marginal notes in the poem of *The Ring* that Wagner sent him. At the end of the first act of *Walkure*, when the incestuous Sigmund and Sieglinde rush out into the forest, Wagner's stage direction says 'The curtain fall quickly'. Schopenhauer wrote in the margin 'And about time too!' (Chancellor, 1980, p132)

'Ideas by no means palatable'

Although Wagner became an immediate enthusiast for Schopenhauer, he later described in Mein Leiben, the struggle to abandon what he calls his Greek (optimistic) outlook.

For those who hoped to find some philosophical justification for political and social agitation on behalf of so-called 'individual freedom' there was certainly no support to be found here, where all that was demanded was absolute renunciation of all such methods of satisfying the claims of personality.

At first I naturally found his ideas by no means palatable, and felt I could not readily abandon that so-called 'cheerful' Greek aspect of the world, with which I had looked out upon life in my Kunstwerk der Zukunft. (My Life, pp. 411-412).

In a letter to Rockel on August 23rd 1856 he wrote:

I had constructed a Hellenistically optimistic world for myself which I held to be entirely realizable if only people wished it to exist, while at the same time seeking somewhat ingeniously to get round the problem why they did not in fact wish it to exist. (Cooke, 1979, p21)

Much later, in November 1870, according to Cosima's diary, Wagner said:

Everything depends on facing the truth, even when it is unpleasant. What about myself in relation to Schopenhauer's philosophy - when I was completely Greek, an optimist? But I made the difficult admission, and from this act of resignation emerged 10 times stronger. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, Vol 1, 1978, p291)

So there is clear evidence that Wagner himself saw his life in terms of a before and after the discovery of Schopenhauer. But how did his so-called 'Greek' outlook manifest itself? Certainly as a political reformer and revolutionary Wagner believed the world could be changed through politics but his early operas are hardly the works of an out and out optimist.

There are elements of a 'Greek' outlook in The Ring, the text of which was written between 1850 and 1853 when Wagner is in exile labeled a 'revolutionary'. Some like George Bernard Shaw have viewed the whole of the Ring as an allegory about the overthrow of capitalism.

Wagner himself supports the idea that his intention was to show the overthrow of injustice.

I worked out the personality of Siegfried in this premeditated way, with the desire to represent an existence free from pain: and I thought to express myself even more clearly in the representation of the whole Nibelung myth, by showing the original injustice from which a whole world of injustice arose and therefore fell into ruins, so as to - well - teach us a lesson how to recognise injustice, tear it out by the roots and establish a just world in its place.... (letter to Rockel, August 1856).

The role of the 'hero' Siegfried may also be seen as 'Greek' with his amazing (if ultimately self-deluding) optimism. In his creation of the naive fearless hero, as Nietzsche pointed out, 'nothing could be more contrary to the spirit of Schopenhauer' (quoted by Hollindrake in Millington, 1992, p145).

Musical extract: Video excerpt from Siegfried forging Notung, end Act 1 (Manfred Jung as Siegfried, and Hanz Zedink as Mime in the Boulez/Chereau production from Bayreuth, Deutsche Gramophon, 1980)

While Wagner's 'conversion' to Schopenhauerian ideas required a radical reconsideration of some aspects of Wagner's previously held beliefs, he also claims that he recognised in Schopenhauer what he had already intuitively known. 'Now at last I could understand my Wotan...' he says. In his letter to Rockel, August 1856, Wagner explains:

Well, I scarcely noticed how, in working out this plan, nay, basically in its very design, I was unconsciously following a quite different, and much more profound, intuition, and that, instead of a single phase in the world's evolution, what I had glimpsed was the essence of the world itself in all its conceivable phases, and that I had thereby recognised its nothingness, with the result that - since I remain faithful to my intuitions rather than to my conceptions - what emerged was something entirely different from what I had originally intended. (Cooke, 1979, p21)

Indeed Wagner came to believe that he had expressed Schopenhauer's key idea about the renunciation of the will as the only way to be free of illusion better than anyone else had, and that he had come to this realisation before reading Schopenhauer. Furthermore he harboured a lingering resentment that Schopenhauer had not recognised this in the Nibelungen poem that Wagner sent to him in 1854.

It does not say much for Schopenhauer that he did not pay more attention to my Ring des Nibelungen. I know of no other work in which the breaking of the will (and what a will, which delighted in the creation of the world!) is shown as being accomplished through the individual strength of a proud nature without the intervention of a higher grace, as it is in Wotan. Almost obliterated by the separation from Brunnhilde, this will rears up once again, bursts into flame in the meeting with Siegfried, flickers in the dispatching of Waltraute, until we see it entirely extinguished at the end in Valhalla.

I am convinced Sch. would have been annoyed that I had discovered this before I knew of his philosophy. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, Vol 2, p52)

Supremacy of music over poetry

We need to mention here another area where Wagner saw, in the writings of Schopenhauer, a justification for a view that he was already moving to himself, namely the ascendancy of music over all other arts. In the 'official' Wagnerian view of the early 1850's, all the arts are equal and in the total work of art they combine to produce the 'artwork of the future'.

But as we have seen Schopenhauer places music on an entirely different level to all the other arts - music is the direct expression of the Will and provides a glimpse of the deep reality (things-in-themselves) beyond the illusory world to which our senses and rational mind only has access (phenomena).

That Wagner changed his understanding of music can be seen from Cosima's diaries when he says, 'S is right: music is a world in itself, the other arts only express a world (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p186).

Nattiez notes that in 1856 when he was working on early sketches for Tristan, Wagner assigns to music a metaphysical status that he had not previously accorded it:

Into no matter what combination it enters, music can never cease to be the supreme redeeming art. It is in the nature of music that through it, what all other arts merely hint at, becomes the most indisputable certainty, the most direct and definite truths. (Nattiez, 1993, p136)

The last parts of *The Ring* from Act 3 of *Siegfried* and *Gotterdammerung* were written between 1869

- Nov 1874 (15 - 20 years after the 'discovery of Schopenhauer).

As Carl Dalhaus puts it 'where words fail and cease to communicate, there enters music, which speaks of that to which language and stage action cannot attain'. (Muller & Wapnewski, 1992, p310).

Bryan Magee (2000) makes much of the change.

Since everything about the work was already laid down except the musical composition and its relationship to the rest, those are the only respects in which he went onto produce was different from what had gone before. Act III of Siegfried, the point at which Wagner returned, begins with an orchestral prelude in which nothing but already existing musical motif are used, but which hits the listener with a sheer massiveness of orchestral sound unlike anything heard so far in The Ring. (Magee, 2000, p259)

However there is also a view that the change was not as radical as Magee has claimed. A number writers see Wagner's development as occurring quite independently of the influence of Schopenhauer's views on music. What Wagner found in Schopenhauer was a confirmation of something that he had already concluded himself. This is the view of Eduard Sans:

In spite of a certain number of sensational theoretical remarks, his mind was fully prepared to receive confirmation of his own deepest convictions from the philosophers. (quoted by Nattiez, 1993, p100).

Text of The Ring

But what about the text of *The Ring*? Wagner decided not to revise the text of the Ring, which had already been published long before his discovery of Schopenhauer, but there is one exception, and that is the final monologue of Brunnhilde's which ends the whole Ring Cycle.

In the original 1853 ending to Gotterdammerung Brunnhilde's final monologue exalts love 'as the only valid thing in life'. (Deryk Cooke, 1979)

Not goods, not gold,
Nor godly pomp:
Not house, not court,
Nor lordly splendour;
Nor shady bargains'
Deceiving bonds,
Nor two-faced customs'
Rigid laws;
Blessed in joy and grief,
Let there be only – Love.

In his 1856 letter to Rockel, Wagner said he was dissatisfied with these lines:

Strangely enough these lines were a continual torment to me and it needed a complete revolution of my conceptual thought, brought about eventually through Schopenhauer, to reveal the reason for my torment...(Cooke, 1979, p20)

The second draft shows clearly the influence of Schopenhauer, indeed it might be seen as a brief synopsis of some central Schopenhaurian tenets.

If I now fare no more
to Valhalla's fortress,
do you know whither I go?
From the land of desire I depart,

the land of illusion I flee forever:
the open gates
of eternal becoming
I close behind me:
to the desire free, illusion free
holiest chosen land
the goal of world wandering,
redeemed from birth,
she who understands now departs.
The blessed end
of all things eternal,
do you know how I reached it?
Deepest suffering
of grieving love
opened my eyes;
I saw the world end.

But apparently, according to Deryck Cooke, Cosima advised against this ending as being too obviously indebted to Schopenhauer.

Finally we have the ending as performed, here in Andrew Porter's translation, commissioned by ENO in 1971.

I am yearning to join him there;
glorious radiance
has seized my heart,
I shall embrace him,
united with him,
in sacred yearning,
with him, ever one!
Hiayoho! Grane!
Ride to your master!
Siegfried, Siegfried! See!
Brunnhild greets you as wife!

Musical extract: excerpt from Brunnhilde's final speech, sung by Carla Pohl as Brunnhilde, Badischer Staatskapelle; cond Gunter Neuhold (1995).



Interval

Tristan and Isolde

In the summer of 1857 Wagner was working on *Siegfried*. Act One was complete and the orchestral sketch for Act Two was also composed. But Wagner's discovery of Schopenhauer, and his increasing need to write an opera that was more likely to be staged, led him to give up writing *Siegfried* and set about the composition of *Tristan and Isolde* (see (Newman, 1949, p203-4).

He wrote from Venice to Otto Wesendonck to say:

I can no longer get in the mood for my Siegfried; my musical sensibility is now reaching out far beyond that, into a realm more consonant with my mood - the realm of melancholy. (Newman, 1949, p207)

In Mein Leiben, Wagner says that Schopenhauer inspired *Tristan and Isolde*,

I felt the longing to express myself in poetry. This must have been partly due to the serious mood created by Schopenhauer, which was trying to find ecstatic expression. It was some such mood that inspired the conception of a Tristan und Isolde. (p412)

And to Liszt he wrote:

As I have never in life felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head "Tristan and Isolde," the simplest but most full-blooded musical conception; with the "black flag" which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself to die. (ZURICH, September 29th, 1854).

Wagner wrote the following notes for concert performances of the Prelude and Leibestod on 25th Jan, 1st and 8th Feb 1860. These notes clearly demonstrate the impact of Schopenhaurian ideas. The tale of Tristan and Isolde, he writes, is one of

Endless yearning, longing, the bliss and the wretchedness of love; world, power, fame, honour, chivalry, loyalty and friendship all blown away like an insubstantial dream; one thing alone left living - longing, longing unquenchable, a yearning, a hunger, a languishing forever renewing itself; one sole redemption - death, surcease, a sleep without awakening. (Newman, 1949, p218-19)

The pain of perpetual longing is pure Schopenhauer, which is expressed not only in the tale of the love of Tristan and Isolde for each other, but supremely in the music with the Tristan chord unresolved until the last moments of the opera when Isolde is 'transfigured'.



This musical device of 'suspension' had been discussed by Schopenhauer at some length, some thirty

years before Wagner composed *Tristan and Isolde*, in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Schopenhauer was a competent musician (a flautist) and able to write with a degree of technical knowledge about music. He writes about discord and reconciliation, and how the suspension of that reconciliation creates a sense of delayed satisfaction.

The effect of suspension also deserves to be considered here. It is a dissonance delaying the final consonance that is with certainty awaited; in this way the longing for it is strengthened and its appearance affords the greater satisfaction. This is clearly an analogue of the satisfaction of the will which is enhanced through delay. (W2, p455)

Wagner, never one to do things by half, takes this device and suspends the satisfaction of the reconciled Tristan chord over the whole of the opera.

Tagespracht

There is another important way in which *Tristan and Isolde* reflects the influence of Schopenhauer. This is in what has come to be called the Tagespracht, the discussion of day,

Here is an extract:

Isolde: Was it not the day
that lied from with you
when you came to Ireland
as a suitor
to court me for Mark
and destined her who loved you to death?

Tristan:
The day! The day!
that shone around you,
there where you
matched the sun
in loftiest honour's
brightness and radiance
removed you, Isolde from me

Isolde: What lies did evil
day tell you
that woman destined for you
as your lover should thus be betrayed by you?

Tristan : You were haloed
in sublimest splendour
the radiance of nobility
the authority of fame
Illusion snared me
to set my heart on them

Isolde: I from the light of day
I wanted to flee
and draw you with me
onto night
illusions would end there...

(Translation by Bryan Magee, 1983, p359)

So what is this all about? To understand these passages in Act 2 of the opera we have to remind ourselves of Schopenhauer's metaphysics with which we started, namely that the world of vision (and the other senses) which we experience is the world of phenomena, which is a creation of our

minds, whereas the underlying reality the noumenal world is beyond our experience. So to this extent we are necessarily living in a world of illusion. So the basic idea in Tristan and Isolde's Tagespracht is that day represents the phenomenal world which is illusory, ephemeral and constantly changing, while the night represents the noumenal world, which is real, permanent and unchanging.

Magee comments, rather condescendingly:

Passage after passage in the text is thus poeticized Schopenhauer, and for anyone familiar with Schopenhauer the verbal imagery is unproblematic throughout the work - but alas only for someone familiar with Schopenhauer. (Magee, 1983, p361)

The puzzle for most is further compounded by the fact that in everyday language it is light that is associated with truth and with 'enlightenment', so we talk about 'cast light on' , 'bring to light' etc, whereas night is associated with obscurity, dreams and delusions. But Wagner reverses these commonsense ideas and makes day the place of illusion and night the place of truth.

Furthermore in the day the lovers are separated, but at night they are united, and this too is not simply a fact in the drama, it reflects the Schopenhaurian idea that the noumenal world is unitary. The individuation of objects and persons requires concepts of space and time which are man-made concepts and therefore only exist in the phenomenal world.

We may say that it is night that makes the lovers one, and unites them, but in fact it is in the realm of the noumenal alone that they are literally, that is to say metaphysically one. (Magee, 2000, p218)

Musical extract: Der Tag der Tag. Wagner: Tristan und Isolde, Karl Bohm, Isolde: Birgit Nilsson, Tristan: Wolfgang Windgassen (1966).

Wagner's 'correction' of Schopenhauer

Although *Tristan and Isolde* is often cited as the most Schopenhaurian of Wagner's operas, Wagner departed from his master's ideas in several important respects.

To appreciate the significance of one of these departures from Schopenhauer, we need to see what the philosopher said about love and women.

Schopenhauer was unusual in the attention he gives to the subject of sex. He devotes a whole chapter to the topic, The Metaphysics of Sexual Love, in Vol2, of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Ch XLIV). Here are some of the things he says in this chapter, which make it clear that Schopenhauer takes a very unromantic and very biological view of love.

Amorousness is rooted in the sexual impulse alone. (W2, 533)

The longing of love that the poets of all ages are forever concerned to express in innumerable forms, a subject which they do not exhaust, in fact to which they cannot do justice; this longing closely associates the notion of endless bliss with the possession of a definite woman, and unutterable pain with the thought that this possession is not attainable. (W2, 551)

What guides a man is really instinct directed by what is best for the species, whereas man himself imagines he is seeking merely a heightening of his own pleasures. (W2, 339)

Schopenhauer foreshadows Freud in placing considerable emphasis on the importance of sexual desire in the affairs of man (as with other animals). Sex is ever-present in our minds, according to Schopenhauer. It is:

the public secret which must never be distinctly mentioned anywhere, but is always and everywhere understood to be the main thing. (W2, 571)

It is the ultimate goal of almost all human effort; it has an unfavourable influence on the most important affairs, interrupts every hour the most serious occupations. (W2, 533)

It seems that Schopenhauer is making something of a confession here about his inability to block out sexual thoughts even during the 'most serious occupations'.

He goes on to write eloquently about 'The important role of sex-relation in the world of mankind...'

It is the cause of war and the aim and object of peace, the basis of the serious and the aim of the joke, the inexhaustible source of wit, the key to all hints and allusions, and the meaning of all secret signs and suggestions, all unexpressed proposals, and all stolen glances: it is the daily thought and desire of the young and often the old as well, the hourly thought of the unchaste, and the constantly recurring reverie of the chaste even against their will, the ever ready material for a joke, only because the profoundest seriousness lies at its root. (W2, 513)

Schopenhauer's misogyny

An unavoidable feature of Schopenhauer's thinking is his uncompromising denigration of women.

Only the male intellect, clouded by the sexual impulse, could call the undersized, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged sex the fair sex; for in this impulse is to be found its whole beauty. (P2, 619)

Throughout their lives women remain children, always see only what is nearest to them, cling to the present, take the appearance of things for reality, and prefer trivialities to the most important affairs. Thus it is the faculty of reason by virtue whereof man does not, like the animals, live merely in the present ... In consequence of her weaker faculty of reason, woman shares less in the advantages and disadvantages that this entails. (P2, 615–16)

The view that women were forever childlike was shared by Mary Wolstencroft - that prototype feminist - but she thought this was due to their up-bringing and education. Her solution was to transform education for women and their role in society. But Schopenhauer seems to think that gender differences are unavoidably derived from biology.

Schopenhauer's misogyny is betrayed by this rather fanciful comment on beards.

The rapid change in the features of the face which betrays every movement of the mind, become visible mainly in the mouth and its vicinity. Therefore, to conceal this from the prying glance of an adversary...nature gave man the beard. Woman, on the other hand, could dispense with it, for with her dissimulation and self-control are inborn'. (W1 p335)

Now let's briefly consider Wagner's attitude to women. Does he follow Schopenhauer? He seems to have had a dependency on strong women, and women are portrayed as redeemers in the operas, which suggests he sees women as stronger than men, but in his personal life Wagner seems to have shared many of Schopenhauer's judgements, (including his view of beards!).

Cosima in her diaries records that soon after she and Wagner started to live together (in 1868) that she asked Wagner whether she should read Schopenhauer and she records his answer as follows:

He advises me against it: a woman should approach philosophy through a man, a poet' to which C. adds 'I am in complete agreement. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p29)

Nevertheless, in his operas the treatment of women is more nuanced. In my view, for example, Wagner portrays Isolde as the stronger of the two in his portrayal of Tristan and Isolde.

But there's another way Wagner departs from Schopenhauer - in what he refers to as his 'correction' of Schopenhauer. This relates to the role of sexual love. In a letter to Matilde Wesendonck Wagner he speaks of salvation reached by consummation of sexual desire (Venetian Diary 1 December 1858, quoted by Reinhardt, 1992 p291). And in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck on April 7, 1858, where he describes love as the "well-spring of redemption." (*Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 381, quoted by Guhl-Miller, p577).

Schopenhauer's view is in sharp contrast to that espoused by Wagner. He sees sexual relations as essentially biologically driven and romantic love as a delusion necessary to ensure the propagation of the species (this is very clear in W2,539 and abstention from sex was Schopenhauer 101 as Americans would say - the basic starting point for renunciation).

Not surprisingly, from what we know about his sexual appetite, Wagner could not accept Schopenhauer's reductionist view of sexual desire and develops his own theory that sexual love is the highest possible form of experience which, like music, provides access to the noumenal world. He even composed a letter to Schopenhauer - that he never sent - 'correcting' the philosopher on this point. (See Magee 2000, p222, and Reinhardt in Muller & Wapnewski, 1992, p291).

So what we get in *Tristan* is Wagner's view that through love we/they can escape the world of delusions and find a deeper eternal truth - a glimpse perhaps of the world as it is, free from error and deception (which takes us back to the Tagespracht).

United in Death

A similar point can be made about the final death scene in *Tristan*.

Schopenhauer has quite a lot to say about death, but *Tristan and Isolde* present a different viewpoint which more closely reflects Wagner's own attitude to death.

Schopenhauer says that the individual that I am is merely part of the world of phenomena. It occupies certain portions of space for a certain time, after which it ceases to exist, although the 'living being does not suffer any absolute annihilation through death, but continues to exist in and with the whole of nature.' (W2,473).

Tristan and Isolde become united in death, because then there is no longer a Tristan and an Isolde and they will be united in the metaphysical sense of re-entering the noumenal world. So they sing 'Let us die and never part - united - nameless - endless - no more Tristan - no more Isolde...'

*So stürben wir um ungetrennt, ewig einig, ohneEnd', ohn' Erwachen, ohn' Erbangen, namenlos
in Lieb' umfangen, ganz uns selbst gegeben, derLiebe nur zu leben!*

*(Then we would die without separation, eternally united, without end, without awakening, with
out fearing, nameless, surrounded by love, completely given to each
other, living for love alone).*

The mood of the final *Leibestod* is far from the nihilism of Schopenhauer. It is rapturous and triumphant, love redeemed through death. Wagner suggests that the two individuals - Tristan and Isolde - will not simply disappear into the infinite but that they will be personally united in death.

As Magee points out, however, Wagner's idea of being united in death occurs in his earlier operas - written before he read Schopenhauer - *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhauser*, and the text of *Götterdämmerung*.

In his personal life he believed that he and Cosima would die together and become 'one' in death. He believed they would die on the sofa together.

As Cosima records: Jan 15th 1875,

R declared that now having acquired me after his 'beggar's life', he knew for certain he would

live to a ridiculously old age, and we both die by euthanasia on the sofa in his room, which he had furnished for that purpose. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p 819).



RICHARD AND COSIMA WAGNER.

When the Wagners were building Wahnfried, the house at Bayreuth which means 'free from delusion' (another Schopenhaurian reference), they built the tomb in the garden in anticipation of their being united in death.



In strict Schopenhaurian terms, lovers cannot be united in death because they are no longer individuals (see Magee 2000, p222). Wagner's own view of being 'united in death', an idea so central to *Tristan*, and also in Wagner and Cosima's relationship, does not reflect Schopenhauer's idea of individuals becoming part of nature in death, but rather a more personal idiosyncratic of view of Wagner's own.

Optimism or pessimism in *Die Meistersingers*

Schopenhauer ,as we have seen, regarded optimism as a 'pernicious doctrine'. Wagner seems to have been ambivalent about this aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

For example we read in Cosima's Diaries (1869 January 20th) 'At parting, R said that Sch was quite right: the sum total of wisdom would be to believe nothing and to say nothing' but, a year later, in 1870 Feb. 17th, Cosima records:

R says he fears that Schopenhauer's philosophy might in the long run be a bad influence on young people of this sort, because they apply his pessimism which is a form of thinking, contemplation, to life itself and derive from it an active form of hopelessness. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, p191)

So how far does Wagner's understanding of Schopenhauer's pessimism affect his music? We have already discussed *Tristan and Isolde* but Wagner's next opera was *Maestersingers*, which is Wagner's most generally light-hearted and optimistic opera. Although *Maestersingers* is sometimes described as a 'comedy' it has much in it that is serious and even sombre.

'a very noble character'

In Hans Sachs we see the embodiment of the Schopenhaurian tragic hero, the ideal of the noble personality. Here is Schopenhauer picture of an ideal man who has overcome worldly desires and renounced personal ambition.

We always picture a very noble character to ourselves as having a certain trace of silent sadness that is anything but constant peevishness over daily annoyances. It is a consciousness that has resulted from knowledge of the vanity of all possessions and of the suffering of all life, not merely one's own. (W1,396)

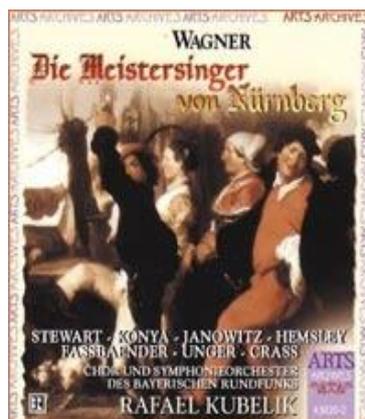
When Hans Sachs in Act III sings 'Wahn, wahn, ueberall Wahn' he seems to be expressing the kernel of Schopenhauer's outlook:

Fools, Fools, Everywhere fools, vainly do I look and seek in ancient book the cause of these delusions that drive men to on to fight, and fill their minds with confusion and aimless crazy spite! For only grief is their reward, they fly the foe yet think they pursue him; hear not their own wild cry of pain, when their own flesh they tear and maim.....

Because we inhabit a world which is cruel and full of conflict, all human beings necessarily live lives of suffering. Schopenhauer sees sympathetic or empathetic recognition of fellow suffering as the foundation of morality.

In the underlying reality, as we saw, there is no individuality, there is only a unified single thing, so there is a sense in which if I injure another I am also injuring myself.

Sachs is given words which reflect this Schopenhauerian view that when we cause pain to others we injure ourselves because in deep reality we are all one.



Musical Extract: 'Wahn Wahn' sung by Thomas Stewart, the Canadian baritone, in this recording in 1967 with Rafael Kubelik conducting the Bavarian Broadcasting Orchestra.

It's worth noting in passing that at the ending of *Maestersingers* Hans Sach sings about the lasting value of German art. Schopenhauer would not have approved. He was not a nationalist and said, in a phrase later used (knowingly or not) by Margaret Thatcher,

“Nations are in reality mere abstractions; only individuals actually exist.”

Parsifal

Let us now finally consider *Parsifal*. For enthusiasts like Bryan Magee, *Parsifal* is the ultimate Schopenhauerian opera centred on the renunciation of the will and an ethics of compassion.

According to Schopenhauer, and in contrast to Kantian ethics, it is by our recognition of fellow-suffering that we create the possibility of morality. Only if it is possible for me to feel compassion can I be motivated to do good. I can only feel compassion if 'to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other person, and in consequence the barrier between the I and the non-I is for the moment abolished' (B, 166).

By 1858 Wagner had espoused Schopenhauer's ethics as this extract shows from the Venetian Diary written for Matilda Wesendonck;

Nothing touches me seriously save in so far as it awakes in me fellow-feeling, that is fellow-suffering. This compassion I recognise as the strongest feature of my moral being, and presumably it is also the fountain head of my art. (quoted by Magee, 1983, p377)

Whether Wagner succeeded in translating this 'fellow-feeling' into action I'll leave you to judge, though he certainly followed Schopenhauer in extending his compassion to animals.

In *Parsifal*, Wagner attempts to create a quasi religious experience by combining religious symbols, dramatic action and musical effect.

When Wagner wrote about art and religion at the same time as composing *Parsifal* he partly reflected Schopenhauer's view that religion is to be seen as furnishing allegories for the masses - not literal truths. To demonstrate this let us look at what Schopenhauer says about religion.

Schopenhauer was an uncompromising atheist. There is no room for God in the blind, meaningless, unknowing and unknowable underlying noumenal reality. However, he thinks that earlier forms of religion, here he cites the Upanishads and the Vedas, shows man 'capable of a purer and more direct comprehension of the inner essence of nature.' (W2,162)

In Schopenhauer's view, the dogmas of religion cannot be taken as 'truth', but rather they function as allegories which constitute a 'metaphysics of the people' 'for the great majority of people who are not capable of thinking but only believing and are susceptible not to arguments but only to authority.' (W1, 164)

He says 'Religions are necessary for the people and are an inestimable benefit to them' (W2, 168) and this is because 'before the people truth cannot appear naked' (W1, 166).

It might be asserted that some absolute inconsistencies and contradictions, some actual absurdities are an essential ingredient of a complete religion; for these are just the stamp of its allegorical nature and the only suitable way of making the ordinary and uncultivated mind feel what would be incomprehensible to it, namely that religion deals with a completely different order of things-in-themselves.

Therefore, not only the contradictory but also the unintelligible dogmas are really only allegories and accommodations to the human power of comprehension.

The only stumbling block is that religions never dare acknowledge their allegorical nature, but have to assert that they are true. (W2, 167)

On Christianity, he is scathing about the doctrines, but he approves of the aspects of Christianity which emphasise that life is indeed a 'vale of sorrows' and calls for self-sacrifice and renunciation.

The power by virtue of which Christianity was able to first overcome Judaism and then the

paganism of Greece and Rome, is to be found in its pessimism, in the confession that our condition is both exceedingly sorrowful and sinful. That truth, profoundly and painfully felt by everyone, took effect, and entailed the need for redemption. (W2, 170)

Wagner takes on board the essential character of these views, but he goes a step further and sees art as necessary to religion.

It could be said that at the point where religion becomes artificial, it is reserved to art to salvage the kernel of religion, inasmuch as the mythical images which religion would wish to be believed as true are apprehended in art for their symbolic value, and through ideal representation of those symbols art reveals the concealed deep truth within them. While the priest bends every effort to get the allegories of religion regarded as literal truths, the artist had no interest in anything of the kind, for he frankly and freely makes his work known as his own invention. (Religion and Art, PW VI. 213.)

So according to Wagner, the artist is free to invent his own symbols and their signification.

So where does that leave Wagner's view of Christianity? He suggests that it was Schopenhauer's comments on Christianity which opened his eyes to the value of Christianity, as Cosima noted in her diaries on Feb 19 1879, 'Yes, it was Schopenhauer who revealed Christianity to me' (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, Vol2, p270).

But he wanted to distinguish religion from the church, as Cosima's Diaries (Jan 13th 1880) show:

It is always the same, people think only of the Church, and confuse this with Christianity.

No figure is more sublimely moving than that of Christ.

The path from religion to art - bad, from art to religion good. (Gregor-Dellin & Mack, 1978, Vol2, p424)

The Schopenhaurian idea of renunciation, which is central to *Parsifal*, contrasts strongly with Tristan and Isolde. In the earlier opera Wagner gives expression to the longing which accompanies the strongest form of willing, namely erotic desire, which is resolved (contra Schopenhauer) by Isolde's affirmation of love in death, but Parsifal must break his will, and give up all longing and desire, in order to attain the higher level of being which will redeem the community of the grail.

The painful struggle needed to overcome longing is given expression in Parsifal's reactions to Kundry's kiss in Act II.

Parsifal, having been reminded by Kundry of the love that his mother had felt for him and whom Parsifal had abandoned in an act of selfish wilfulness, rejects the temptation of love (both simultaneously erotic and maternal) embodied in Kundry's kiss. Seized by guilt about his rejection of his mother's love for him, he becomes vulnerable to Kundry's seductive approach, but he recoils as he remembers Amfortas, and his perpetual pain.

Amfortas's wound represents what for Schopenhauer is the strength of Christianity, namely *'the confession that our condition is both exceedingly sorrowful and sinful'*.

Parsifal feels the pain of the bleeding wound in his own heart; 'I saw the wound bleeding, now it bleeds in me'.

Parsifal's empathy for Amfortas demonstrates that he has achieved what is, in Schopenhaurian terms, the highest form of ethical response - compassion. Here is Wagner explaining his interpretation of Schopenhauer in a letter to Rockel in June 1855:

Under the highest and most favourable conditions we attain to a sympathy with all things living,

and by reason of their life, in unconscious bondage to the service of the Will. In this perfect unison with all that has been kept apart from us by the illusion of individuation lies the root of all virtue, the true secret of redemption. (quoted by Guhl-Miller, 2012, p306)

This is the moment in the opera when Parsifal becomes capable of this sympathy. But although Parsifal achieve the insight, Wagner shows that translating insight into action is excessively and exceedingly painful.

In the passage following Kundry's kiss Wagner creates a dramatic realisation of what Schopenhauer has described in the following passage:

[I]n most cases the Will must be broken by the greatest personal suffering before its self-denial appears. We then see the man suddenly retire into himself, after he is brought to the verge of despair through all the stages of increasing affliction with the most violent resistance. We see him know himself and the world, change his whole nature, rise above himself and above all suffering, as if purified and sanctified by it, in inviolable peace, bliss, and sublimity, [and] willingly renounce everything he formerly desired with the greatest vehemence. (W1, 392)

In Wagner's account, Parsifal exclaims:

*The longing, the terrible longing
which seizes and grips all my sense!
O torment of love!
How everything trembles, quakes and quivers in sinful desire!
(Translation by Lionel Salter in the ENO Guide to Parsifal) (Salter, 2011)*

Musical Extract: Parsifal Act 2 'Amfortas, Die Wunde'. BBC transmission of Wolfgang Wagner's Bayreuth version circa 1980 Siegfried Jerusalem as Parsifal.

Brener (2014 p167) jokes that Parsifal proves the adage that men give good advice when they are too old to set a bad example.

The music of Parsifal has been described variously as diaphanous, translucent, glimmering, like silk (as Debussy said). Magee says 'It is music that radiates acceptance. It is resignation in orchestral sound'.

It might equally be argued that the music of Parsifal, far from being ascetic, is gloriously decadent.

Nietzsche, in *Twilight of the Idols*, (1888) argued that:

It is a self-deception on the part of philosophers and moralists to imagine that by making war on decadence they therewith elude decadence themselves. This is beyond their powers: what they select as an expedient, as a deliverance is itself only another expression of decadence – they alter its expression, they do not abolish the thing itself. (Hollingdale, 1968, p24)

In Wagner's case, his close relationship with Judith Gautier, who was his chief supplier of silks and satins, and whose relationship with the 'master' was only ended by Cosima in Feb 1978, it seems that expressing resignation in his music did not require him to practice Schopenhaurian asceticism.



And his dalliance with the English Flower maiden Carrie Pringle reputedly led to a blazing row with Cosima on the morning of his death (Millington, 2012, p243)



Conclusion

Wagner certainly believed he was influenced by Schopenhauer and in many respects he was, but he was happy to depart from Schopenhauer whenever it suited him.

Guhl-Miller paraphrases Dahlhaus's judgement about Wagner's use of Schopenhauer, namely that influences on Wagner's works

...cannot be laid at the feet of just one man or just one system, but is so broad that an analogy can be made to nearly any system of thought found in the nineteenth century; in essence, that he used the philosophical ideas of the Zeitgeist to justify his writings, which in and of themselves are not worth as much as the operas as a keystone to Wagner's thinking. (Guhl-Miller, 2012, p213)

Ernest Newman is equally sceptical about the influence of Schopenhauer:

That is just the trouble; he had already certain vague innate notions as to renunciation and redemption, and Schopenhauer, so far as Wagner could understand him, simply gave a support to these notions. He took the philosopher up not because of his own interest in philosophy, but because of his interest in his own ideas. (Newman, 1899, p222)

Or for a similar but more recent sentiment see Joachim Köhler:

The reason why he proclaimed his dependence from the rooftops lies in the simple fact that no such dependence existed. Wagner had not helped himself to another's ideas, as was generally the case, but had merely poured the wine of his own ideas into new bottles. It was his own thoughts that seethed beneath the Schopenhauerian label. (Köhler, 2004, p420)

I think we must conclude that Wagner's enthusiasm for Schopenhauer was because he recognised in Schopenhauer's writings support for convictions which Wagner already had (and had demonstrated through his operas). The writings of Schopenhauer provided intellectual support for Wagner's own beliefs. Wagner picked selectively from Schopenhauer that which suited his own ends, but he could never be a true disciple (though he sometimes cast himself in that role) because he was always willing to jettison, or to wilfully misunderstand, Schopenhauer's ideas when they didn't fit his artistic ends.

As Milton Brener (2014) (p167) says Wagner was Schopenhauerian except when he wasn't.

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